

FHRS Display Audit 2022 - Executive Summary

Results available: Results available

Area of research interest: [Research projects](#)

Research topics: [Food hygiene](#)

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Introduction

Under the scheme, places where food is supplied, sold or consumed are given a rating ranging from 0 to 5, with 5 indicating 'very good' food hygiene and 0 indicating 'urgent improvement necessary'. In Wales and Northern Ireland, businesses have been legally required to display their food hygiene rating sticker in a prominent place like the front door, entrance or window of the business since 2013 and 2016 respectively. Businesses in England do not have to display their rating at their premises but are encouraged to do so. Across England, Northern Ireland and Wales, food hygiene ratings are also available to search on the Food Standards Agency (FSA) [FHRS website](#).

The FSA has conducted research into the Display of Food Hygiene Ratings in England, Northern Ireland and Wales since 2011 (with a pause in 2020 due to COVID-19). As with the previous waves of the research, the objectives were threefold:

- provide a representative estimate of the display of food hygiene ratings by food businesses
- explore the reasons and drivers for display and non-display
- explore business awareness and attitudes towards the scheme

Mainstage fieldwork in October and December 2022 comprised 1,525 covert audits of food businesses in England, Northern Ireland and Wales (501, 527 and 497 respectively) and 1,500 telephone interviews of food businesses in England, Northern Ireland and Wales (500 per nation). In total, 484 food businesses that participated in the telephone survey were also audited.

Audit results

In England, around two-thirds (67%) of businesses were displaying a food hygiene rating, either inside or in a location visible from outside their premises. Although not significantly higher than in 2021 (64%), this represents a continuation of the steady upwards trend in rates of display by businesses in England since 2017, when 55% of businesses displayed a sticker. There has also been an increase since 2019 in the proportion of businesses displaying the sticker so that it is visible from the outside of their premises (63% in 2022 compared to 55% in 2019).

In Northern Ireland and Wales, where it is mandatory for businesses to display their food hygiene rating, the vast majority of businesses had their rating on display either inside or in a location visible from outside the premises (Northern Ireland 87% and Wales 91%). In both countries these

figures represented a return to pre-pandemic levels of display following a slight dip in 2021 (84% and 88% respectively ([footnote 1](#))). This still however left approximately one in 10 businesses in Northern Ireland and Wales not displaying in a compliant fashion. In the survey, businesses in Northern Ireland and Wales commonly reported that they did not display their rating because there was nowhere suitable to show it outdoors.

In England and Northern Ireland, takeaways and sandwich shops were more likely than average to have a sticker on display (England 79% and Northern Ireland 95%), while accommodation businesses, pubs, bars, and nightclubs were less likely (England 57% and Northern Ireland 67%). In Wales, restaurants and catering businesses were more likely than average to display their sticker (96%), while retail businesses (for example supermarkets and food shops) were less likely (81%).

Likely due to the statutory requirement to display, there was little difference in display rates between businesses with different food hygiene ratings in Northern Ireland and Wales. However, in England, businesses with a rating of 5 were more likely than average to display a sticker (77%), while those with a rating of 4 (43%) or 3 (39%) were less likely. Furthermore, focusing on audited food businesses with a rating of less than three, it was much more common for businesses in Northern Ireland (4 out of 6) and Wales (17 out of 20) to have an FHRS sticker on display than their counterparts in England (6 out of 22).

Alongside an audit of the business premises, auditors conducted an online review to see whether the food hygiene rating was displayed on the business's website or Facebook Business Page (regardless of whether the business offered online sales). Most businesses had an online presence in either regard (England 84%, Northern Ireland 89% and Wales 87%). However, relatively few businesses with a website or Facebook Business Page displayed their rating on these platforms: 13% in England, 6% in Northern Ireland and 8% in Wales. Where displayed, ratings usually matched the rating shown on the FHRS database (95% in England, 100% in Northern Ireland and 92% in Wales).

