

# Government Chemist at food allergy event in Northern Ireland

Michael Walker of the Government Chemist team, played a key role in a well attended conference on food allergy on 21 October in Riddle Hall, Queen's University Belfast (QUB). Organised by Professor Katrina Campbell, from the Institute for Global Food Security (IGFS) at QUB, this was the second of an annual series of conferences aimed to bring together stakeholders in the risk analysis and management of food allergy. The event focused on the analysis of food allergens, their management in the supply chain and the regulation and enforcement of food law on allergens.

Over 100 enforcement officers, MSc students and food industry personnel attended to hear from experts in a variety of disciplines.

The conference was opened by Dr James McIntosh of Safefood, who along with IGFS were the main financial sponsors. Gary McFarlane, Director CIEH NI, chaired the first session in which Dr Hazel Gowland, Allergy Action, introduced food allergy and discussed its human impact, recent fatalities and forensic implications. [Dr Michael Walker](#), Laboratory of the Government Chemist, described the options for analysis of food allergens and how these can be improved. Sharon Gilmore, Head of Standards and Dietary Health at the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in Northern Ireland described the legislative and policy context in which food allergy is regulated and FSA research on food hypersensitivity.

Michael Bell, Executive Director of the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association (NIFDA) chaired the session in which Carol Whyte of Moy Park described the extensive allergen management systems in place in this large company. Lynn Patterson, (LP Associates NI) then discussed allergen management in food businesses from a training and audit perspective.

After lunch Dr Brian Jack, QUB School of Law, chaired a session devoted to legal aspects. Helen Dodds, Hyndburn Council, described the joint investigation into the death of Megan Lee following consumption of a takeaway meal and the subsequent manslaughter prosecution. Helen Morrissey of Belfast City Council described the compliance strategy adopted by local authority EHOs in Northern Ireland and recent prosecutions. Julie Barrett, a barrister and legal trainer, discussed how prosecutors prepare for court and what happens in court.

In the last session of the day, chaired by Dr Michael Dillon, QUB, Professor Clare Mills, University of Manchester, spoke on food allergy risk assessment and the iFAAM and EuroPreval research findings. Pauline Titchener, Neogen, discussed the validation, use and interpretation of ELISA data for food allergens and Adrian Rogers, Romer, gave an engaging talk on point-of-use personal allergen analysis devices.

Closing the conference, Gary McFarlane and Michael Walker thanked the

organisers and sponsors. Commending the format in bringing a wide range of stakeholders together they recommended the event as an annual feature which should be a model for similar events in England, Wales and Scotland.

The Government Chemist has a long standing interest in food allergy stemming from acknowledged difficulties in allergen analysis. [Read about our work on this challenging topic.](#)

For more information about the work of the Government Chemist please contact: