



December 2008

Dear Board Member

UK-Wide 'Scores on the Doors' Scheme on Hygiene Standards in Food Businesses Consultation –FSA Board Meeting 10th December

I am writing to you regarding the UK –wide consultation on 'Scores on the Doors' which is on the FSA Board Agenda for December 10th.

The Scottish Consumer Council (now Consumer Focus Scotland) first called for a scheme to make inspection reports available to consumers in 2004 following research on the views of environmental health and food safety officers in Scotland FSA ¹. The Report recommended that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) set up a Working Group to look at existing methods. In order to facilitate this, SCC held a Chairman's Lunch to discuss the way forward and also presented to the Scottish Food Advisory Committee in June 2004. This led to our publishing a further paper reviewing options for schemes in January 2005². Following this a Working Group was set up.

Since then we have been actively involved in every stage of this work.

Given that the consumer is the primary focus of this work, CFS commissioned research specifically on this consultation which I thought may be of interest. Deliberative techniques with 6 focus groups on Scotland (3 in pilot areas and 3 in non pilot areas) were used. A copy is attached.

In summary, the views of the consumers were clear – they found the Pass/Fail scheme easier to understand and there was consumer

¹ Food Law Enforcement – A study of the views of Environmental Health and Food Safety Officers in Scotland – SCC February 2004.

² Consumer Information on the Inspection of Food Premises-SCC January 2005

confusion over the star scheme. The main findings regarding differences between the two schemes were as follows:

- Both schemes provided information but the Pass/Fail scheme provided the crucial information as to whether the outlet had reached standards;
- Pass/Fail scheme was perceived to be more consistently understood –this was confirmed by a matching exercise undertaken;
- Both schemes would influence decisions. The Pass/Fail would influence these decisions more fairly;
- The star scheme provided more gradation and in this sense more information. However there was confusion as to what the gradation meant in practice and this outweighed any benefits of the extra information;
- The confusion of stars with hotels, food quality and scale was seen as a major drawback. Anything less than 3 stars left consumers unsure;
- Most consumers wanted the scheme to be simple as few were going to take time to read certificates in any detail. Important information needs to be conveyed quickly;
- The two tier Pass/Fail scheme was seen as more meaningful and helpful in making informed choices.

I hope that you find the information of interest and helpful. If you require further information, please contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martyn Evans." The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Martyn Evans
Director, Consumer Focus Scotland

Consumer Research commissioned by
Scottish Consumer Council to support
its response to Food Standard's
Agency's UK–Wide 'Scores on the
Doors' Scheme on Hygiene Standards
in Food Businesses

August 2008

About the Scottish Consumer Council

The Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) was set up by government in 1975. Our purpose is to promote the interests of consumers in Scotland, with particular regard to those people who experience disadvantage in society. While producers of goods and services are usually well-organised and articulate when protecting their own interests, individual consumers very often are not. The people whose interests we represent are consumers of all kinds: they may be patients, tenants, parents, solicitors' clients, public transport users, or simply shoppers in a supermarket.

Consumers benefit from efficient and effective services in the public and private sectors. Service-providers benefit from discriminating consumers. A balanced partnership between the two is essential and the SCC seeks to develop this partnership by:

- carrying out research into consumer issues and concerns;
- informing key policy and decision-makers about consumer concerns and issues;
- influencing key policy and decision-making processes;
- informing and raising awareness among consumers.

The SCC is part of the National Consumer Council (NCC) and is sponsored by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform. The SCC's Chairman and Council members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, in consultation with the First Minister. Martyn Evans, the SCC's Director, leads the staff team.

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The SCC assesses the consumer perspective in any situation by analysing the position of consumers against a set of consumer principles.

These are:

ACCESS

Can consumers actually get the goods or services they need or want?

CHOICE

Can consumers affect the way the goods and services are provided through their own choice?

INFORMATION

Do consumers have the information they need, presented in the way they want, to make informed choices?

REDRESS

If something goes wrong, can it be put right?

SAFETY

Are standards as high as they can reasonably be?

FAIRNESS

Are consumers subject to arbitrary discrimination for reasons unconnected with their characteristics as consumers?

REPRESENTATION

If consumers cannot affect what is provided through their own choices, are there other effective means for their views to be represented?

Written by Carole Millar, Carole Millar Research

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Executive Summary

Six focus groups were held across Scotland to clarify consumer views on two proposed UK-wide schemes to provide information about the results of food hygiene inspections. Each group undertook qualitative discussions around scenarios designed to allow participants to deliberate on the issues together with a matching exercise to map each scheme's ratings to more general descriptors.

The two options were:

- a three star, plus fail (four tier) scheme and
- a pass/improvement required (two tier) scheme.

Whilst consumers felt that information about the hygiene levels in food outlets was important, they neither had very little awareness of nor had given much previous thought to such schemes. They believed that food outlets were inspected and that no place would be allowed to operate that could endanger their health. A pilot (of pass/improvement required) had likewise made virtually no impact on awareness of the 3 groups in the relevant areas.

Having heard the schemes, participants felt that they would permit comparisons, provide reassurance and ensure any deficiencies would be rectified.

Of the two schemes, there was a distinct preference for the pass/improvement required; two tier scheme. This view was developed early in the discussion prior to the introduction of any of the scenarios and prevailed throughout. It was seen as clearer, easier to understand and more reassuring. Qualitative discussion on this was backed up by the matching exercise. The key issue for consumers was whether or not a food outlet had met the required standard and pass/fail scored well on this point.

The three star plus fail; 4 tier scheme was seen as confusing in respect of: how the scale worked, i.e. maximum/minimum; similar measures for hotel quality and food quality and what the stars actually represent.

There was particular confusion as to what one star means.

It was felt that restaurants would not want to display an improvement required certificate or a one star or fail. Indeed many would hesitate about a restaurant that scored less than three stars. Display location was an

issue with concern expressed about being lost among a miscellany of certificates as well as the risk of inconspicuous positioning.

An improvement required certificate would attract more attention than a pass and some said they would want more information about the improvements required or planned. There were concerns about how quickly a place could be re-inspected if compliance measures were remedied.

There were significant concerns about a poorer rating being given for a restaurant lacking a track record. It was felt that a scheme offering reasons for one star that were not directly related to hygiene would fall into disrepute.

There was ambivalence towards the EATsafe award scheme though the Matching Exercise indicated a clear niche for this.

Management/control procedures rarely occurred to participants but once mentioned many felt it right to take them into account.

Other information suggested for the certificates was date of issue and expiry date. There were some concerns about how to maintain standards post inspection.

Websites could be used to provide any additional information. Few would think to access the council's website but thought that information might be made available on the restaurant's own site or through restaurant guides. Older participants had concerns about accessing websites.

The majority felt for the schemes to work they would have to be mandatory while recognising that a poor rating would damage restaurant reputation. People would be influenced by certificates but the greater impact would come from a negative result.

