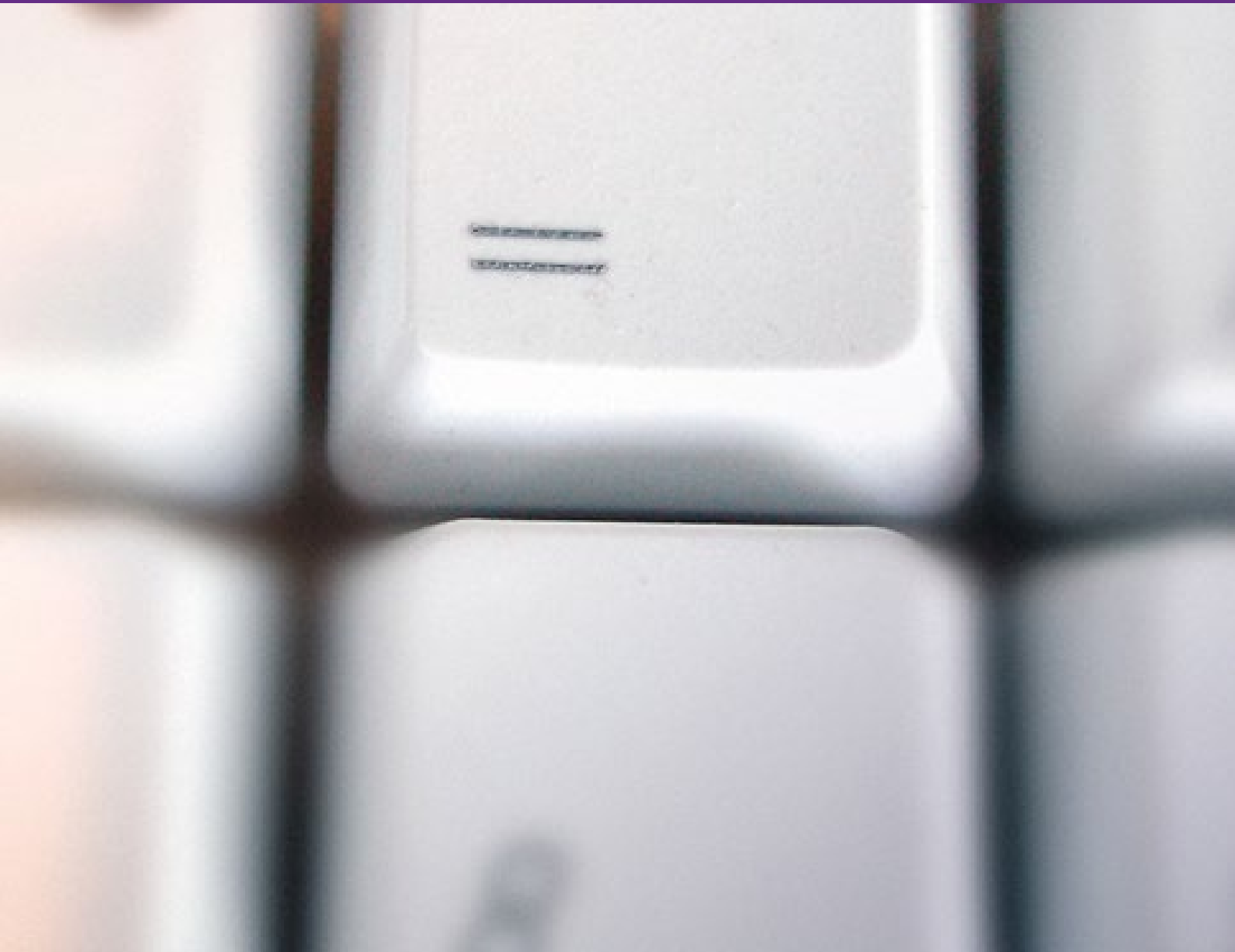




Audit of Inequalities and S75 Action Plan: Jan 2020 – Dec 2022



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*To contribute to public health and well-being,
by promoting food safety and healthy eating on
the island of Ireland.*

This document is available in a range of formats on request.