Survey results

Awareness of the scheme and satisfaction with ratings

As found in previous years, most food businesses surveyed reported having heard of the FHRS (92% in England, Northern Ireland and Wales). Historically, awareness of the scheme in Northern Ireland and Wales has been higher than in England, likely reflecting the different legal requirements around the FHRS in the different countries. However, in 2022 awareness of the scheme was consistent across all three countries.

Within each country, self-reported awareness of the FHRS was at a similarly high level across the different sizes of food businesses, outlet types, and food hygiene rating that the business held. However, takeaways and sandwich shops stood out as being less likely than average to be aware of the scheme in England (85%), Northern Ireland (85%) and Wales (83%).

In line with 2021, most businesses reported being satisfied with their food hygiene rating (England 91%; Northern Ireland 95%; Wales 89%). Those with a higher rating showed higher satisfaction levels, but otherwise, satisfaction levels were similar across outlet types.

As few businesses stated being dissatisfied with their food hygiene rating, it is not possible to confidently report what was driving this dissatisfaction. But indicatively, the reasons reported by businesses that were dissatisfied were that they were expecting a higher rating than they were given, a sense that the rating was not fair, and situations where the inspection was conducted at an inconvenient time (it should be noted that inspections by Local Authorities are intended to be unannounced).

Most businesses in England (60%) and Northern Ireland (58%) reported feeling that the lowest food hygiene rating they would be satisfied with would be the top rating of a 5, while just under half (49%) of businesses in Wales would only be satisfied with a rating of 5. However, many businesses felt a 4 rating would be 'good enough' for them to display (England: 45%; Northern Ireland: 44%; Wales: 43%).

Reported display of ratings and reasons for non-display

The majority of surveyed food businesses reported being aware that they had been given a food hygiene rating (93% in England, 97% in Northern Ireland and 96% in Wales) and most of these said they displayed their FHRs sticker in a place clearly visible to customers.

The proportion that said they displayed their FHRs sticker in a visible place was higher for businesses in Northern Ireland (98%) and Wales (97%) compared to England (87%), where it is not a legal requirement to display an FHRs sticker. [\(footnote 2\)](#) Furthermore, in line with 2021, most businesses that displayed an FHRs sticker said the sticker could be seen from outside their premises (England 90%; Northern Ireland 92%; Wales 97%).

Takeaways and sandwich shops in England (98%) and Northern Ireland (99%) claimed that they were more likely to display an FHRs sticker so that it was visible from outside their premises, while accommodation businesses and pubs, bars and nightclubs in Northern Ireland (80%) claimed that they were less likely.

Most businesses in Northern Ireland (90%) and Wales (86%) reported having an FHRs sticker displayed at every entrance. In both countries, takeaways and sandwich shops (Northern Ireland 98%; Wales 95%) and retail businesses (Northern Ireland 97%; Wales 95%) reported that they were more likely to do so, while accommodation businesses and pubs, bars and nightclubs were less likely (Northern Ireland 80%; Wales 75%).

Businesses in England that did not display their FHRs sticker or who did not display it in a visible place for customers, gave a range of unprompted reasons why this was the case. The most common reasons given were there being nowhere suitable to show it outdoors (30%); ratings being displayed inside the premises (11%); and having never received a sticker (11%).

Around one in five businesses in England that did not display their FHRs sticker in a location where customers could see it from outside or did not display it at all claimed nothing would encourage them to do so (21%). Amongst the remainder, having a better rating was the most reported action that would encourage display (11%). This was closely followed by having an appropriate place to display the sticker (10%), while 9% did not think it was necessary to change their practices because they already displayed their sticker inside their premises.

A minority of businesses in England (29%), Northern Ireland (25%) and Wales (29%) reported displaying their food hygiene rating online. Amongst those that said they displayed their rating online, by far the most common platform used was business websites (England 63%; Northern Ireland 48%; Wales 50%), followed by delivery service websites and apps (England 22%; Northern Ireland 11%; Wales 18%).

