



FREE GUIDEBOOK • UK FOOD BUSINESSES

THE 0-5 SCHEME, EXPLAINED BY PEOPLE WHO WORK IN KITCHENS

Food hygiene ratings

What an environmental health officer actually checks, how the score becomes a rating, and a 60-point self-audit you can work through before they knock.

FOOD HYGIENE RATING
0 1 2 3 4 5

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Ten chapters • 60-point checklist • free to copy and share

How food hygiene ratings work

The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme is run by the Food Standards Agency in partnership with local authorities. A food safety officer from your council inspects your business, checks that it is meeting food hygiene law, and gives you a rating from 0 to 5. The rating is published online and you are sent a sticker for the window.

THE SCALE



Very good

Hygiene standards are very good.



Good

Hygiene standards are good.



Generally satisfactory

Hygiene standards are generally satisfactory.



Improvement necessary

Some improvement is necessary.



Major improvement necessary

Major improvement is necessary.



Urgent improvement necessary

Urgent improvement is necessary.

It is a snapshot, not a running score

The rating reflects what an officer found on the day they visited. It does not change until they visit again, however well the kitchen has run in the meantime — which is why the paperwork on the day matters so much.

Scotland works differently

Scotland is not on the FHRS. It uses the Food Hygiene Information Scheme, which gives a business either **Pass** or **Improvement Required** — there is no 0 to 5 rating. If you trade in Scotland, everything in this guide about what an officer checks still applies; only the published result differs.

Displaying it

In Wales and Northern Ireland, displaying the sticker is a legal requirement. In England it is voluntary — but a missing sticker is widely read as a low one.

What the officer actually checks

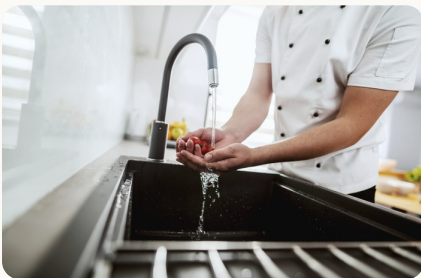
Three things are assessed at every inspection, and each is scored separately. The three scores are added up to set the band — and then the worst single score can pull the rating below it. Both rules bite, which is why one weak area costs more than it looks.

1

HYGIENE

How the food is handled

Preparation, cooking, re-heating, cooling and storage. What the officer watches people actually do.



2

STRUCTURE

The condition of the premises

Cleanliness, layout, lighting, ventilation, pest control, and the state of the fabric of the building.



3

CONFIDENCE

How you manage food safety

Your systems, records and training — and whether the officer believes the standards will still be there next month.



The third one is the one businesses lose marks on without realising. An officer can see a clean kitchen. What they cannot see, unless you show them, is whether it was clean yesterday.

Businesses that are not rated

- Low-risk premises that most people would not think of as food businesses — newsagents, chemists, visitor centres selling only pre-wrapped goods that need no refrigeration.
- Childminders, and businesses providing caring services in someone's home.

Re-visits, re-ratings and appeals

A rating is not permanent. If you have put right what the officer found, you can ask for another visit — and you have rights if you think the rating is wrong.

Ask for a re-visit

Once you have fixed the problems, you can ask the council that inspected you for a re-rating inspection. Put it in writing, say what you have changed and show evidence. The officer visits unannounced and looks at the whole business — so the rating can go down as well as up.

Every authority in Wales and Northern Ireland charges. In England, a paid re-visit comes within three months; a free one waits three months first, and you only get one between planned inspections.

Appeal the rating

If you believe the rating does not reflect the standards at the time of inspection, you can appeal to the local authority. Put it in writing — within 21 days of being told your rating in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, or within 14 days in Scotland.

A 5 is published as soon as it is uploaded. A 0 to 4 is held back for three to five weeks after the inspection, to leave room for an appeal.

Right to reply

You can submit a short statement to be published alongside your rating — for example explaining that a problem has since been fixed. It does not change the rating, but it is published with it.

Free, and worth doing if there is context a customer would want.



What a 5 actually takes

A 5 is not a reward for a tidy kitchen. It is what happens when all three assessed areas are strong at the same time, and you can prove it.

1**Safe procedures, followed**

Storage, preparation, cooking, cooling and reheating done the same way every service, by everyone.

2**Written evidence**

Records that show the controls were actually carried out — dated, and signed by whoever did them.

3**Trained staff**

Everyone trained to the level their job needs, able to explain what they do and why, with the certificates to show for it.