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Audit of Inequalities

1. Purpose of Audit

The **safefood** Equality Scheme contains a commitment to carry out an Audit of Inequalities and to review this in line with its Equality Scheme schedules. The current Scheme was approved by the Equality Commission on 14 September 2011 and revised in September 2017.

Section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 states that in carrying out functions relating to Northern Ireland, public bodies such as **safefood** are required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation
- men and women generally
- persons with a disability and persons without
- persons with dependants and persons without.

Section 75(2) of the Act states that in addition and without prejudice to the obligations above, **safefood** is required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group when carrying out its functions in relation to Northern Ireland.

Under these provisions **safefood** is required to develop an Equality Scheme. This Scheme is reviewed on a five year basis and as part of the review and, as recommended by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, **safefood** should take a systematic approach to examining its functions and how these relate to the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations by undertaking an Audit of Inequalities. The audit can be used by a public authority to inform its work in relation to the Section 75 equality and good relations duties. It can also enable public authorities to assess progress on the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties as it provides baseline information on existing inequalities relevant to a public authority's functions.

As part of this approach it is recommended that **safefood**, where inequalities have been identified, develop action plans to promote equality of opportunity and good relations which are based on the context of their functions, linked to achievable outcomes, and are implemented through the framework of the equality scheme. It is recommended that action plans to promote equality of opportunity and good relations should be informed by an analysis of the inequalities that exist for those Section 75 categories affected by the functions of **safefood**.

In preparing the actions plans **safefood** undertook an audit of inequalities to identify the range of key inequalities which the implementation of **safefood**'s functions is likely to address, developed action plans based on functions and key inequalities identified, prioritised those actions which should have the most impact on inequalities and developed timescales for implementation of these action plans.

2. **safefood** – its origins and functions

safefood is a North-South Body, responsible for the promotion of food safety and healthy eating on the island of Ireland. It was established in 1999 under the terms of the British-Irish Agreement Act 1999 and the North-South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) Northern Ireland Order 1999. The establishing legislation provides for:

- the promotion of food safety and healthy eating;
- research into food safety;
- the promotion of scientific cooperation and linkages between laboratories, and,
- surveillance of food-borne diseases;
- the promotion of scientific cooperation and linkages between laboratories, and
- development of cost-effective facilities for specialised laboratory testing.

There is also a requirement to provide nutritional advice and to provide an independent scientific assessment of the food supply.

Funding is provided by the Oireachtas in the Republic of Ireland and by the Northern Ireland Assembly. Seventy per cent of the funding is provided by the Department of Health (DOH) in the Republic of Ireland, and the balance (thirty per cent) is provided by the Department of Health in Northern Ireland (DOHNI).

The functions of the Body are carried out by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) under the policy direction of the North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC). There is a twelve-member Advisory Board and a twelve-member Advisory Committee (SAC) to assist and advise the CEO in the discharge of **safefood**'s functions.

3. Background to **safefood**

safefood's role is to promote food safety and provide nutritional advice on the island of Ireland in accordance with its legislative remit. This is achieved by building an evidence base of sound and authoritative science that is used to influence policy and to promote behaviour change in the overall interests of improved public health. **safefood** has made it a priority to work in partnership with key stakeholders on the island of Ireland and to utilise innovative approaches to support it in:

- communicating clearly, in a direct and supportive manner;
- promoting a better understanding of food safety, nutrition and healthy eating, and,
- encouraging healthier, safer and sustainable food choices by consumers and those involved in the food chain.

People and the food environment on the island of Ireland are at the centre of both the vision and mission of **safefood** and it uses behaviour change theory and techniques to develop targeted messages to further educate, inform and motivate people to put food safety and healthy eating at the core of their lifestyle choices. It seeks to systematically use behaviour change techniques, market research and message authentication techniques involving the target audience across the development and evaluation of its work to ensure that it brings relevant, practical, targeted and timely information to the public. It strives to create messages and develop initiatives that are rooted in the everyday lives of its target audiences and communicate with people in the context of what matters to them regarding food and health.