In summary the pass/improvement required scheme was preferred as easier to understand, more consistently perceived and more effective in informing choices.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Food Standards Agency is currently undertaking a consultation on proposals for establishing a UK wide scheme to provide consumers with information about hygiene standards in food businesses. The score achieved reflects the inspection findings.

The main purpose of such schemes is to empower consumers so that they can make informed choices about the places in which they choose to purchase food. Experience with current schemes suggests that this, in turn, can encourage businesses to raise standards.

Hygiene award schemes by contrast are designed to recognise businesses that have achieved standards of hygiene that are over and above that required to meet the legal requirements. In Scotland there is an *EATsafe* hygiene award scheme running in parallel with a food hygiene information scheme, which is being piloted by some local authorities.

The shared features of the current food hygiene information schemes being piloted across the UK are:

- The score is based on an assessment of the level of compliance with food hygiene legislation.
- Businesses may appeal against a score through the local authority's formal complaints procedure
- It is not mandatory for businesses to display their score although scores are made available to consumers via the web.

The schemes differ with respect to

- The type of businesses included within the schemes
- The number of tiers within the schemes
- The symbols used to denote these tiers
- Policies regarding businesses requesting re-inspection

There has been strong support for a National UK-wide scheme to provide consistency and clarity for consumers. Following discussion, the Food Standards Agency's (FSA's) Board recommended that the Agency should consult on two options for the UK-wide scheme:

- a three star, plus fail (four tier) scheme and
- a pass/improvement required(two tier) scheme.

The objectives for the UK-wide Scores on the Doors (SOTD) scheme are that it should:

- Be clear and easy to understand for consumers and allow them to make informed choices about the places that they purchase food
- As a consequence, provide businesses with recognition and an incentive to comply with the requirements of food hygiene legislation
- Be simple and practical to operate by the local authorities that decide to implement it so that it may be applied consistently to businesses
- Include the safeguards necessary to ensure that businesses are treated equitably and fairly.

This research has been commissioned to allow consumers to voice their opinions on this issue and in particular to express their preferences between the two schemes on offer.

1.2 Methodology

Six focus groups were arranged across six different locations. Three were in pilot areas for the Scottish Food Hygiene Information Scheme and three were not.

The areas represented were:

<u>Pilot</u>	<u>Non-pilot</u>
Renfrew	Livingston
Edinburgh	Glasgow
Perth	Falkirk

Participants were selected to ensure a range of age, gender and socio-economic group. In total 62 people attended the focus group discussions.

Focus group discussions were held in local hotels.

Each focus group lasted between 90 and 105 minutes. Two researchers facilitated the discussions and field notes were taken throughout the discussion as well as audio tape recordings. These formed the basis of the subsequent analysis of the data. Participants were assured of anonymity so no quotes provided in this report are attributed to any individual.

Focus groups were held between mid July and early August 2008.

A detailed topic guide was prepared to guide the discussion. This was agreed by the Scottish Consumer Council prior to the start of fieldwork. A copy of the topic guide is shown in Appendix 1.

The purpose of the focus group discussions was to elicit the range of views held by participants. The findings do not provide any quantitative measure of the number of people holding a particular view nor do they quantify the conviction with which views were held, although a qualitative description of strength of opinion is included where appropriate.

One of the challenges of researching this issue was the lack of knowledge held by consumers about the food hygiene schemes being evaluated. The issues arising from the schemes can become very complex when specific situations arise and yet it was important to ensure a level of knowledge to allow the participant to deliberate meaningfully given the information available.

This was done via the presentation of scenarios (see appendix 1 for more details). Information was provided in stages thus allowing any changes in views to be monitored as more information became available. Vignettes were prepared to make it easier for participants to access the information and around which a discussion could take place.

The two schemes were presented to participants firstly by simply showing the certificates (see Appendix 2).

The two schemes were:

The three star plus fail scheme; A four tier system

The pass / improvement required scheme; A two tier system

After each input of information there was discussion, thus allowing the participants to assimilate the information given at each stage.

They were then presented with a short scenario (see Appendix 1). One scenario related to the award of a one star and the other to a pass. Participants were asked to put themselves into the shoes of the person seeking to book a restaurant and discussions relating to their perceptions of what each of these awards would mean to them ensued.

Further information was then provided on each of these scenarios giving more information about how a score was arrived at and where further information was available. Again this was presented in the form of a vignette.

After some discussion participants were asked to take part in a matching exercise to match the ratings to textual descriptors of the results of inspections.

Further information was then provided in the form of the details of what is measured and a further scenario presented to highlight issues relating to interpretation of the stars and whether the scheme should be voluntary or mandatory. More details on this methodology can be found within the topic guide shown in Appendix 1.

1.3 Structure of report

The following chapter aims to set the context for the discussion of the two information schemes and, in particular, assesses awareness of existing schemes.

Chapter 3 forms the core of this report and provides an evaluation of the two schemes. It examines the strengths and weaknesses of each of the schemes. It also summarises the findings of a matching exercise undertaken to explore consumers' understanding of each of the terms or symbols involved in the two schemes under consideration.

Chapter 4 discusses factors which the two schemes may have in common. The final chapter provides a conclusion.

Chapter 2 Awareness

This chapter identifies the context for the discussion of the two information schemes. It covers what consumers understood as a food hygiene information scheme at the outset of the discussion, how important information about food hygiene is to them, what they consider the purpose of a food hygiene information scheme to be and identifies how they currently assess food hygiene. Finally this chapter examines their awareness of any of the existing schemes.

2.1 Understanding of Food Hygiene Information Scheme

When participants were told that they would be asked their views of a food hygiene information scheme, few had any awareness of such schemes or indeed any knowledge of what that might mean.

Some thought that it was a scheme to inform the public of the hygiene requirements that businesses selling food would have to observe.

Only a few mentioned that it might relate to the results of inspections that were undertaken by Environmental Health Officers.

2.2 Importance of information for consumers

Once it was explained to them what a food hygiene information scheme was, it was clear that information about hygiene for consumers was important to them. All felt that hygiene issues were significant and thought consumers should be informed.

The idea of information being provided to consumers was not to the front of people's minds unless prompted when it assumes a much greater importance. Good hygiene is essentially something that is taken for granted and is broadly expected from food outlets.

This is highlighted by a few comments about not really worrying about food hygiene unless something happens, such as seeing something in a restaurant that prompts the customer to think about it at which point it acquires a significant importance.

2.3 Perceived purpose of Food Hygiene Information Schemes

Participants were asked what they thought the purpose a food hygiene information scheme might be.

One suggested that it would be to allow comparisons to be made between food outlets.

Another described it as being about reassurance, that the inspectors are going in and making checks and as providing security that a certain level of cleanliness had been met.

Further they felt that if a business has not met the required levels that something would be done about it by inspectors to ensure that this is rectified.

2.4 How do consumers currently assess hygiene?

There is a clear assumption that checks are being carried out by environmental health officers. There is a belief that if a place was a danger to health it would not be operational i.e. it would be closed.