4**Premises in good order**

Clean, well maintained, pest free, and laid out so that raw and ready-to-eat food never meet.

5**Equipment fit for use**

Working, clean, calibrated where it matters, with a maintenance routine behind it rather than a repair history.

6**A management system that holds**

A written food safety management system based on HACCP — Safer Food, Better Business for most small businesses — kept up to date rather than filled in once.



What to expect from the officer

Officers have obligations too. Knowing them makes the visit less uncomfortable and helps you tell a legal requirement from a suggestion.

- ☐ They should identify themselves and show identification before starting.
- ☐ They should be professional and courteous throughout.
- ☐ They should explain what they find, and give constructive guidance on putting it right.
- ☐ They should make clear which points are **legal requirements** and which are **recommended good practice**. You are entitled to ask which is which.
- ☐ Anything they require you to do should be confirmed in writing, with the reason given.
- ☐ Where a legal breach is cited, they should tell you which law it falls under.
- ☐ You should be allowed a reasonable period to comply — unless there is an immediate risk to public health, in which case they can act at once.
- ☐ They should tell you how to appeal or complain about a decision.



The law they are working to

Food safety enforcement in the UK sits on the **Food Safety Act 1990**, the **Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013** and their equivalents in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and assimilated **Regulation (EC) 853/2004** on the hygiene of foodstuffs, which was retained in UK law after leaving the EU. Officers follow the **Food Law Code of Practice**, which is what sets the scoring in this guide. Where a business trades across several council areas, the **Primary Authority** scheme lets it agree one interpretation with a single council.

Officers do not add marks for good work. They add points for what is wrong, in each of the three areas — so a **low score is a good result. The points are then mapped to a rating from 0 to 5.**

Before the officer arrives

The things most often missing when an officer walks in. None of them take long; all of them are hard to produce on the spot.

- ☐ Your food safety management system, completed and signed up to date.
- ☐ Your allergen information, finished and matching the menu — and a label with the ingredients, allergens emphasised, on anything you pack before it is ordered.
- ☐ Proof of registration with the local authority — required at least 28 days before you start trading.
- ☐ Training records for every member of staff, including anyone who started this month.
- ☐ A working, calibrated probe thermometer — and the record of calibration.
- ☐ Temperature records for fridges, freezers and hot holding.
- ☐ Cleaning schedules showing what is done, how often, and by whom.
- ☐ Pest control records, including any contractor visit reports.
- ☐ Supplier list and delivery records, including anything you have refused.
- ☐ Handwashing facilities stocked: hot water, soap, and a means of drying.
- ☐ A designated food preparation sink, separate from handwashing.
- ☐ First aid kit stocked, including blue detectable plasters.
- ☐ Waste stored and removed properly, with bins that close.
- ☐ Fire safety equipment in place and in date — not scored in your hygiene rating, but an officer will say so if it is obviously wrong.
- ☐ A record of staff sickness — who reported what, and when they came back to food handling.



Food safety and hygiene procedures

How food is handled — the first of the three assessed areas.

		YES	NO	ACTION NEEDED
1	Do staff report illness, and stay off food handling until 48 hours clear of diarrhoea or vomiting?			
2	Are cleaning chemicals stored safely and separately from food?			
3	Is equipment regularly maintained and cleaned?			
4	Are staff wearing appropriate, clean protective clothing?			
5	Are staff following safe food handling practices?			
6	Is all food sourced from approved, recorded suppliers?			
7	Is food waste segregated and disposed of correctly?			
8	Is frozen food defrosted in a refrigerator, in a covered container?			
9	Is cooked food cooled and refrigerated within 90 minutes?			
10	Is hot-held food kept at 63 °C or above, with equipment preheated?			
11	Is food cooked to a safe core temperature — 75 °C for 30 seconds, or an equivalent combination?			
12	Is refrigerated food kept at 8 °C or below, and frozen food at –18 °C or below?			
13	Is date marking in place for prepared food and open ingredients, and checked daily for expiry?			
14	Is every food item covered, wrapped or stored in a closed container?			
15	Are allergenic ingredients sealed, clearly labelled, and prepared with separate equipment or space?			
16	Is colour-coded equipment used correctly to prevent cross-contamination?			
17	Is separate, clearly labelled equipment used for raw and ready-to-eat food?			
18	Are cooked and ready-to-eat foods kept apart from raw food in storage and preparation?			
19	Are handwashing stations accessible, stocked and actually used?			
20	Are staff meeting personal hygiene standards — clean clothing, hair tied back, no jewellery or nail varnish?			

