

Steven Esom

By email

10 September, 2009

Reference: EPC 263

Dear Steven,

National 'scores on the doors' scheme - banding issues

Firstly, I would like to thank you for the work that the Steering Group and its two Working Groups have undertaken so far on the development of the national 'scores on the doors' scheme. I am conscious that you have an extremely challenging task so the efforts that are being made to ensure a collaborative approach are very much appreciated, and I hope that this will continue as matters progress.

I appreciate the difficulties that the Steering Group experienced in reaching a consensus position on the mapping of numerical scores derived using the intervention-rating scheme at Annex 5 of the *Food Law Code of Practice* to the six tiers of the national scheme. We have now considered very carefully the two issues that the Steering Group referred back to the Agency - defining the top tier and mapping of the concept of 'broad compliance' - and the mixed views of Steering Group members, and I can now let you know how the Agency intends to proceed.

Top tier

We have decided to opt for a broad top band (a combined score of 0 to 15 with a maximum of 5 for any of the three elements of the intervention-rating scheme used to determine the SotD).

We consider that this will eliminate 'gold-plating' barriers to businesses reaching the threshold of the highest rating of the scheme. It does so without compromising the primary purpose of Annex 5 for determining the intervention frequency. This negates any need to amend the *Code of Practice* for the sole purpose of accommodating SotD and, in effect, creating separate scoring systems. This approach also reduces the potential for inconsistent scoring and is likely to result in fewer requests for re-inspections/re-visits thereby reducing the potential impact on the sustainability of the scheme. It provides consistency with better regulation and Hampton principles and the findings of the Pennington review by allowing local authorities to focus resources on high-risk establishments at the lower end of the scale.

In the longer term, in order to provide incentives for better performing businesses to improve even further, consideration could be given to 'reward' options that might work in parallel with the SotD scheme.



'Broad compliance'

We have decided that for the national scheme, the Code of Practice scores of 10/10/10 should be mapped to the bottom tier of the top half of the scheme in the position equivalent to three stars. The consumer research that we are planning will help inform the choice of descriptor for this and the other tiers.

We consider that, irrespective of how a score of 10/10/10 is labelled, such establishments would not, in practice, necessitate immediate or significant follow-up action by the local authority. It is establishments that have not yet reached scores of 10/10/10 that local authorities should be focusing their resources on. In addition, by moving 'broad compliance' to a point in the scale where consumers are likely to buy food, an incentive to reach this is provided to businesses and they are more likely to display their score.

I should emphasise that these were very difficult decisions for the Agency and have not been taken lightly. We consider that this approach will, however, provide the best way of ensuring that the national scheme is legally robust and sustainable for the future, and that it does not undermine the risk-based approach to interventions.

I am copying this letter to all Members of the Steering Group and also to Members of the two Working Groups.

I understand that the Steering Group is making good progress on agreeing other elements of the national SotD scheme and I look forward to receiving an update on these following your next meeting at the end of the month.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Wadge', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Andrew Wadge
Chief Scientist and Director of Food Safety