Trial and error is one means that consumers use to reassure themselves, i.e. if you go somewhere and have a poor experience then do not go back. Many people will use the same outlets because they have over time decided that they are safe to use. Reassurance therefore comes from that previously good experience.

Many have their own means of assessing a place for signs of cleanliness including how clean it looks around tables, floors etc. They acknowledge however that they do not get to see what is going on behind the scenes, and for some, they do not really want to know.

Some people talk of their preference for buying from places where their food is prepared where they can see. This is mentioned particularly in relation to sandwiches. Another buys his Chinese takeaways from a place where he can watch the food being prepared.

Certificates, displayed on the wall, relating to hygiene, also provide reassurance.

Word of mouth is also an effective means of finding out about places, especially local ones. If a place has done particularly badly word gets around. However when participants are talking of this type of scenario it is often when a place had been closed down and not just some minor lack of compliance.

It is worth noting that the number of TV programmes relating to running of restaurants has raised awareness of hygiene issues.

2.5 Awareness of Existing schemes

There was no clear difference in awareness between those recruited in the pilot areas of the Food Hygiene Information Scheme currently running in Scotland and those recruited outside of those areas. The pilot scheme appears to have made little impact to date on consumers. One thought she had heard about the scheme on the radio but was not confident.

Very few have seen a Pass certificate from the pilot. One had seen the certificate in Renfrew, one thought they had seen it in Perth and one of the group in Glasgow had seen a certificate whilst in Renfrew. It had made little impact on them. Another thinks he might have seen it but suggests it's the sort of thing you would just take for granted.

Only one could describe the certificate unprompted by the certificate itself. He had wondered if it was a new initiative or was just something to show that the environmental health inspections were actually taking place.

Unsurprisingly, none had seen an Improvement Required certificate and none had seen any of the star scheme certificates.

However it is worth noting that some participants felt that they had seen similar schemes and would often describe hygiene certificates that were on the wall commonly in their local takeaway shops or small cafes. These were mostly certificates to say that someone on the staff had completed a course in hygiene. They found this reassuring that there was someone on the staff who had knowledge of such issues.

One described certificates that had stars on it. One felt that the type of certificates that were on display often looked like they had been made at home and somewhat amateurish.

One thought that he had seen certificates relating to the results of hygiene inspections by the council, but it is unclear what this was, and it was not the pilot Pass / Improvement Required scheme.

Chapter 2

Key findings

- Few had any knowledge of what a food hygiene information scheme might mean
- Information about hygiene was important to consumers
- Good hygiene is broadly taken for granted
- There was a belief that any danger to their health would result in closure
- The purposes of a food hygiene information scheme were perceived to be:
 - To allow comparisons
 - To provide reassurance
 - To ensure that lack of compliance was rectified
- Reassurance at present comes from
 - Having been to an outlet before
 - Seeing food being prepared
 - Assessing cleanliness from the parts of business that can be seen
 - Seeing certificates for hygiene on the wall
 - Recommendations from friends

Chapter 3 Evaluation

The two schemes being evaluated were:

- **The star scheme; *A four tier system***
- **The pass / improvement required scheme ; *A two tier system***

Very early in the discussion, and prior to any prompt material other than the certificates themselves, participants expressed a preference for the pass/ improvement required scheme. This was not always the immediate reaction from everyone but of the vast majority. In each group there tended to be one or at most two at the outset who thought the star scheme visually appealing, often for the very reason that they were familiar with it from hotels. However after only a few minutes of discussion these people too became strong advocates of the pass/ information required scheme. This view then tended to prevail throughout the remainder of the discussion and was strongly held.

This chapter aims to highlight the factors which caused groups to reach this conclusion.

3.1 Reactions to the sample certificates

Showing the sample certificates for both schemes to participants tended to provoke a number of questions and initial comments.

To some extent this simple prompt mirrors more accurately than other methods what the consumer is likely to think when faced with one of these certificates on the door of a restaurant for the first time.

Initial questions often related to:

- whether it is voluntary or mandatory.
- how often premises were inspected
- if inspectors come at planned times

There were comments made about:

- how standards could change quickly with a change of staff
- whether there would be different standards for a takeaway than for a restaurant.

- whether a restaurant would require more checks to be made on it than in the takeaway.

Some people took a very firm view that anything less than the standards expected should cause the restaurant to be closed. They could not envisage any grey areas. There is a strong view held by many members of the public that no risks would be taken with their public health and shades of grey were unacceptable.

“If it is open, then it has passed a standard and if it hasn’t, it has got a closed sign on it”

“If we go into a restaurant, we make the assumption that it has been checked by environmental health and if we think it looks decent enough and then we’ll decide whether we go back again”

It is important to understand the point of view from which consumers develop their understanding of the schemes on offer. The view that is taken on this colours how they view the schemes being proposed.

3.2 Perceptions of the Three Star plus fail; 4 Tier scheme

The star scheme was seen as being confusing on a number of different variables.

These were:

- the scale that is being used
- confusion with schemes monitoring quality
- the lack of clarity of what the stars mean

3.2.1 Scale

The star scheme was criticised very early in the discussion for not having a scale attached to it. This meant that the consumer did not know if three stars were good in that it could potentially go up to five stars or even something else.

Suggestions to remedy this would be to have all stars shown but only the number shaded in gold that the establishment has achieved.

Even if it were clear how many stars were involved in the scale there are other questions raised by the use of a scale.

For example, one participant asks which way the scale is running i.e. is one the minimum standard while the rest represent extra achievement?

Anything less than the top score of three stars raises questions in consumers' minds as to why they did not achieve the highest score. This implies to many that something is wrong or at least raises the question as to what is lacking. Many feel if anything is wrong they should be failed.

“It shouldn't be that you nearly passed – if they are not good enough, they're not good enough and should be failed. It should be one or the other”

One person said that at school if you got a gold star it would be something that was beyond a reasonable standard or would one star be below standard?

The key issue with the star scheme is that the scale raises questions for the consumer that they can't readily answer and adds confusion. It may be that a public awareness campaign could address some of these issues.

3.2.2 Confusion with quality

Very early in the discussion, essentially as soon as the certificates are seen, there is significant confusion with other ratings, most commonly hotel ratings.

The stars can also be easily confused with ratings that might be given for quality of food. For some groups, particularly those with older people, this was a confusion to which they kept returning throughout the discussion.

The following gives some examples of the level of confusion that may be caused.

One group said initially that they quite liked the star rating because it was like the hotel system and would anticipate that the amount of

money the consumer spent would correspond to the different stars as well.

“Could the stars not go along with the size of the restaurant or hotel?”

They wouldn't expect the same service in a one star as a three star hotel and they assumed that the food preparation probably wouldn't be as good as well. Nevertheless they too had a reluctance to go to a one star outlet.

Another group thought that the star rating would be confusing as it would imply that at one star they just provided sandwiches whereas the three star establishments could provide a joint of meat. In other words, the star ratings related to the complexity of food preparation that was allowed.

A similar level of confusion arose in another group which suggested that the stars might represent the level of inspection that the establishment received. They suggested that there might be costs involved in having an inspection done and that there would be more involved in a three star inspection than in a one star inspection.