4. Functions which do not apply to **safefood**

safefood is a small public body based in Cork without any employees in Northern Ireland. It is not a health provider. It does not provide direct services to the public in Northern Ireland as its primary role is to commission research, disseminate information and promote awareness of safe and healthy eating throughout the island of Ireland. Therefore, the areas of inequality which have emerged from this audit do not closely match those which traditionally emerge from large health providers in Northern Ireland – i.e. they exclude concerns re employment or direct service provision.

5. Gathering of Information

This Audit of Inequalities will gather and analyse information across a range of sources of statistical information, both internal and external, to identify any inequalities that exist for service users and those affected by **safefood**'s policies. Sources of information included:

- 2019 Healthy Ireland Survey
- Health Survey Northern Ireland: First Results 2019/20
- WHO Factsheets
- **safefood**'s Corporate Plan 2020-2022 and Business Plans 2020, 2021 and 2022
- Internal Reviews, Consultations, Screening Reports and Equality Impact Assessments

Data and key findings/observations were then analysed to identify any existing or potential inequalities. Opportunities to promote equal opportunities and/or good community relations were identified and recorded. Possible solutions or mitigation with regard to any identified inequality were also identified and recorded.

6. Current position and challenges for **safefood**

Food safety and healthy eating continue to be of increasing national and international importance from a health perspective and underpin **safefood**'s approach to delivering targeted consumer supports. The current obesity epidemic on the island of Ireland poses a major public health challenge.

safefood's research and work has highlighted the various political, economic, social and technological issues that impact on its key objectives, such as:

- Developing a complementary and collaborative approach in the area of public health with the many stakeholders on the island of Ireland.
- Working in an environment where commercial interests do not always support safe and healthy food choices.
- A growing public health concern with regards to excess weight and obesity.
- The changing economic, social and cultural factors that influence consumers and their perceptions about food across the island of Ireland.

- Developing a wider awareness around the food chain, food hygiene and safe and healthy food improving abilities to shop healthy
- Promoting an environment where attitudinal change occurs towards healthy eating.
- Recognising that inequalities in access to a healthy diet are issues for a significant proportion of the population on the island of Ireland. It is important that the needs of the disadvantaged groups on the island of Ireland are addressed. Many of determinants of food poverty are beyond the remit of this organisation.
- How lifestyle changes, the impact of technology on consumer behaviour, media and digital emphasis on parenting, treat culture, confusion among consumers around what to buy, increasing inequalities all impact on **safefood**'s message of safe and healthy eating.
- Developing campaign messages that recognise the increasing smart phone ownership, device reliance, ad blocking on digital media, social media algorithms, etc.

These challenges are applicable across multiple identity groups and **safefood** firmly believes that a co-operative, collaborative approach among concerned stakeholders is required to influence behavioural change.

7. Importance of Nutrition and Food Safety to Health

Obesity is a progressive, chronic and complex disease affecting all ages and genders. It is associated with other chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, several types of cancer, pain and musculoskeletal disorders. Children who have overweight or obesity may also experience social consequences, such as bullying, stigmatization and exclusion.

Many, many factors are involved in the development of obesity, whether in children or adults, including our wider food, physical activity and media environments, social determinants like education and income, as well as genetics. The vast majority of which are outside the control of individuals.

Overweight and obesity affect two thirds of the adult population and around a fifth of children across the island of Ireland. The [2019 Healthy Ireland Survey](#) found that 37% of those surveyed were living with overweight and 23% with obesity, the same levels as in 2015. . Only 2% were measured as underweight. While men were more likely than women to be living with overweight or obesity (66% and 55% respectively), there has been a decline in the proportion of men in this category (down from 70% in 2017 to 66% in 2019).

