

# Activities and performance 2021/22

In this section, we state our activities and performance for the financial year 2021/22.

## Our mission and vision

Our overarching mission is food you can trust and, during the reporting period, our vision comprised the following four goals. These were reviewed by the Board in 2022, leading to our new strategy for 2022-27 which will guide us going forward.

- food is safe
- food is what it says it is
- consumers can make informed choices about what to eat
- consumers have access to an affordable diet, now and in the future

\*The FSA only holds nutrition policy in Northern Ireland, not in England and Wales.

## Our strategic priorities for 2021/22

The FSA's priority throughout has been to ensure food safety, preserving the high levels of consumer protection in the UK whilst supporting industry in maintaining the nation's food supply. We aim to minimise the impact of leaving the EU on food safety and food accessibility. Our priority activity for 2021/22 continued to be fulfilling our regulatory role in 'doing the day job exceptionally well' which included our response to COVID-19 and the smooth delivery of our work now we are operating outside of the EU. Most of the available funding was allocated to ensure ongoing delivery of the FSA's core regulatory functions. Going forward into 2022/23, these objectives will continue to evolve to align with our new responsibilities

- doing the day job exceptionally well
- COVID-19 response
- EU transition

## Doing the day job exceptionally well

Our work broadly consists of three areas:

- understanding levels of hygiene and standards in the three nations
- delivery of our operational requirements and delivery of some nutrition and dietary health policy in Northern Ireland.
- internally ensure we can resource that work by providing the best people for the job

Some of our achievements in each of these three areas are provided on the next four pages. Later we report in more detail on the following.

### Hygiene and standards

- foodborne disease
- public attitudes towards the FSA
- science and surveillance
- horizon scanning

- strategic surveillance
- sampling
- the future for UK official food and feed laboratories
- research and evidence
- analysis and insight
- risk analysis process
- Food Hygiene Rating Scheme
- meat food business compliance

## **Delivery**

- regulated products
- local authority delivery
- food and feed incidents
- animal welfare
- National Food Crime Unit
- Achieving Business Compliance
- operational transformation
- food hypersensitivity
- nutrition: Northern Ireland (NI)

## **Our people**

- staff engagement
- supporting our staff
- diversity and inclusion

## **Hygiene and Standards**

This section reviews the variety of work we carried out and how that work enables us to achieve our goals.

2020 saw a reduction in reporting of laboratory confirmed human cases of foodborne disease for three of the four key pathogens, the FSA's headline food safety outcome measure, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021 all four increased compared to 2020, with two remaining below pre-pandemic levels. See Foodborne disease section for more information (page 20).

The FSA's flagship survey, Food and You 2, launched three waves throughout 2021/22, collecting data from over 400 households across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

As of wave 3, out of which 60% had some knowledge of the FSA, 75% trusted the FSA to make sure food is safe and what it says it is.

To ensure we can continue to provide the scientific research and evidence that is the backbone of the FSA's dedication to being science and evidence-led, we increased the number of science staff by more than 40% within 2021/22.

To inform our knowledge and information on the UK's food system, meet legislative requirements, inform risk assessment and provide information to local authorities for follow up action, we carried out our sampling work, testing 11,065 samples, found 245 non-compliances at a spend of £3.3 million.

We delivered a research and evidence programme worth over £10 million. This included delivering the allocated budget but also around £1 million of additional external science and evidence. We also started PATH-SAFE, a £19 million cross-government programme, funded

by HM Treasury, to explore novel methods for improved foodborne disease and antimicrobial resistance surveillance.

The audit programme for meat food business operators (FBOs) continued to be significantly impacted by COVID-19 in England and Wales. During 2021/22, the FSA prioritised audits previously deferred due to COVID-19 disruption, completing 249 of these audits. There were no outstanding deferred audits and the number of full audits completed against the target had returned to pre-pandemic levels at the end of 2021/22.

As more food hygiene inspections and interventions were carried out, the number of food hygiene ratings given to businesses increased by 179% compared to pre-pandemic levels. In addition, 96.9% of establishments achieved a satisfactory or above food hygiene rating (3 or better).