One participant who was a travel agent was very scathing about the hotel ratings saying that they were not such good indicators of quality and felt that ratings on this could be equally lacking in their representation of hygiene. The key question that all the groups return to is how the ratings are arrived at. To give one example, they asked.... “How does the presence of a cockroach rate in comparison to someone forgetting to wash his hands between the potatoes and the tomatoes?”.

There was confusion with both the hotel ratings and with the Michelin star rating for quality of food. When people see star ratings they often think of quality and not hygiene.

Confusion would also arise simply because people would not take the time to read the poster properly but would just give it a quick glance.

Some alternatives to stars were suggested to avoid confusion with other star- based schemes. This included ratings from A to E.

Another felt that percentages could be given for different attributes.

3.2.3 What do the stars represent?

The stars themselves clearly mean different things to different people and there was much discussion around what they meant. (A more structured analysis of what the stars mean can be found in section 3.4 outlining the findings of the matching exercise.)

Most people react to the star scheme by saying that they would not want to go to a one star establishment. They assume that a one star place would be in need of some improvement.

“It says to me that they have struggled to get that one star and that there has been a problem somewhere”

They suggest that no-one would want to put up a rating unless it was a good rating and showed off the establishment in a good light. In one participant’s view unless it was 3 or 4 stars it would not be displayed. There is a lack of information about what the criteria is for achieving a certain level of stars.

One star:

- is viewed with extreme caution
- is assumed to mean that the hygiene is not up to the standard that is expected.
- implies that something is wrong.

There were concerns about the criteria that attract a one star.

“If have one star at one end of the high street and another one star at the other end - are we to assume that they have both got the same things wrong. One could have filthy floors and the other filthy worktops but they are both getting one star.”

One star could in the eyes of some be given for some structural defect that has nothing to do with the cleanliness in relation to food.

There were also concerns about what it would look like taking your family to a place with only one star. They wanted to know what the difference was between a one and a three star.

The desire to go somewhere that is fully compliant is illustrated by the responses to the following question. Participants were asked if they would be more likely to go to a restaurant that had been well short of compliance and had improved but was still not fully compliant. The majority would still not want to go to a restaurant that was still not fully compliant and would have expected any place that had been given recommendation to improve to have done that. Anything less and they were seen as not taking it seriously.

By contrast there was a minority who do not think that one star is a fail. They assume that if it had failed it would be closed and therefore one star represents the minimum standard that is acceptable.

One person felt that if the inspectors have been there and the FSA are willing to put their name against one star it cannot be that bad and indeed must mean that it has passed.

“If the FSA have given it a star it must be kosher...it must be A OK.”

In conclusion there is considerable ambiguity relating to the star scheme.

3.2.4 Influencing decisions

There is no question that the star scheme would influence the consumer's choice of restaurant.

Typically the majority say that seeing a one star would be very influential in their decision and they would not take the chance of eating there. They would prefer to play safe and go to an establishment that has three stars, especially if they were making a booking for other people. One group said they would have to be even more careful if there was a frail elderly person within the group.

A few people would take greater chances with their own health although one young mother said that she would be very careful as she has such responsibilities she could not afford to be ill.

Whilst the majority say they would be influenced by the star rating on the door there were a minority who would rely on other cues or sources of information.

For one gentleman, if the place was very busy, this would over-ride what was on the door. Another would ask questions of the restaurant and yet another would go in for a cup of tea or something small and check the place out for themselves. Another thinks that you can get a strong sense of whether or not somewhere is clean. Recommendations from friends might also override a rating on the door. Some would therefore rely on their own judgement.

However even for the small number who would rely on their own judgement, it was rare for anyone to be willing to take the chance on arranging a special occasion at the restaurant.

3.2.5 Response to scenario 1A/B¹

Prior to the presentation of the scenarios, there was already a strong view in favour of the pass / improvement required scheme.

The great majority thought that it was unfair to give a new restaurant a poorer rating due to lack of a track record. They should not be downgraded for not being in business long enough. Some even make the assumption currently that a new restaurant will be particularly good because of new appliances etc. and should be assumed to be good in relation to track records etc until they have had time to build one up. Only once a track record exists, can it be evaluated.

In two separate groups, they felt that it would be increasingly difficult for new businesses to get established, if a track record was a requirement for a top rating. It was difficult enough to become established in the restaurant business and this was seen as a significant barrier.

It was felt that bringing into the equation the history of the establishment raises some ambiguities. This was particularly the case for places where staff turnover is an issue.

¹ Scenario 1A and 1B can be found within the topic guide shown in full in Appendix 1

A couple of groups indicated that they felt that the proprietor of the restaurant in the vignette might not be telling the truth i.e. they were not willing to believe that the one star had been awarded simply on the basis of the lack of a track record.

“If you haven’t created a track record, how can you fail”

They felt that it must be based on something more substantial.

“If everything is brand new why are you not getting more than one star?”

If the restaurant is all right then it must be the inspection process that is wrong. It is very difficult to take the explanation given on board.

Some considered whether the previous experience of the manager at some other establishment was being taken into account but in reality, they could come up with no viable explanations for such an outcome.

If it was to be the case that it was awarded for this reason then one group took the view that the whole scheme would quickly fall into disrepute. They felt that word would get out and before long anyone who got one star would be saying it was for those kinds of reason. One star places would soon start to trivialise it and people would be saying that it had nothing to do with hygiene but was related to management systems. The public would then not be able to trust it for the purpose for which it was intended. The whole scheme could potentially be dismissed.

The bigger restaurants could easily say it was a scheme for amateurs and the precedent cited of how big restaurants don’t put up their staff’s hygiene certificates despite the fact that they do have them.

3.2.6 Response to scenario 2²

This scenario was presented subsequently. It reinforced the group’s feelings of confusion concerning their perceptions of the four tier star scheme. They had by this stage felt quite strongly in

² Note scenario 2 can be found within the topic guide shown in full in Appendix 1

favour of a pass – fail scheme and this just served to entrench that view.

A one star rating that can mean different things will clearly devalue the four tier scheme in the eyes of consumers. One star is very ambiguous.

As a response to the scenario one consumer said he would simply have gone to the restaurant that looked the best. Effectively this is asking consumers to make a judgement on a rating for which they do not have all of the information.

Another felt that a restaurant that had issues with their food handling should not get any stars because it had failed on a major criterion.

“It’s like saying to a child, you have not failed, you have just not passed on this occasion... but here is a star anyway...I know that is nice but at some stage in life you just have to say no...that’s failed – end of story... especially with a major issue.

“You could have gone into that restaurant and been seriously ill and the reason you went in was because it had one star... because you thought it had passed.”

Another returned to the confusion with quality saying that a tourist would not know what these signs meant and will rate one star as a good meal, two stars as an excellent meal and 3 stars as haute cuisine.

Another would have been very annoyed to find out it was so lacking in compliance when the FSA have been there and given it a star which consumers would have assumed that it was of an acceptable standard. One thought this would potentially leave the government agency open to being sued if it provided such information that led to any unfortunate consequences.