While the proportion that had a normal weight declined with age, the proportion that were living with overweight or obesity increased with age. Among those aged between 15 and 24, 65% had a normal weight and 28% were living with overweight or obesity. However, among those aged 65 and older, 26% had a normal weight and 74% were living with overweight or obesity.

Among those aged 15 to 24, there is no difference between the proportions of men and women that had a normal weight (65%), however among older age groups there was a persistent difference between both sexes. For example, 47% of women aged between 25 and 34 had a normal weight, compared with 34% of men. Among those aged 75 and older, women were almost twice as likely as men to have a normal weight (34% and 18% respectively).

Those living in deprived areas were more likely than those living in affluent areas to be living with overweight or obesity (65% and 55% respectively). Among those aged under 35, 50% of those living in deprived areas were living with overweight or obesity, compared to 37% of those living in affluent areas.

Examining weight management, just over a third (34%) of people in Ireland were trying to lose weight, with 49% of those who were living with overweight or obesity were trying to lose weight. Women who were living with overweight or obesity were more likely than men to be trying to lose weight (54% and 40% respectively). Those aged under 55 were more likely than those older than this to be trying to lose weight (53% and 35% respectively). Finally, 48% of those living in affluent areas who were living with

overweight or obesity were trying to lose weight. This compares to 44% of those living in deprived areas who were affected by overweight or obesity. The most common actions taken to lose weight were taking more exercise (56%), eating fewer calories (54%) and eating/drinking fewer sugar sweetened foods/drinks (49%).

The key findings of the [Health Survey Northern Ireland: First Results 2019/20](#) were that 65% of adults were either living with overweight (38%) or obesity (27%), up from 62% in 2018/19. Females (38%) had a greater tendency to be normal weight than males (28%) while males (43%) had a greater tendency to be affected by overweight than females (33%).

Concerningly, two-thirds (63%) of males living with overweight thought they were about the right weight. Three-quarters (76%) of males who were affected by overweight were not trying to lose weight whilst four-fifths (79%) of males affected by obesity thought they were too heavy and half were trying to lose weight. Three-fifths (58%) of females living with overweight thought they were too heavy with half (48%) of overweight females trying to lose weight. For females affected by obesity most (87%) thought they were too heavy and two-thirds were trying to lose weight.

Around a quarter (25%) of children aged 2-15 were either living with overweight (20%) or obesity (6%), similar to the results in the 2018/19 survey.

Whilst over four-fifths of respondents (84%) in the survey knew the Department of Health in Northern Ireland advises people to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables each day the proportion of those that reported eating the recommended five or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day was 44%, similar to the figure recorded in the 2018/19 survey. Half of females (50%) consumed five or more fruit and vegetables per day compared with only 38% of males.

Less than two-fifths (39%) of those living in the most deprived areas reported eating five or more portions of fruit and vegetables per day compared with over half of those in the least deprived areas (54%).

In Northern Ireland, the Health Survey Northern Ireland 2019 showed that males were least likely to lose weight and were twice as likely to consume processed meats.

Research into health inequalities in Northern Ireland reveals certain equality groups are more inclined to predominate at the lower socio-economic levels e.g. men, people with disabilities, young people, young mothers. Historically, Roman Catholics have been associated with greater social disadvantages than Protestants (e.g. unemployment differentials). Whilst there has been a general convergence of employment activity levels between the two groups, other research looking at residential segregation, for example, shows that segregation still exists with different experiences felt by the two communities. It would therefore be prudent to take an umbrella view that poverty and disadvantage affects all communities within Northern Ireland.

Community Food Initiative Programme (CFIs)

The **safefood** funded all-island Community Food Initiative Programme has supported 30 communities between 2010 and 2018 and is currently supporting a further 14 communities. Valuable lessons have been learnt through the approach of supporting families in their communities.

Over the period 2020 to 2022 **safefood** will continue to support a programme of Community Food Initiatives aimed at positively influencing the eating habits of families in disadvantaged or marginalised communities. Community food programmes will be supported in the health regions on the island of Ireland (5 in Northern Ireland and 9 in Ireland) throughout this period. These groups will already be working in the local environment, developing community access to safer and healthier food and directly targeting local conditions. **safefood** will fund between 28-42 small initiatives related to healthy eating and food skills and a further 84 community-wide events.