In Northern Ireland we maintained MenuCal, a free online tool to support businesses in calculating calories and managing allergens. Despite the pandemic and the limited ability to promote the tool, active MenuCal users continued to grow. In the latest wave of the Eating Well Choosing Better Tracking Survey (2021+Data was collected from August to October 2021), there were a high number of respondents (87%) who recognised the traffic light label, which remained consistent throughout each wave.

Most respondents (79%) understood the traffic light label. However, only 42% reported that they use the label when shopping (-14% since 2020 [\(footnote 1\)](#)).

## **Delivery**

This section looks at the practical work carried out by, or on behalf of, the FSA within the meat industry, food businesses and legal enforcement. The FSA has largely managed to provide a consistent service across our areas of delivery, despite the continuing challenges we have faced in the past year. Some of our key achievements are described below.

As at December 2021, we had 420 applications progressing through the regulated products service, at different stages of the authorisation process. We received a high level of contacts to the service for Cannabidiol (CBD) products in the first quarter of 2021/22 which coincided with the FSA deadline on CBD applications.

Local authorities met the expectations of the FSA and have made significant progress in relation to inspections and interventions, clearly taking a risk-based approach in line with the Local Authority Recovery Plan (the plan) agreed by the Board in May 2021.

Our animal welfare team introduced the 'Demonstration of Life' protocol. This is a voluntary scheme which aims to reduce the number of small ruminant animals (sheep and goats) that are slaughtered without prior stunning, by certifying that the stun method is halal compliant. We also introduced a referral for investigation triage process which is overseen by a panel of experts who assess animal welfare cases that could be prosecutable. This ensures proportionality and consistency of the FSA's approach to these cases.

Our National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) have achieved their first end-to-end conviction, as well as other activities to disrupt criminal behaviour around food.

## **Delivering our priority programmes**

Our three priority programmes of work are unchanged from previous years. Where necessary, the FSA reprioritised resources to support progress in these areas. They are:

- achieving business compliance

- operational transformation
- food hypersensitivity

## **Achieving Business Compliance**

The ABC Programme has continued to progress each of its three workstreams:

- targeted and proportionate approach to regulation
- enterprise level regulation
- assurance of online food sales

This included progressing and concluding the pilots in England and Northern Ireland for a new risk-based model for food standards, developing our approach to modernise the food hygiene delivery model, working with UK's 10 largest retailers to develop a proof-of-concept to test regulating at a business level, and developing our understanding and evidence base to inform future work to assure online food sales. The programme provided a comprehensive report to the [FSA Board in September 2022](#).

## **Operational Transformation Programme (OTP)**

Worked closely with key stakeholders to develop and agree the Future Delivery Model which outlines the key objectives the OTP will achieve in modernising delivery of official controls. This was successfully signed off by the FSA Board in September 2021 whilst also agreeing the next 12 months' programme of work. The OTP continued to deliver against the agreed work programme by progressing several key project initiatives. These include the digitalisation of meat approvals, progressing the initial review of legislative strategy options for official controls and developing and piloting use of a segmentation model that enables a more data driven, risk-based approach to scheduling of audits.

## **Food Hypersensitivity**

Implemented the prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) legislation from 1 October 2021 and have supported businesses and local authorities to successfully implement the new rules. The PPDS legislation requires food businesses to label this type of food with the name and ingredients list, with the 14 major allergens emphasised within the list. More information can be found in the priority programmes section on page 74.

## **Our people**

This section considers our staff and our engagement during 2021/22.

The FSA's engagement index score was 68%, our second highest ever score. Our response rate to the People Survey was 77%, down 10% points since 2020 but remained above the Civil Service benchmark of 62%. Most areas dropped only marginally, except for pay and benefits (-6% points), My Manager (+1% point) and My Team (+/-0% points).

The health, safety and wellbeing of our staff continued to be of utmost importance throughout the pandemic. Due to the nature of the pandemic and the ongoing additional demands placed on staff, we continued to implement a variety of support measures to enable staff to protect themselves and others.

The FSA also continued to make its award-winning flexible Our Ways of Working (OWOW) offer available to support its staff. This location-agnostic approach to recruitment resulted in successful recruitment campaigns, which quite often included reserve candidates.

Our representation remained broadly aligned with the economically active population.