The fact that other restaurants were by-passed because of their lack of displaying certificates emphasised the importance of making it mandatory. This again was a view that most groups already held at this point in the discussion.

The view taken by the majority was that for the scheme to work it would have to be mandatory. A fuller discussion of the arguments in favour of it being mandatory is provided in chapter 4.

3.3 Perceptions of 2 Tier Scheme; Pass / Improvement required

3.3.1 A Pass

A pass certificate was seen as:

- Been tried and tested
- The best
- Reassuring
- Having reached the standard
- That it is safe...
- and clean

All having seen a pass would book a restaurant without any hesitation.

Most would not even read any further than the 'Pass' as it wouldn't trigger any questions at all.

One person did not think that a pass would imply the best and if it was that good it would say pass plus or pass with distinction or something similar.

This system provided the clear benefit of reassurance that the environmental health officer has determined that this outlet has reached the standard at which a pass was achieved. The responsibility for this was theirs, they were seen as being the experts and knowledgeable about what was required.

Most people only want to know that somewhere has met the required standard and little else. From this standpoint, providing the consumer with a simple pass or not is sufficient.

For those for whom the question of hygiene was very definite, it was important to them that hygiene reached the bar as determined by the experts.

“Personally I think it is just black or white – hygiene wise it is either up to scratch or it is not... there is no grading.”

3.3.2 Improvement required

Whilst the pass certificate would be expected, the certificate on the door would have a much greater effect on the consumer if the result was negative, i.e. an improvement required certificate.

The first reaction to the improvement required certificate is that no one is likely to put it on the door.

If it was exhibited, the general view was that it could be quite off-putting. Given this and with some recognition from a few individuals that they might have failed to pass because of something relatively minor that perhaps had nothing to do with food e.g. a cracked shelf, there was a strong view that along with any improvement required certificate there would have to be more information available about what it was that requires improvement.

There were concerns that an ‘improvement required’ result could be unfair on the establishment.

An absence of detailed information could lead to people making assumptions of what is wrong and the provision of specific information might be required to stop people making up their own stories about a place. This type of misinformation could be very damaging to an establishment. An improvement required certificate could therefore have a very damaging effect on a business.

Others had less sympathy for a business that does not comply and felt that there was no room for error.

Another felt that if an old favourite that you had regularly used got an improvement required certificate you would have to ask questions.

There were also concerns expressed in one group about how improvement required certificates can be amended to a pass and how quickly this can be done given the presumably finite time available to environmental health officers who cannot keep going back to undertake re-inspections.

This provoked discussion about the dates of certificates and how long they remain valid. This is discussed in more detail in section 4.6.

Many groups returned to the argument that if it was open you would have expected it to pass anyway. This will be a challenge for any scheme to overcome.

Other issues with the two tier scheme is that they would assume that in practice they would see nothing if it had failed leaving people to make up their own minds about the establishment. Many thought that if they saw nothing at all they would probably still go in.

3.3.3 Influencing decisions

This scheme would be very influential if the certificates were displayed. It would have much less influence if there was no need to display.

An improvement required result was also thought to echo more loudly through word of mouth than would a pass.

There were some concerns expressed about the extent to which the public understand information and any information that is provided would have to be kept very simple and clearly explained.

3.4 Understanding the ratings; The matching exercise

In order to objectively assess what each of the ratings might mean to consumers and to assess what level of consistency exists on understanding, a matching exercise was devised and group participants were asked to match the likely ratings that might be seen on each of the two schemes with descriptors of possible results from a food hygiene inspection by Environmental Health Officers.

Participants worked in subgroups of two or three with the instruction that they should discuss and collectively agree each match. In total, this gave 22 subgroups from the 6 focus groups.

A copy of the matching exercise is provided as Appendix 3 to this report.

Each of the ratings could be matched against one or more of six descriptors. The descriptors were as follows:

- **E**xceeds statutory hygiene requirements
- **B**roadly meets all statutory hygiene requirements
- **M**eets all statutory hygiene requirements
- **D**oes not meet all statutory hygiene requirements
- **G**eneral failure to satisfy hygiene requirements
- **P**oor appreciation of hazards and control measures. No food safety management system

Each descriptor was denoted by the initial letter of the descriptor. Each subgroup was told that they could use the same descriptor against more than one rating and they could use more than one descriptor against each of the ratings. This allowed for some variation within each subgroup (and means that the total number of matches against each rating can exceed 22).

The following table summarises the results.

Table 1: Matching exercise

	E	M	B	D	G	P
Set 1						
EATsafe Award	19 86%	8 36%	4 18%			
Pass	3 14%	17 77%	10 45%			
Improvement required			2 9%	17 77%	7 32%	7 32%
Set 2						
Three stars	18 82%	6 27%	2 9%			
Two stars		14 64%	9 41%	3 14%		
One star		2 9%	9 41%	8 36%	3 14%	4 18%
No stars		1 5%		5 23%	15 68%	9 41%
Set 3						
Good	11 50%	13 59%	1 5%	1 5%		
Satisfactory		8 36%	12 55%	2 9%		
Basic		3 14%	5 23%	12 55%	1 5%	2 9%
Fail				6 27%	19 86%	15 68%

When interpreting Table 1 it is important to distinguish between any confusion of matches to descriptors E,M or B (all of which are positive) with descriptors D,G or P (which are negative). Confusion within these two subsets is of less consequence.

With the highest degree of consistency, the Eatsafe award was seen as being given to those who had exceeded the statutory requirements.

A pass was seen by over three-quarters as meeting all the statutory hygiene requirements and 45% thought that it additionally

broadly met all requirements. None of the respondents thought that it was anything less than this.

An improvement required certificate was seen by over three quarters as not meeting all statutory hygiene requirements but nearly two thirds saw it as a general failure to satisfy hygiene requirement or as having a poor appreciation of hazards and control measures- no food safety management system. (See also discussion in section 3.3.2)

The vast majority of participants (82%) indicated in the matching exercise that three stars meant that the establishment had exceeded statutory hygiene requirements and only 27% felt that they had been merely met. This was almost as many, but not quite, as those who matched the Eatsafe award to this descriptor.

Nearly two thirds thought that two stars indicated that they had met all statutory hygiene requirements although 41% also said that it broadly met them.

One star is where there was the greatest variation of response with no fewer than five out of the six descriptors being used by someone. The most common response (41%) was that it meant the outlet had broadly met all requirements although 36% felt it might mean does not meet all statutory requirements.

A fail was more consistently perceived with 68% indicating that it meant a general failure to satisfy hygiene requirements.

As a control, a plain English scale was also provided running from good through satisfactory, basic and then fail echoing the terms used in the FSA consultation document. Many felt this was easier to understand, but it yielded quite similar levels of confusion across the EMB;DGP divide as did the star scheme.