Improve Families Ability to Shop

In 2020, **safefood** and the Healthy Living Centre Alliance (HLCA) led by the Old Library Trust HLC teamed up to support families to make healthier & more balanced choices with their shopping through the Transform your Trolley initiative.

The Healthy Living Centre Alliance, an award- winning network of 29 community-led health improvement organisations focused on the promotion of good food and nutrition as a key strategic priority and were keen to get involved for the benefit of local people living across the North.

As lead delivery partner, the Old Library Trust, with its wealth of experience in the area of food and nutrition, has been delivering key projects to families, promoting the importance of well- balanced food and nutrition over the last 10 years.

8. Inequalities in Access to Safe and Healthy Eating on the island of Ireland

safefood research has shown that the most vulnerable groups, and where there is likely to be inequalities in access to safe and healthy eating, are single parent families, older people, low income families with teenage children, young people and people with disabilities. **safefood** recognises that these groups are found in all the equality categories and that its communication messages must be inclusive. Food poverty and safe eating is a reality for many people on the island of Ireland. An example, of how **safefood** is working pro-actively to address these equality and access concerns is through its Community Food Initiatives (CFIs) which brings together NGO, community groups, government agencies and government departments on the island of Ireland.

9. Priorities for *safefood*

safefood's strategy is aligned with the targets set out by its sponsor departments. The strategy will specifically target obesity and will maintain an all-island focus whilst recognising that the two jurisdictions have different needs at different times. The initiatives will focus on those most in need.

The sponsor department targets are set out in their policy statements. In relation to obesity and overweight in the Republic of Ireland, the Department of Health's Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016 – 2025 has set a sustained annual 0.5% decrease in the level of excess weight averaged across all adults and children. In Northern Ireland, the following targets are outlined in "A fitter Future for All – Framework for preventing and addressing overweight and obesity in Northern Ireland 2012-2022":

- Adults: To reduce the level of obesity by 4% and overweight and obesity by 3% by 2022.
- Children: A 3% reduction of obesity and 2% reduction of overweight and obesity by 2022

This will be done by creating effective channels of communication that empower positive behavioural change and where education and training will be critical components.

A strong communications programme supporting the increasing need to promote food safety and hygiene to consumers will be delivered. The emphasis will be to target specific audiences who are at greater risk of food poisoning in the home because of their vulnerabilities.

There are many organisations on the island of Ireland involved in the food system. *safefood*'s strategy will be to work in cooperation with these stakeholders to maximise the advantage that a partnership approach can bring and build up relevant networks that can be used as a basis for developing policy and other interventions.

With this strategy in mind, **safefood**'s objectives will be to concentrate specifically on:

- Early years where lifelong impact can be made.
- Vulnerable groups such as the aging population.
- Supporting communities that are at risk of food poverty.
- Identifying other groups at risk.

safefood aims to ensure that the methods of communication are equal and inclusive and adequately reaches those groups which experience inequality in accessing nutrition or whose patterns of consumption need to change to promote healthier food for life. **safefood**'s evaluation has recognised that the groups highlighted are less able to access its messages either because they are disadvantaged or because of lifestyle or situational factors they are less able to make informed and empowered choices. **safefood** recognises its responsibilities to address its remit to all communities but is committed to developing special initiatives to address these groups who are frequently 'harder to reach' or resistant to behavioural change messages. These will form a core part of its action measures for the Action Plan.

It is also essential that **safefood** continues to build its evidence base thereby providing solid scientific evidence that will enable and inform cultural behavioural change.

safefood is also particularly conscious of identifying other equality groups that are not necessarily reflected in the evidence base and research. The messages of healthy and safe eating apply to all groups equally. However, research does not reflect nor suggest any different impacts on some specifically identified equality groupings e.g. sexual orientation, religion or political view. This is why **safefood** will work closely with local community partnership levels as well as national groups to ensure its message goes out at the ground level.