Structural requirements

The premises themselves — the second assessed area.

	YES	NO	ACTION NEEDED
21 Are emergency procedures and exit routes clearly defined and unobstructed?			
22 Is there a designated, clean area for staff breaks?			
23 Are dishwashing and utensil-washing facilities sufficient for the volume?			
24 Are windows and doors correctly fitted and sealed against pests?			
25 Are ceilings sound and maintained to prevent contamination?			
26 Is the floor slip-resistant, sound, and easy to clean?			
27 Is access to the premises controlled to prevent unauthorised entry?			
28 Are waste disposal and storage facilities adequate?			
29 Are staff sanitary facilities sufficient and well maintained?			
30 Are the premises kept in a good state of repair?			
31 Is the building proofed against pests?			
32 Are storage areas clean, dry and adequate for the stock held?			
33 Is equipment positioned so that cross-contamination is prevented?			
34 Are drainage systems adequate and in working order?			
35 Is there an adequate supply of potable hot and cold water?			
36 Is lighting adequate for cleaning and for inspection?			
37 Is ventilation sufficient to avoid condensation and mould?			
38 Are surfaces and finishes smooth, non-porous and easy to clean?			
39 Does the kitchen layout keep raw and ready-to-eat processes apart?			
40 Are there separate areas for raw and cooked food preparation?			

Confidence in management

Your systems and records — the third assessed area, and the one most often scored worst.

		YES	NO	ACTION NEEDED
41	Is there a documented food safety management system based on HACCP?			
42	Is it specific to this business rather than a blank template?			
43	Has it been reviewed in the last twelve months, or after any change?			
44	Are the daily opening and closing checks completed and signed?			
45	Are temperature records complete, with gaps explained?			
46	Where a check has failed, is the corrective action recorded against it?			
47	Are cleaning schedules signed off by the person who did the work?			
48	Is there a record of probe thermometer calibration?			
49	Are supplier and delivery records kept, including refused deliveries?			
50	Is allergen information documented and current, available to every server, and on the label of anything packed before it is ordered?			
51	Are training records held for every member of staff?			
52	Has everyone been trained to the level their role requires?			
53	Is there evidence of refresher training, not just induction?			
54	Are pest control records and contractor reports kept on site?			
55	Are waste transfer notes retained?			
56	Is there a record of any customer complaint about food safety, and what was done?			
57	Can a named person explain the system if the manager is not there?			
58	Are records kept for long enough to show a pattern, not just this week?			
59	Would the records make sense to someone who has never been here?			
60	Could you produce all of the above within ten minutes of being asked?			

How a score becomes a rating

Officers score each of the three areas separately. Points are given for what is **wrong**, so a low score is a good result. The three are added up, and then a second rule is applied: no single area may score above a cap, or the rating drops regardless of the total.

THE BANDS

TOTAL SCORE	AND NO SINGLE AREA ABOVE	RATING	
0 – 15	No score above 5	5	Very good
20	No score above 10	4	Good
25 – 30	No score above 10	3	Generally satisfactory
35 – 40	No score above 15	2	Improvement necessary
45 – 50	No score above 20	1	Major improvement necessary
Over 50	—	0	Urgent improvement necessary

WORKED EXAMPLES

5, 5, 20 TOTAL 30 · HIGHEST 20 **1**

The total would suggest a 3, but one area scored 20 — above the cap of 10 for that band — so the rating falls to 1.

0, 5, 10 TOTAL 15 · HIGHEST 10 **4**

A total of 15 sits in the top band, but the cap for a 5 is 5. The highest single score is 10, so it settles at 4.

5, 5, 5 TOTAL 15 · HIGHEST 5 **5**

Balanced, and nothing above the cap. This is what a 5 looks like.

This is why one weak area costs you more than a scattering of small problems. A business with 5, 5, 20 has done well in two areas out of three and still lands on a 1.

Fix the paperwork, then prove it.

This guide gets the premises and the records inspection-ready. The rest is showing an officer that it was like this yesterday too — which is a record-keeping problem, not a cleaning one.

Train the team

CPD-standard courses with a verifiable certificate for every member of staff — the evidence an officer asks for under Confidence in Management.

Keep the records

The GFH app replaces the paper diary: daily checks, fridge temperatures, cleaning and allergens, signed and dated as they happen.



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