A discussion followed each of the matching exercises to try and ascertain where they thought a pass would be on the star scheme. This was highly variable with some assuming that it should be three stars and others assuming that a single star would represent a pass. The latter view comes from the assumption that if they are getting a certificate at all then it should be pass or else it would be closed.

Yet others assume a single star is a fail.

There was simply no agreement as to where the line of passing actually was. It was this level of discussion that leads many to conclude that the important thing to know from a food hygiene information scheme is whether the inspectors have deemed it safe to eat in and have assessed all aspects required for a pass.

Improvement required was seen as being either a fail or a one star.

Chapter 3 Key Findings

- Both schemes would influence choice of food outlet
- Distinct preference for the Pass / Improvement Required; two tier scheme which was seen as clearer, easier to understand and more reassuring.
- Only want to know if somewhere has met the required standards.
- An improvement required certificate would attract more attention and would raise questions about what was required to be done than would a pass certificate.
- Restaurant would not want to display certificate unless positive: pass or three stars or higher
- Seeing a certificate raises questions in the consumers mind and these are fewer with the 2 tier scheme.
- Three stars plus fail; four tiers is confusing in relation to
 - Scale
 - Quality – hotels /food/ others
 - What the stars represent
- One star is very easily confused and seen by some as fail but by other as the minimum and therefore a pass.
- A government agency giving a gold star to a place that is not meeting legislative requirements could be seen as misleading.

- It would be unfair for a new restaurant to be given a lower rating due to lack of track record
- A scheme offering reasons for being given one star not relating directly to hygiene would quickly fall into disrepute.
- Concerns expressed about how long a restaurant would have to display an improvement required certificate before undertaking actions to get a pass certificate.
- It may be that improvement required could be unfair on the establishment unless improvements undertaken and re-inspected quickly.
- The matching exercise suggests that the 2 tier scheme offers the greater clarity:
 - Eatsafe was generally seen as exceeding requirements with almost as many viewing three stars as achieving this distinction
 - A pass was seen as meeting or broadly meeting all requirements and never as negative.
 - Two stars was seen as meeting or broadly meeting all requirements but some deemed it to be less than this.
 - Improvement required was seen by the majority as not meeting all requirements
 - There was considerable confusion as to where a pass was on the three star plus fail scheme.
 - There was great variation in what one star might mean. 41% said it met all the requirements and 36% felt it did not meet all statutory requirements.

Chapter 4

Common features of food hygiene information schemes

There are various features that are common to both schemes and this chapter aims to provide consumer views on these issues. This includes:

- Perceptions of an awards scheme running in parallel with the food hygiene information schemes;
- Understanding of what is being measured;
- Level of information required;
- How information should be disseminated to the public;
- Whether there are different requirements for different places;
- How maintenance of standards can be addressed;
- Whether the display of certificates should be mandatory or voluntary and
- How any scheme might affect reputations.

4.1 Awards scheme

There is an awards scheme operating in Scotland called *Eatsafe*. This is separate from the Food Hygiene Information Scheme currently being piloted.

This was described to participants and they were asked if they thought it was helpful.

There were very mixed views on this. Many were quite ambivalent and did not have a view one way or another. This was not an issue over which strong views were expressed. Broadly it was felt that this would not make a significant difference. (In recording this finding, however, it should be acknowledged that the matching exercise (Ref. Section 3.4) indicated that *Eatsafe* plays a complementary role when consumers make a subjective assessment of scale in respect of the hygiene level achieved.)

Some felt that if exceptional effort had been put into a restaurant's cleanliness then they should be recognised for that. A few thought that *Eatsafe* would raise standards

Others just found it excessive, complicating the issue with further information that they didn't need to know and were quite content simply to know that it had passed.

There were a few participants who could not conceive of a standard that was above that of a pass i.e. how can you get cleaner than clean?

Some thought it was just another ruse to be able to put the prices up yet further. It was often seen as something that was of greater benefit to the business than for the consumer. It allowed them to advertise something they were doing well.

One participant felt that it left the awarding body open to litigation if someone had a meal at an establishment featuring an Eatsafe award and then became unwell.

4.2 Understanding of what is being measured

Participants were asked to indicate what they thought the inspectors were measuring when they visited premises.

Their lists tended to be quite long and detailed. The following is the amalgamated list from all groups.

Air conditioning	Hand washing facilities
Blue plasters on cuts	How long food kept before serving
Broken tiles that might harbour germs	Legislation up on walls
Chopping boards	Possible hazard
Clean floors worksurfaces sinks	Preparation areas
Clean pans utensils etc	Procedures
Clean tea towels	Recording systems
Cleanliness generally	Separation of food stuffs
Cloths	Staff clothing
Cross contamination	Staff knowledge
Dates of food	Staff personal hygiene
Fabric of the building	Staff training
Fire hazard	Storage of cleaning equipment
Food sources	Structure of the building
Food storage	System of how long food kept for
Hair tied	

Systems	Ventilation
Temperature of food waiting to be served	Vermin control
Temperature of fridges, freezers	Walls / floors clean from grease
Toilets	Waste
Use of plastic gloves where appropriate	Water drainage

Participants were then taken through the key areas which are measured by the different food hygiene information schemes. The following was presented to the groups:

The score a business gets will be dependent on a number of different factors. Different schemes will take into account different things

Levels of compliance determined by:

- **food hygiene and safety**
 - *food handling*
 - *temperature control*
- **structural**
 - *cleanliness*
 - *layout*
 - *condition of structure*
 - *lighting*
 - *ventilation facilities etc*
- **confidence in management / control procedures**
 - *track record*
 - *willingness to act on previous advice*
 - *complaint history*
 - *attitude of management towards hygiene and food safety technical knowledge available*
 - *satisfactory HACPP based procedures*

Participants were asked if there was anything on this list that they had not expected to see.

Lighting was commonly mentioned. This was not something that would have occurred to many people.

One group reiterated the fact that having a track record would be difficult for new business.

There was also a question relating to who keeps the complaint history and how this is managed.

Another thought it would be difficult to gauge the attitude of management but assumed that this will relate to the relationship that has been built up over time and will to some extent come back to the track record. For this group these two factors therefore began to merge into one.

The management factors were very rarely mentioned spontaneously within the group when asked to consider what they thought was being measured. However after prompting and the opportunity to think about it, most people are quite happy that they be measured as part of the rating.

One group indicated that they wouldn't have thought about management factors as customers would not be too concerned about them but agreed it is appropriate that these aspects be taken into account.

When asked what the priorities are, respondents were quite consistent in identifying food hygiene and safety and anything relating to cleanliness as their priority. Structure would be second followed by management factors.

However they were seen as linked.

"I would say if the first two are exceptional, the third one will be too"

4.3 Level of information required

Participants were asked what level of information they felt should be provided by a food hygiene information scheme.

For many the date that the inspection was undertaken was important. Another mentioned an expiry date for the validity of the certificate. (This was associated with queries about the frequency of inspections.) It was also mentioned that the date tends to be in small print such that it cannot be readily seen. There were

comments about certificates being displayed for awards that were years out of date.

It should also be made quite clear that it was about food hygiene.