10. Good relations

S75 also requires public bodies to have regard to the desirability to promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion and racial background. **safefood** believes by working towards comprehensive evidence based research which allows comparison and co-operation across the island of Ireland, as well as working in active co-operation through local initiatives in communities in Northern Ireland, that it is contributing to promoting greater respect between the Protestant and Catholic and ethnic minority populations in Northern Ireland. This co-operative, collaborative approach is a hallmark of how **safefood** works.

11. Conclusion and s75 Action Plan

safefood, in partnership with others, has a major role in communicating to influence change in order to achieve its aim of protecting and improving public health and wellbeing on the island of Ireland. The ECNI recommends that public authorities should review and update action plans over the lifetime of their equality scheme to ensure that they remain effective and relevant to their functions and work, and that effective monitoring should be considered at all stages of the implementation of action plans to allow for measurement and reporting of progress on their delivery. Reviewing the previous Audit of Inequalities, S75 Action Plans, Corporate strategies, business plans and key research has given **safefood** a solid base to reflect and continue to build on its work as it affects the equality groups in the categories covered by s75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

As a result of this exercise **safefood** has prepared a S75 Action Plan for the period 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2022.

S75 Action Plan – 1 Jan 2020 to 31 Dec 2022

*(NB: This Action Plan does not form part of the approved Equality Scheme. It is a 'living' document and can be added to as other inequalities are identified by **safefood**. The review of the audit of inequalities on which the plan is based is thus an ongoing measure).*

Introduction

safefood's over-arching aim is to influence and change consumer behaviour in relation to food safety and healthy eating on the island of Ireland. Our mission is:

to contribute to public health and well-being, by promoting food safety and healthy eating on the island of Ireland.

safefood has promoted food safety and healthy eating on the island of Ireland in accordance with its legislative remit since December 1999. We have made it a priority to communicate positively in a direct and clear manner to move consumers and those involved in the food chain towards a better understanding of food safety, nutrition and healthy eating and always supported by sound and authoritative science. Our goal is to influence behaviour in the overall interests of improved public health.

The consumer on the island of Ireland is at the centre of both our vision and mission, and will continue to be so over the period of this S75 Action Plan. **safefood** will build on our targeted and widely-acclaimed consumer messages to further educate, inform and motivate the consumer to put food safety and healthy eating at the centre stage of their lifestyle choices.

safefood is conscious of the fact that economic, social and cultural factors continue to change over time, influencing consumer concerns and their perceptions of food. The food industry continues to grow globally, and from time to time, there may be outbreaks of food-borne illness or incidents that will further alter consumer perceptions and occasionally dent confidence. We will continue to monitor these concerns and will utilise our resources to appropriately inform and, where necessary, reassure consumers so that they may continue to make healthy and safe food choices.

safefood is aware of the wider public health context in which we operate, and we will continue to work in partnership with Governments and professional partners across the island of Ireland to inform consumers of positive lifestyle choices to improve their health, particularly nutritional advice and good food safety practice. We will continue to challenge obesity, to which the population of the island of Ireland in common with other western cultures is prone, in order to reduce risk of stroke, heart disease, diabetes and cancers. Our education initiatives will target the child, the parent and the teacher and our communication programmes will continue their aim to place the longer-term interests of consumers at the forefront.

Safefood will continually evaluate our programmes to assess their impact and ensure that the most relevant and practical research supports our communication. We will conduct this research ourselves where we feel it supports a need, including targeting research to better understand consumer behaviour and psychology as well as to enhance the food safety capacity of the food chain. This will enable us to plan our communication programmes effectively to achieve positive outcomes for the consumer.

