

FACTFILE:

# GCE HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

## A2 7: HUMAN NUTRITION AND HEALTH



### Food Preparation and Handling

#### Students should be able to:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the following in monitoring and enforcing food safety regulations:
  - the Food Standards Agency; and
  - the Environmental Health Officer (EHO).



### Course Content

Good hygiene and safe practices are essential in the handling, storing, preparing and cooking of food. This helps to prevent the spread of bacteria (cross contamination) which can cause food poisoning and other medical conditions. Food poisoning is not usually serious and for most individuals it is a mild illness, and they recover quickly with no medical treatment. However, for individuals most at risk from food poisoning for example infants, children, pregnant women, the elderly and those with a chronic illness the illness can be severe requiring medical treatment. In rare cases it can be fatal. The Food Standards Agency and Environmental Health Officers play a vital role in monitoring and enforcing food safety regulations.

#### The Food Standards Agency (FSA)

The FSA is an independent government watchdog which aims to ensure that we can trust the food we eat and that is safe. The agency carries out this role in several ways.

#### Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

This scheme which is operated in partnership with the local authorities (councils) involves the display of a green sticker displaying the food hygiene ratings of the business on a scale of 0-5. This sticker must be displayed near the entrance of the business, for example on a window or door. It is a legal requirement to display the sticker. The Food Hygiene Rating sticker gives customers clear information on the hygiene standards of the business. The businesses required to display the food hygiene rating include:

- care homes
- food shops
- supermarkets
- takeaways
- food vans
- stalls

- hospitals
- schools
- hotels
- restaurants
- pubs
- cafes

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The business is inspected by a Food Safety Officer (FSO) The frequency of the inspection depends on the level of risk to the public. A business which presents a low risk may be inspected every two years whereas a high-risk business may be inspected every six months. A new food hygiene rating is issued after each inspection.

During the inspection the FSO will assess the following aspects of the business:

The physical condition of the business/setting	Are pest control measures in place, is there adequate lighting and ventilation, what is the level of cleanliness etc?
Hygiene handling of food	How is the food prepared, cooked, cooled, stored and reheated?
The procedures in place by the person in charge of the business to maintain food safety	Are staff trained in food hygiene and safety, are there processes and systems in place to maintain good food hygiene?

Following the inspection, the FSO will rate the hygiene standards of the business on a scale of 0-5 as follows:

- 0 is awarded when urgent improvement in hygiene standards is required
- 1 is awarded when improvement in hygiene standards is necessary
- 2 is awarded when some improvement in hygiene standards is necessary
- 3 is awarded when hygiene standards are generally satisfactory
- 4 is awarded when hygiene standards are good
- 5 is awarded when hygiene standards are very good.



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Depending on the outcome of the inspection the FSO may have to take further action. Advice and guidance may be given on how to improve food hygiene. The FSO will give a timescale for these improvements to be completed and will revisit. In cases where the hygiene is very poor and a risk to the public and the food may be unsafe to eat the FSO may close the business or part of it until improvements have been made and it is safe to reopen.

The FSA also works with other government departments to help ensure the food we eat is safe. Key areas of work include:

### Research

The FSA also work closely with the Science Advisory Committee, Science Council and other research institutes to help ensure that the food we eat is safe. Research is undertaken, for example on the impact of chemical hazards in food and the impact of food borne pathogens such as salmonella and how these risks can be reduced. This evidence from scientific research provides information which enables the FSA to make policy decisions which help to ensure the food we eat is safe and is what it says it is.

### Risk analysis

The FSA also assesses food and animal feed safety through their risk analysis process. The FSA works with several external experts and scientists in this process. The risks to food are identified, for example the presence of bacteria. The risks are assessed, and guidance is given on how to reduce these. Some foods and food products such as flavourings and additives go through a risk analysis before being sold. The outcomes of the risk analysis may result in changes in legislation and guidance given to businesses.

### Food crime

National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) is the law enforcing function of the FSA which enables food criminals to be brought to justice. Examples of food crime include:

- replacing one type of meat with another cheaper type, for example the 2013 horse meat scandal
- replacing or diluting a food ingredient with another (usually inferior) or by adding one which should not be there
- altering labels, for example replacing the label on a food which is past the sell by date
- putting unsafe food such as meat and chicken by products back into the food chain
- the theft of food

The food crime will be investigated and if the food criminal is found guilty may be fined or even face imprisonment.

### Activity

Visit the [FSA website](#) to find more detail on the work of the organisation using the 'our work' tab.

Discuss how the FSA monitors and enforces food safety regulation.  
(9 marks)

### Environmental Health Officer (EHO)

Environmental Health Officers also referred to as Environmental Health Practitioners are usually employed by local authorities and an important aspect of their work is to monitor and enforce food safety regulations. They do this by following the framework agreement set out by The Food Standards Agency. Their main role is visiting food premises to carry out an inspection to check if the business is complying with food regulations and that the food provided in the premises is safe to eat. The frequency of the visits varies depending on the type of business and the records of previous inspections. Visits are usually unannounced. The visits may take place if a complaint has been received or there is new information about the business. The EHO also investigates reported cases of suspected food poisoning. New food businesses are also inspected, or it may be a routine visit.

EHOs have the following rights:

- to enter and inspect premises
- to take food samples
- to examine working methods and manufacturing procedures
- to look at records.

They may also take photographs of food or remove food which is unfit for human consumption.  
(NI Business Info 2023)

During an inspection the EHO will complete a food safety checklist produced by the FSA covering three aspects.

1. **The hygiene of food, rooms and equipment**, for example are the food rooms tidy and clean, is the equipment clean and in good condition and are all food contact surfaces such as slicers and work surfaces cleaned and disinfected regularly?
2. **Food storage practices**, for example are freezers working properly, are deliveries appropriately stored immediately, is food in fridges and freezers covered?
3. **Food handling practices**, for example are frozen foods defrosted safely, are staff handling of foods done as little as possible (for example by using tongs), is ready to eat food prepared in separate clean areas? (Food Standards Agency 2023)

### Activity

Visit You Tube and watch some videos of an inspection being carried out.

Visit The [Food Standard Agency's website](#) to access the Food Safety Checklist which provides further detail on the areas of inspection.

Where the inspection highlights only minor issues the EHO may offer advice on how to ensure safe practice or discuss corrective measures giving a timescale for these to be implemented. The EHO will revisit the business to check the corrective measures have been put in place.

When there are concerns following the inspection the EHO may take a range of actions such as issuing a:

- Hygiene Improvement Notice - this sets out what the business needs to do to comply with food hygiene law
- Food Information Improvement Notice - sets out what the business needs to do to comply with food information law
- Hygiene Emergency Prohibition (HEP) Notice which prohibits the use of certain processes, premises, or equipment. This is confirmed by a court
- Remedial Action Notice - like a HEP notice but is not confirmed by a court
- Food Business Prohibition Order - in serious cases the EHO may recommend prosecution. If this is successful it may result in a business being forbidden to use certain processes, premises or equipment, the manager being banned from managing the business, a fine or in rare cases imprisonment. (NI Business Info 2023)

### Activity

1. Anna is the chef in Pine Grove Care Home and the EHO has just arrived to carry out an inspection. Discuss how the Environmental Health Officer (EHO) will monitor how food safety regulations are being followed by the catering staff.  
(9 marks)
2. Discuss the range of actions the EHO may take following the inspection of a business to enforce food safety regulations.  
(9 marks)

### Useful links

[Nutrition in Northern Ireland](#)

[NI Businessinfo.co.uk](#)