Most people did not want too much information and a simple pass or fail was seen as sufficient. There was always a view expressed by one or two within a group that they would simply not read something on the door but would merely glance at it and no more.

Government officers were seen as being employed to do a job and they should be left to get on with it. Few thought themselves likely to read the detail on any certificate. There was a view expressed that further confusion could be caused by giving out too much information.

However there were always a few who were looking for more information whilst others were adamant that they would not seek out additional information on websites.

Many consumers say they would want more information if a place had failed in order to find out why. A certificate on the wall was seen by one group as not the best place to tell the consumer what was wrong. However another thought that some basic information relating to reasons could be put on the certificate itself. Another group felt that it should say what was wrong and when it was to be corrected by.

In another group one participant felt that if restaurants were made to put up the reasons for any failure the public would be horrified. This would be very off putting to customers and detrimental to the restaurant. He felt that the public do not want to know this level of detail and this would be opening up a can of worms. As a restaurant owner, they would want to reassure the public that whatever had been asked of them had been done even although it might be some time until the next inspection could verify this independently.

It was however often assumed that any premises would get inspected again pretty soon when a pass could be restored. However others within this group felt that this might place too onerous a burden on the environmental health staff.

It was assumed by another in this same group that they are simply ticking boxes and so don't accept that it would be much additional work to review those areas that had not met the standard.

The contrary view was that the certificate would get no more than a cursory glance and it would only be if there was an improvement required certificate that a customer might stop and pay more attention.

In takeaways when customers are waiting for food there is greater opportunity to read such notices in more detail.

Further some would be very distrusting of asking the restaurateur to give an explanation. In scenario 1A where the restaurant got only one star a number of people said they did not believe the reason given by the owner of the restaurant and assumed that he would say something like that anyway. It would be preferable if this was provided by a reliable and unbiased source.

Websites were mentioned as one place where additional information could be provided.

4.4 Means of communicating information

An issue was where exactly any certificate might be posted and if behind counters might not be able to be seen properly by consumers.

One group felt that the certificate did not have to be obvious but should be discreet whilst still being easily visible. This group felt that it should be somewhere near the entrance.

Other groups generally agreed that on or near the door was an acceptable place for it to be displayed.

Some thought that the display of a good certificate would also be good for the restaurant. Those that therefore complied with the requirements of the inspectors would not have anything to fear from such a scheme.

Other places that were suggested included the restaurants own website, in the local newspaper and on any of the restaurant's advertisements.

There are concerns that there are many awards put up on the walls of food outlets and this can diminish the impact of any single one as it gets lost amongst the many.

The quality of the document was a concern and was raised in a few groups. One group in particular felt that the documents could be easily copied.

“It looks like a photocopy. It reminds you of the certificates you get in primary school”

This again has the effect of giving them less authority.

It is not clear who the issuing authority is. The Food Standards Agency is identified in the corner of the certificate but not easily seen.

Only two groups mentioned the Scores on the Doors brand in relation to the source of these documents and it was felt by these groups that it was not at all clear that this brand related to hygiene.

Advantages to certificates being displayed on the doors were:

- It can be seen easily by those walking past
- Customers can make a judgement / snap decision before they enter
- It's clear whether they are meeting the standards
- Good for business
- Makes places that are not up to standard raise their standard
- Get the choice to walk away

Disadvantages to certificates being on the door were:

- It might make you a bit wary
- Concerned that it would get lost amongst other information on the door
- Posters on doors could stop people being able to see through the window
- Could be open to forgery

- Need to ensure could not be easily transferred to another restaurant
- Might not be somewhere that can be easily seen
- Restaurant not wanting to put up a poor rating
- Potentially disadvantageous to restaurateur

The views of the groups were sought on the information being published on the website. There was general approval of information being displayed on the website other than from the most elderly group, for whom access was an issue.

However, it came up in discussion across a few of the groups that participants had not realised that the information would be published on the council's website.

The council's website is not a place that people would ever think of looking to get information about a restaurant. They had all thought that the information would have been displayed on the restaurant's own website or perhaps on a restaurant guide.

Advantages to information being available on the website are

- Consumers can research more details if they wish
- More people would be able to see it
- It would give opportunity to explain a fail or a fail could lead the customer to further information

Disadvantages to information being on the website are:

- No-one would look at it or use it
- Lack of access to it
- Tourists would not have access
- Wouldn't go into the councils website
- How quickly it would be updated
- It is likely to only be on the restaurant's website if they have done well

4.5 Different standards for different places?

Booking an expensive restaurant as in our scenario and seeing a poster that looks like something he would see in a local takeaway attracted comment. One participant thinks that he doesn't want to

know about what goes on behind the scenes. All he wants is to have a nice meal and assume that everything is going to be good in that type of establishment.

It could potentially ruin the ambience of a place by drawing attention to hygiene.

Others mentioned that there was some snobbery in the restaurant trade and the more that is paid the more assumptions are made about the place. For example, in the local café selling a quick bacon sandwich:

“The owner wants me to know that they have everything in place and both he and I are quite happy with that but... as you spend more, I think the attitudes that both the consumer and the restaurateur have will change and I think it will be difficult.”

This participant believes that the expectations of consumers will differ in different places.

Not all participants agreed with him and others felt that the same standard of hygiene should be achieved irrespective of what is being paid for it. Levels of hygiene should be the same in a top restaurant as they are in a burger bar.

4.6 Maintaining standards

There are repeated concerns that hygiene levels seen on the day of inspection might not be maintained.

Consumers recognise equally that one bad apple within the staff can have a deleterious effect and equally that staff turnover is an issue in making a place either better or worse in terms of hygiene.

Maintaining standards was commonly mentioned and the lack of track record influencing results in the vignette prompted one participant to suggest that the passes be coloured, with a blue one for the first year, building up to silver in year two and then gold in year three. This would provide the consumer with a measure of consistency of standard over time.

4.7 Mandatory or Voluntary

The question of whether certificates should be displayed on a mandatory or voluntary basis came up very early in the discussion.

For many people there was a strong preference for the display of certificates to be mandatory.

Whilst the pass / improvement required scheme was vastly preferred, the point of the scheme is much diminished by not having to display the findings of the inspection.

“At the end of the day, you would think that someone who had a gold star, which would mean that they had passed, is going to display it... so if you’re going round looking for a restaurant and see a gold star – you are more likely to go in there than to one which has nothing displayed... and you’re maybe thinking that they’ve failed.”

If it was mandatory and they didn’t really want to display it the view was that they would probably put it up somewhere less visible.

One group felt that if a certificate was not in view then the assumption would have to be that it had failed. However this would remain ambiguous as it would be possible that it had passed but simply had not displayed the certificate.

One view was that a certificate on display might bring down the tone of the décor.

“Imagine. It might be like when you’ve just done the house up and decorated it all and your boyfriend brings home a scabby poster and wants to put it up. You might not want to put it up.”

Though not endorsed by others, one view was that only a fail need to be displayed, or that a fail notice be larger than a pass one.