However, further work is required to increase disability representation. We continued to implement new, innovative programmes such as Reverse Mentoring and FSA Accelerate, a development programme for underrepresented groups.

All performance and resources reports are published as [Board papers](#), where we present updates and progress against these measures. More detail available in the Our people section on page 82.

## Priorities in-year

Whilst our overarching functions have carried on, we have continued our work to move back to 'business as usual' after major changes to our work resulting from the UK's exit from the EU and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### COVID-19 recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have knock-on consequences for the FSA, particularly around our sampling work and work carried out on our behalf by the three nations' local authorities.

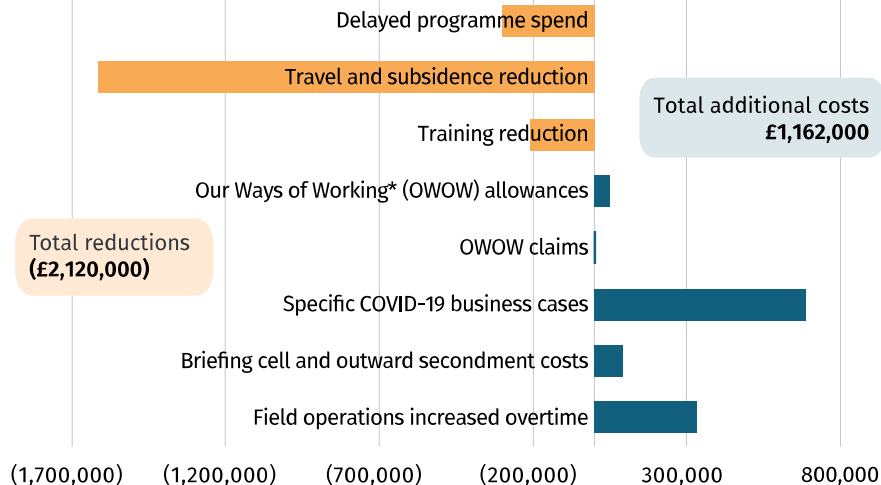
The pandemic severely affected the ability of inspectors to assess industry compliance. This is reflected in the number of food businesses given food hygiene ratings during the pandemic (see the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme section for more detail).

Although there has been a significant reduction, enforcement officers have had a presence within the hospitality premises to carry out COVID-19 compliance visits. While these visits were not always combined with food hygiene checks, there is significant overlap between the principles used to assess whether a premises was COVID-safe and safe food production practices.

Local authorities resumed inspections across food businesses, prioritising those establishments with a history of non-compliance, or where complaints indicated possible problems. Early discussions with Local Authority Food Liaison Groups suggest that local authorities are encountering higher levels of non-compliance than before the pandemic. More data is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn about the impact of the pandemic on broader hygiene standards.

Sampling conducted by the FSA and FSS during the pandemic provided reasonable confidence that the basic safety of most food products was being upheld. However, a substantial number of products tested did not meet required standards in at least one area, in terms of the quality and accuracy of consumer information. This underlined the need for ongoing monitoring and increased investment in a wider range of sampling activities.

### Figure 1: Financial impact of COVID-19 on the FSA in 2021/22



We introduced Our Ways of Working (OWOW), our award-winning flexible working package in 2017, saving the taxpayer almost £2 million on office costs each year. It allows our non-frontline staff the flexibility to work from offices and homes across the UK.

### Risk assessment from food

We continued to manage our research contract, 'Assessing the survival of COVID-19 on food surfaces and food packaging materials'. This project aims to measure the survival of COVID-19 virus in a range of environs designed to mimic food moving through a retail environment. Its outputs will inform future risk assessments regarding risk of COVID-19 exposure via food and food packaging. This project began in February 2021, and the final report for the project was received by the FSA in July 2022. The report has undergone peer review and will be published in the 2022/23 reporting period.

As part of our risk assessment work, we carried out public consultations on genetically modified organism applications, novel food applications and imports from the Fukushima region of Japan – more information can be found in the risk assessment section on page 41.

### EU Exit

Following the UK's departure from the EU, the FSA has continued to internalise processes previously carried out by the EU to ensure we continue to deliver on our priority: Food is safe and what it says it is.