Mandatory display

As found in previous years, amongst those aware of their FHRs rating, awareness that it is a legal requirement to display their food hygiene rating sticker at their premises in Northern Ireland and Wales was extremely high (Northern Ireland: 95%; Wales: 96%). Furthermore, there is strong support for compulsory display with around nine in ten businesses in Northern Ireland and Wales saying that the legal requirement to display the rating is a good thing (Northern Ireland: 91%; Wales: 89%). Positive attitudes towards mandatory display typically centred around the theme of openness and business promotion.

In both countries, there was self-reported evidence of attitudes towards mandatory display varying by sector. In Northern Ireland, takeaways and sandwich shops were more likely than average to consider mandatory display a good thing (97%). Meanwhile, in Wales, accommodation businesses and pubs, bars and nightclubs were less likely than average to consider mandatory display a good thing (84%).

Support for introducing mandatory display was also high in England with 82% of businesses reporting they believed it would be a good thing, broadly in line with 2021 (85%). Businesses in England with a food hygiene rating of 5 were more likely to have a positive view on the introduction of such a scheme (84%).

Amongst the food businesses in England that reported having positive views on the introduction of mandatory display, the most common reason was the view that it is important to be transparent about food hygiene (33%), followed by the view that it helps customers decide where's safe to eat or buy food from (21%) and that it helps drive standards or helps businesses maintain their high standard (20%).

Across England, Northern Ireland and Wales, the majority of businesses felt that the display of food hygiene ratings should become mandatory for at least some online platforms (England: 92%; Northern Ireland: 93%; Wales: 93%). Furthermore, almost half were of the opinion that mandatory display should be introduced for all the online platforms they were probed with [\(footnote 3\)](#) (England: 49%; Northern Ireland: 49%; Wales 45%). This marks a significant increase since 2021, where only around one in five businesses felt that mandatory display should be introduced for all platforms (England: 17%; Northern Ireland: 19%; Wales: 19%).

Businesses that reported supporting mandatory online display typically also reported supporting display at physical premises and considered an extension of existing regulations to online platforms as a logical progression. Some commented that mandatory online display would benefit customers by providing them with information to inform purchasing decisions, while others said that it would be beneficial to their business as it would promote their high standards.

The minority of businesses that reported not being supportive of mandatory online display often had concerns about the cost and complexity of implementing this change to their websites, social media platforms and other online platform whilst the remainder took issue with mandatory online display because of their perceived reservations about the efficacy and fairness of the FHRS.

Awareness and ease of use of safeguards

In line with results in 2021, more than three quarters of businesses in each country recalled receiving their inspection letter (Northern Ireland 86%, Wales 82%, England 78%). Of those businesses that received a letter and had an FHRS rating of less than five, most could recall if their letter told them what improvements they would need to make in order to achieve the highest food hygiene rating of 5 at their premises (England 80%; Northern Ireland 89%; Wales 84%).

Businesses were asked if they knew they could appeal their rating, request a re-rating inspection, and have a 'right to reply' if they were unhappy with their FHRS rating. [\(footnote 4\)](#) In line with 2021, overall self-reported awareness was high, with more than three-quarters aware of each option in England (76% for appeal, 77% for 'right to reply' and 79% for re-rating) and closer to nine in ten aware in Northern Ireland (87% for appeal, 87% for 'right to reply' and 87% for re-rating) and Wales (89% for appeal, 89% for 'right to reply' and 91% for re-rating).

Businesses in the retail sector in Northern Ireland were less likely than average to be aware they could request a re-rating (82% compared to the 87% average in Northern Ireland). In Wales, retail businesses were less likely than average to be aware they could request an appeal (83% compared to the 89% average in Wales) as well as the 'right to reply' (84% compared to the 89% average in Wales).

