

Display of food hygiene ratings in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2019 wave of research)

Area of research interest: [Behaviour and perception](#)

Study duration: 2019-09-01

Conducted by: BMG Research

The research assessed the proportion of food businesses displaying food hygiene ratings by using mystery shopping audits. A telephone survey was also conducted with a sample of food businesses across England, Wales and Northern Ireland to explore business attitudes towards the scheme and specifically, in Wales and Northern Ireland, to determine the impact of compulsory display.

Background

The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) was launched in 2010 and is run in partnership between us and local authorities. The scheme helps consumers make informed decisions about where to eat or shop for food by providing information about hygiene standards found in businesses at the time of routine inspections by local authorities. The scheme covers businesses supplying or serving food directly to consumers, such as restaurants, pubs, cafés, takeaways and hotels, as well as supermarkets and other food shops.

Businesses in Wales and Northern Ireland are legally required to display their ratings in a prominent place, such as the front door, entrance or window of the premises. Display became mandatory in Wales in November 2013 and in Northern Ireland in October 2016. In England businesses are encouraged but not required by law to display their rating.

Research Approach

The display audit sets out to determine how many food businesses with a food hygiene rating were displaying this at their premises and where the rating was displayed. Auditors visited a representative mix of 500 establishments in each of the three countries.

The research also sought to assess how display rates have changed over time compared with previous audits and the impact of compulsory display of ratings in Wales and Northern Ireland.

The business telephone survey sought to find out:

- Awareness of the FHRS scheme and the legal requirements in Wales and Northern Ireland
- Drivers of display and non-display in England and perceived impacts of display
- Awareness and use of safeguards
- Attitudes towards compulsory display.

The total number of establishments surveyed in each country was:

- England: 500 (191 had been audited through the mystery shopping exercise)
- Northern Ireland: 505 (185 had been audited through the mystery shopping exercise)
- Wales: 507 (204 had been audited through the mystery shopping exercise)

Results

Display Rates

England continues to lag behind Wales and Northern Ireland in terms of display rates.

Compulsory display would likely have a big impact upon display rates in England, as seen in Northern Ireland and Wales.

Rates of display of stickers visible from outside the premises were:

- 55% of establishments in England
- 87% of establishments in Northern Ireland
- 89% of establishments in Wales

In England, businesses with a higher rating continue to be more likely to display than those with a lower rating. 73% of those with a rating of 5 are displaying their rating compared to 31% with a rating of 3 and 26% of those that have a rating of 0-2. These proportions are in line with those seen in previous years.

Motivations to display

More than a third of establishments in each country say that displaying their rating has had a positive impact upon their business (37% in England, 41% in Northern Ireland and 38% in Wales).

Customer assurance (71%) continues to be the main motivation for display in England followed by being proud of their rating (32%).

The majority of establishments that receive a rating of 4 or below continue to take action to improve their rating (90% in England, 81% in Wales and 83% in Northern Ireland).

Mandatory display

The vast majority of businesses (96% in both Northern Ireland and in Wales) are aware that display of ratings at premises is mandatory. Most are positive about the scheme, with 88% in Wales and 91% in Northern Ireland saying it is a good idea or they understand why it is necessary.

In England, business attitudes towards compulsory display are also positive, with over three-quarters (79%) saying the introduction of compulsory display would be a good thing.

Businesses in all countries are also supportive of extending the scheme so that it includes online display: 90% in England, 94% in Northern Ireland and 93% in Wales agree that display of ratings on online platforms should be compulsory.

Research report
PDF

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