

# Industry Weekly Digest

School of Hospitality & Tourism Management



## Counting Calories

After a gruelling couple of years, the foodservice industry is now faced with mandatory calorie labelling on menus. This has been introduced as a result of increasing levels of obesity, an increase in eating out and the want to both educate consumers about what they are eating and allow them to make informed, and healthier, choices. It is also hoped that businesses will be encouraged to provide lower calorie options.

In this digest, **Professor Anita Eves** explores this new requirement and what it may mean to different stakeholder groups.

Have a great Weekend!

# Down for the count? Calorie labelling comes into force

**Professor Anita Eves**

All food service businesses with more than 250 employees (contracted staff, including zero hours contracts, but not casual staff) must provide calorie information at point of sale. There is some confusion over umbrella businesses where individual brands operate as separate companies and concern that foodservice outlets within hotels are affected, as hotel employees, rather than foodservice employees, are counted.

Calculating calories will be considerably more onerous than allergy labelling, as it is not just the presence of an ingredient, but also its quantity and how that translates into the calorific value of the dish that is required. The government has produced implementation **guidance** to help and clarify requirements as has **UK Hospitality**.



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It is suggested that calories are deduced from the labelling of bought-in-items or ingredients or reference to government approved data sets of nutritional values, with a 20% leeway allowed to account for the need to substitute ingredients, or the chef's decision to add something different. For chain restaurants, using standardised menus and ingredients this is more straightforward, and indeed the likes of **McDonalds** and **Pizza Express** already have nutritional information available to consumers. For less standardised operations that cook from scratch this is far more difficult, both as a practice and in absorbing the costs.

So, does the customer want this and is it likely to have the desired effect? Research into the effectiveness of calorie labelling, required in the USA for many years, has been mixed. Sometimes the immediate effect is positive, but often there is no long-term effect. In addition, selection of a lighter entrée can lead the consumer to justify having a dessert! Perhaps those eating out regularly will find this useful, as out-of-home meals constitute a significant part of their diet. But for 'special occasion' meals, this may be the last thing people want to see. These infrequent meals also need to be considered as part of an overall diet, not a one-off event.

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