The EU has remained by far our largest supplier of imported food, accounting for over 90% of all beef, dairy, eggs and pork products imported into the UK and nearly two thirds (65%) of all food and feed not of animal origin. Analysis of compliance levels in import controls checks carried out between 2020 and 2021 showed that there was no meaningful change in the standard of imported goods because of either the pandemic or the UK's EU departure.

Until full import controls are introduced for EU goods entering Great Britain, around the end of 2023, the UK food safety authorities will continue to manage risks through pre-notifications, which were introduced in January 2022 for certain high-risk food and feed imports. Additionally, enhanced capability and capacity were put in place as part of EU Exit planning to detect and respond effectively to food and feed incidents.

The UK's exit from the EU means that it no longer has full access to the European Commission's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF), although it continues to receive notifications

concerning the UK. The FSA and Food Standards have built alternative arrangements with other international partners as well as investing in new surveillance approaches. Levels of incoming and outgoing notifications from EU and non-EU countries have remained stable.

Despite the pressure put on the food supply chain by the pandemic and the UK's departure from the EU, there has been no evidence of significant exploitation by criminals. Generally, there has been no discernible increase in food crime detected over this period.

#### **Post EU transition period update**

The FSA's work to build new functions and prepare for the consequences of EU Exit was successfully delivered. We and Food Standards Scotland took on new responsibilities from 1 January 2021. These include:

#### **Regulated products**

- the FSA has been operating a service to authorise new regulated food and feed products before they enter the Great Britain market.
- as at 31 March 2022, 420 applications were made to the FSA, who carry out a risk assessment of the products and consider factors such as trade and environmental impacts before making recommendations to Ministers on authorisation

#### **Repatriation of International Trade functions including:**

- Free Trade Agreements (FTA)/Section 42 reports which explain whether an FTA is consistent with the maintenance of UK levels of statutory protection in relation to human, animal or plant life or health, animal welfare and the environment
- delivery of a new market access (imports) function to [support the UK Office for SPS Trade Assurance](#) in assessing the food and feed safety of new commodity import requests from third countries
- enhancing the delivery of the market access (exports) function to support our existing and new export markets such as opening the United States market to British lamb.

#### **Other areas**

- expanding the NFCU as well as embedding new working processes and capabilities which have enhanced our abilities to detect, investigate and disrupt food crime
- taking charge of food and feed law. The FSA is now directly responsible for administering food and feed legislation, including risk assessment of new and novel foods, the regulated products approval process, and undertaking legislative changes, via statutory instruments, to amend food and feed law
- the FSA has initiated risk assessments on four issues due to new evidence and/or emerging changes in the food system, and have provided risk assessment and public health advice to support development of future borders policy

At the end of March 2021, the EU Transition Programme closed following agreement by the [FSA Board in March 2020 \(footnote 2\)](#). Ongoing work moved into business as usual. A significant part of the organisation's ongoing focus in 2021/22 continued to deliver our core functions following the end of the transition period and overcoming issues that arose during the reporting period.

Please read the individual pages linked in the next section (below) to read about our year in numbers related to Hygiene and Standards, our people and our delivery.

## **Hygiene and standards: our year in numbers**

- [Foodborne disease](#)
- [Public attitudes towards the FSA](#)
- [Science and surveillance](#)
- [Horizon scanning](#)
- [Strategic surveillance and data](#)
- [Sampling](#)
- [The future for UK official food and feed laboratories](#)
- [Research and evidence](#)
- [Analysis and insight](#)
- [Risk analysis process](#)
- [Food Hygiene Rating Scheme \(FHRS\)](#)
- [Meat food business compliance](#)

## **Delivery our year in numbers**

- [Regulated products](#)
- [Local authority delivery](#)
- [Food and feed incidents](#)
- [Animal welfare](#)
- [National Food Crime Unit \(NFCU\)](#)
- [Operational outcomes](#)
- [Achieving Business Compliance](#)
- [Operational transformation](#)
- [Food hypersensitivity](#)
- [Nutrition: Northern Ireland](#)

## **Our people year in numbers**

1. Data was collected from June to August 2020.
2. [FSA EU Transition paper.](#)