Through our Audit of Inequalities, we continue to be conscious of those in or at risk of food poverty and will have a targeted programme of interventions specifically aimed to support and improve the overall health of people. We recognise that we need to communicate on an equal and inclusive platform so that socially disadvantaged groups have the opportunity to become involved. Our role is to communicate. Through our research and our evaluation of campaigns, we have recognised certain groups in society as being less able to access our messages. At times, we will specifically target these groups who are either

disadvantaged or because of lifestyle or situational factors are less able to make informed and empowered choices.

safefood has at its core an aim to communicate and empower. This is mainstreamed through our Corporate Plan 2020-2022. This document outlines the role that **safefood** will have in empowering consumers to make the necessary improvements to their choices and behaviour. Its core values of dignity and respect inform our Action Plan herein.

S75 Action Plan 2020-2022

Inequalities	Action	Time frame and expected outcome	Measuring and Reporting Progress
<p>Low Income households who are at risk of food poverty. Most vulnerable groups – children, elderly and single parent families.</p>	<p>Community Food Initiative Programmes (CFIs) will be supported in each of the health regions on the island of Ireland (5 in Northern Ireland and 9 in the Republic of Ireland) throughout the period of the Plan. safefood will fund up to forty small projects and will support capacity building of existing peer-led healthy eating programmes.</p> <p>Research into the cost of a healthy food basket.</p>	<p>The programme will run between 2020 and 2022. Based on the success of previous CFIs, it will aim to encourage community participation, collaborative approaches and improved skill sets.</p> <p>Research will be carried out on an ongoing basis from 2020 to 2022. The intended outcome is to influence government policy around social issues and inequalities.</p>	<p>Evaluations and reports will be done on annual basis. The programme will be fully evaluated at the end of the three year programme.</p> <p>Evaluation and reporting to government departments. Changes in policy to be monitored.</p>
	<p>Campaigns, initiatives and strategies addressing food safety and health issues will give specific consideration of how best to reach this group while avoiding social stigma and blame.</p>	<p>2020-2022 - This will be an ongoing consideration for each campaign, initiative and strategy. It is envisaged that opportunities to specifically target men will be identified and actioned to help them to adopt safer and healthier food preferences</p>	<p>This will be on-going and evaluated throughout the three years</p>

Inequalities	Action	Time frame and expected outcome	Measuring and Reporting Progress
People with Disabilities	<p>To ensure that the Disability Action Plan targets are met.</p> <p>To continue to review safefood information provisions to ascertain if more tailored communication approaches required.</p>	<p>This will be conducted over the period of both the Corporate Plan and Disability Action Plan. The aim is to remove or ease barriers to general communication methods and develop positive behavioural changes.</p> <p>Campaigns will be delivered over the period of the Corporate Plan 2020-2022.</p>	<p>Monitoring and evaluation of Disability Action Plan</p> <p>Evaluation of information resources</p>
Provision of Accessible Information Services	<p>Pro-actively develop in accessible formats our Information, both written and web-based, to suit the needs of all equality groups</p>	<p>More accessible information services for our consumers.</p> <p>Website accessibility and technology enhanced to suit needs of different groups. Ensure website continues to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 Checklist. Publish Accessibility Statement.</p>	<p>These will be on-going and evaluated throughout the three years.</p>
All Groups	<p>Targeted campaigns and strategies addressing food safety and health issues including nutrition and obesity.</p>	<p>Campaigns will be delivered over the period of the Corporate Plan 2020-2022.</p>	<p>Independent review of campaigns</p>

safefood is committed through all its actions to achieving an outcome where the eating practices of people in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland are safe and healthy. The overall aim of the action measures listed in the Northern Ireland s75 Action Plan is that they will contribute to this outcome.

In seeking to influence behavioural change for all, **safefood** focuses on where it is most needed - specifically amongst the groups mentioned above. Evaluation of all projects and campaigns is on-going to ensure they are effective, reach disadvantaged groups and are inclusive. **safefood** believes that its programmes and campaigns will only be successful if we consult with all relevant stakeholders on a constant basis and is currently developing a stakeholder strategy to consolidate and enhance our goals. As an element of our stakeholder engagement, we will engage with advisory groups in the areas of concern with a view to developing our campaigns in a targeted and focussed fashion for maximum impact.