Few businesses reported that they had requested a 're-rating' inspection or 'right to reply'. Only around 1 in 20 in each country reported that they had applied for a re-rating (4% in England, 3% in Northern Ireland and 6% in Wales) and around 1 in 10 self-reported exercising their right to reply (9% in England, 10% in Northern Ireland and 10% in Wales) ([footnote 5](#)), similar proportions to those found in 2021.

Businesses who were not satisfied with their food hygiene rating and did not apply for a re-rating inspection were asked why not. Combined results across countries show the most common reasons were that the fees were too high (26%), the business had not yet made all of the changes suggested (20%) or a lack of time (18%).

There were fewer businesses in 2022 reporting they had other priorities than applying for re-rating (down to 1% from 16% in 2021 when the COVID-19 pandemic would still have been top of mind for many) or that they had not yet made all the changes suggested (down to 20% from 25% in 2021). In 2021, the impact of the pandemic was mentioned by one in five (19%) but in 2022, it was not mentioned at all.

Of businesses that did apply for a re-rating, more than half reported being awarded a higher rating. This is a significant increase from 2021 (56%, compared to 28%). The number of businesses reporting that they were still waiting for a requested re-inspection or to hear back from their local authority remained similar to previous years (36% in 2021 and 37% in 2022).

Businesses who were not satisfied with their food hygiene rating and did not exercise their 'right to reply' were also asked why. Combined results across countries show that they have or are making the changes required (27%) and other competing priorities (19%) were the primary reasons. The impact of COVID-19 was not directly mentioned in 2022, whereas it was given as a reason by 12% of businesses in 2021.

Impacts of the scheme

Most businesses reported being incentivised to maintain or improve their food hygiene rating and consider that the display of their rating has a range of positive impacts on customer perceptions of the business. Nearly all food businesses agreed that they work hard to maintain or improve their food hygiene rating (England 99%; Northern Ireland 97%; Wales 98%) and that displaying a food hygiene rating proves to consumers that the business takes food hygiene seriously (England 97%; Northern Ireland 96%; Wales 94%).

Almost as many businesses stated that they were proud of their food hygiene rating (England 94%; Northern Ireland 94%; Wales 89%). Across all countries, those with a rating of 5 were more likely to be proud (England 98%; Northern Ireland 97%; Wales 96%). There were also differences by outlet type within both Northern Ireland and Wales. In Northern Ireland, restaurants and catering businesses were more likely to be proud of their rating (97%), while in Wales accommodation and pubs, bars and nightclubs were less likely to be proud (83%).

As in 2021, there was widespread agreement that good food hygiene ratings were attractive to customers (England: 92%; Northern Ireland: 91%; Wales: 90%) and around two-thirds agreed that displaying a food hygiene rating resulted in more customers (England: 67%; Northern Ireland: 65%; Wales: 65%).

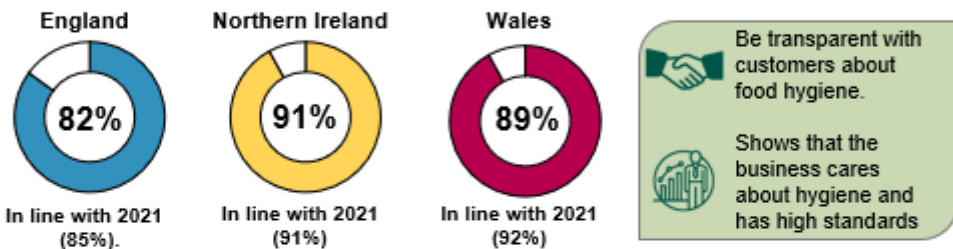
Across each nation, less than one in five food businesses said they used their food hygiene rating to promote their business, for example through display in advertising or on menus (England: 14%; Northern Ireland: 11%; Wales: 9%). In England, takeaways and sandwich shops stood out as more likely to use food hygiene ratings in promotional materials (27%), while retail businesses were less likely to (4%).

The mix of channels used to promote food hygiene ratings differed quite widely by country. In England and Northern Ireland, it was most common to use their food hygiene rating to promote their business through take-away menus. While in Wales, free advertising and table menus were the more common channels.

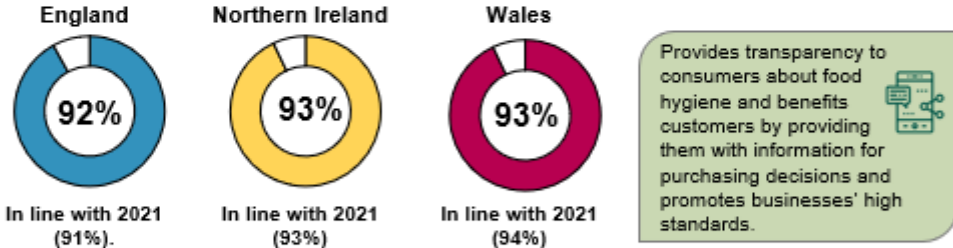
Most food businesses that had received a food hygiene rating of 4 or less reported making changes to try to improve their rating across all three countries (England: 83%; Northern Ireland: 85%; Wales: 82%). However, the most common actions differed by country. In England, the most common action was undertaking repairs or improvements (25%), closely followed by cleaning the workplace or premises (24%). Whereas in Northern Ireland and Wales, the most common action was improving documentation or record keeping (Northern Ireland 38%; Wales 30%).



Support for mandatory display of stickers at premises



Support for mandatory online display



Attitudes towards the scheme

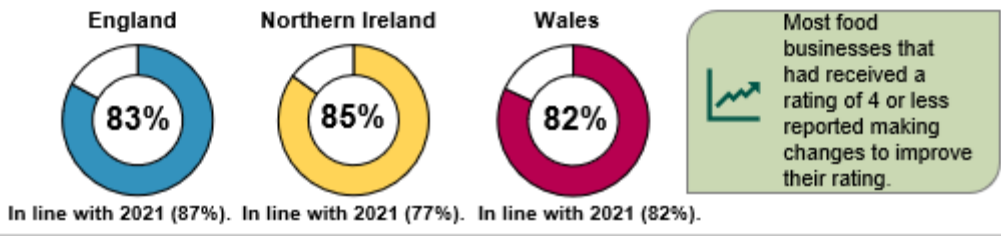
Practically all businesses said:

- They **work hard** to maintain/improve their rating (England: 99%; Northern Ireland: 97%; Wales 98%)
- That displaying their rating shows customers that they **take food hygiene seriously** (England: 97%; Northern Ireland: 98%; Wales 94%).

Agreement was high for the perceived impact food hygiene ratings have on:

- Competitive advantage (England: 92%; Northern Ireland: 91%; Wales 90%)
- Business reputation (England: 89%; Northern Ireland: 89%; Wales 88%)

Changes made as a result of FHRs



1. In the 2021 report, the main figure of display in Wales (inside and outside) of 88%, was comprised of 85% of establishments displaying the sticker with the dragon logo and 3% without the dragon logo. In the 2022 report, no distinction is made between the dragon and non-dragon style FHRs stickers on display. Given the Welsh statutory FHRs came into effect in 2013, the number of FHRs dragon stickers should be negligible and at a similar

level to 2021 (3%).

2. Self-reported rates of display were higher than rates of display observed during audits.
3. Online platforms businesses were probed with were: restaurants and takeaways' own online ordering facilities; takeaway ordering aggregators or apps; hotels' and guest houses' own websites where they serve or supply food; restaurants and takeaways' own websites; restaurant table booking sites; supermarket websites; accommodation booking websites; and social media.
4. If businesses make the improvements to hygiene standards that the food safety officer raised at the last planned inspection, businesses can request a re-visit before the next planned inspection. Right to reply allows businesses to tell customers how their business has improved its hygiene standards or if there were unusual circumstances at the time of inspection. The response is published online, alongside the rating, by the local authority.
5. FSA data indicates that the re-rating inspection request is more commonly used than the right to reply safeguard.