The lack of any information would probably just lead to consumers falling back on the cues that they have at the moment about a place. Even if the scheme was firmly in place and there was no

sign exhibited many would just go in anyway. For the scheme to work there was a strong feeling that it had to be mandatory.

“If you are going out to a restaurant, you’re not really looking out for their hygiene inspection – if it’s there, it’s there and that’s good but if not... you wouldn’t say wait a minute, we need to find out if it’s passed.”

A few felt happy with the compromise that it should only be mandatory on the website and not on the door, but this was a minority view.

After the discussion of the second scenario there was a discussion about the need for the certificates to be voluntary or mandatory.

Some were of the view that no one would voluntarily put up a certificate unless it said pass or three stars. All of the remaining certificates leave questions with the consumer.

If the lack of anything being displayed was to result in consumers assuming a fail, this would rely on consumers knowing enough about the scheme and there being an expectation to display. This would require there to be a significant education process with the public to have this level of awareness.

4.8 Reputation

Reputation in restaurants was seen as being built on quality of food and not on hygiene requirements that are assumed. If it becomes known however that there is a problem with cleanliness then it is thought that this would affect reputation. It was also mentioned that it does not take much to put people off a place and that it might be difficult to redress.

Some people spoke of having a negative experience in a restaurant where they had got food poisoning and they would never go there again.

A one star rating was seen by many as likely to damage reputation.

A number of groups felt that a TV chef with such a strong reputation would not put up with a low grading. One spoke of a

chef who had closed voluntarily and made the necessary adjustments rather than be forcibly closed and that this would be the likely outcome of being given a poor rating.

One person felt that stars mean little in hotels and can be misleading. Knowing what the stars mean is an essential component for this system to work.

Chapter 4 Key findings

Awards scheme

- The majority were ambivalent towards an awards scheme
- Some thought it excessive and complicated the issue
- Some thought that exceptional effort should be recognised

Understanding what is being measured

- Participants rarely thought of management / control procedures when asked what the schemes were measuring
- Majority quite content that management / control procedures be included
- Priorities are consistently food hygiene and safety

Level of information required

- The date on the certificate
- For some an expiry date
- Not too much information
- More information is required if failed
- Debates about timings of re-inspections if failed
- Websites could be used for additional information

Means of communicating information

- The certificate should be near the entrance – easily seen – can make judgement before entering
- Other suggestions include on restaurants own website, in local newspaper and on any of restaurants advertisements
- Too many awards on the wall and information can get lost
- Approval for information being displayed on website
- Lack of access to the internet for some especially elderly and tourists
- Would not consider accessing councils website
- Advantage of website; can access more detailed information
- Concerns about how quickly website can be updated
- Concerns that whilst OK in takeaways, posters on walls are not expected in upmarket restaurants
- Others felt the rules should apply to all

Maintaining standards

- There are concerns about standards being maintained post inspection
- Suggestion to recognise consistency of passes over time

Mandatory or voluntary

- Majority feel should be mandatory

Reputation

- Agreed that poor hygiene ratings would damage reputation.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

The views of consumers were clear. The pass / improvement required scheme is easier to understand. All were in agreement about this. It raises far fewer questions than the star scheme, which was generally seen as being very confusing.

Both schemes would influence decisions. The pass / improvement required scheme would influence these decisions more fairly.

The pass / improvement required scheme was also perceived to be more consistently understood and this was confirmed by the findings of the matching exercise undertaken with consumers.

Both schemes clearly provided information. The pass/improvement required scheme told the consumer whether the outlet had reached the standard. The star scheme did not do so. This was a crucial piece of information.

The improvement required certificate raised questions relating to what aspects needed improvement. There was no consistent conclusion on how this might be addressed.

The star scheme provided more gradation and in this sense provided more information. But, the confusion relating to what that gradation meant in practice was seen to outweigh the benefits of any additional information.

The confusion with hotels, food quality, scale etc was seen as a major drawback as was being unable to determine where a pass actually was. Anything less than three stars leaves many consumers unsure.

The view of the majority of consumers was that it should be as simple as is possible. Few are going to take the time to read any certificates in any detail. The important information therefore needs to be conveyed quickly.

The two tier scheme was seen as the more meaningful and more helpful to making informed choices.

The usefulness of the schemes was determined largely by whether or not they were mandatory or not. They were seen as being

much more useful if all restaurants had to display their results; Nothing on display would raise questions.

Getting a negative result is always going to present a problem for businesses. Consumers would be put off by an improvement-required certificate and by one star and, for many, anything less than three stars. There is an assumption that any lack of compliance can be dealt with relatively quickly allowing for a pass to be achieved.

It was the view of all six groups that the pass/improvement required; two tier system is the preferred option.

Scores on the doors Topic guide

Introduction (5mins)

Introduce self and indicate when last bought food outside of your home and what kind of place it was e.g. sandwich, takeaway, café, restaurant.

SECTION1 BACKGROUND

There has been a pilot food hygiene information scheme running in five areas across Scotland.

Awareness (5mins)

Was anyone aware of this scheme prior to being involved with this research? Discuss what is known and how know about it.

GENERAL ATTITUDE TO FOOD HYGIENE INFORMATION SCHEME (10mins)

What do you feel is the main purpose of a food hygiene information scheme aimed at the general public?

How important is it to you to find out how well somewhere you buy food has done in a hygiene inspection? Is this something that you give much thought to?

What do you expect from a food hygiene information scheme?

Have you ever seen one of these certificates? (SHOW both kinds of certificates)

SECTION 2 SCENARIO 1A/B (20 mins)

We would like to split the group into two and each will discuss a slightly different story.

PRESENT SCENARIO by reading it out but also have hard copy for people to examine.

Scenario 1A It's my husband's fortieth birthday and I want to arrange a large family dinner. People are arriving from all over and I want it to be a very special occasion. I've heard that there is a new restaurant opening up run by a chef I've heard of from the TV. I go down to the restaurant to check out the menu and see what it is like and on the door I notice it has a one star rating from the food hygiene inspection.

DISCUSSION

What do you think one star means?

What would you expect from a one star or a three star? Is there any confusion with other star ratings?

Prompt...e.g. for hotels

Will a poor star rating damage reputation?

How does it interact with people's perception of the quality of the food / service etc.

Would it influence your decision?

How important would it be in making your decision?

CONTINUE SCENARIO

I feel a bit worried – one star doesn't sound very good. I can't take any chances and so decide not to book there but at an old favourite restaurant that we've used before.

After the party I read an amazing review in the local paper and some friends have also been raving about it to me. I feel a bit disappointed that I didn't just go for it... and decide to go there just me and my husband for our anniversary. It was as good as everyone said and I ask the owner about the rating. He said it was because they were a new restaurant and the inspector felt there was not a track record for him to have confidence in their

management but that it was perfect in terms of hygiene and standards and everything. He explained that he was very unhappy about the explanation of the scoring criteria on the Council's website says that businesses with this score for confidence in management are described as having:

a 'poor appreciation of hazards' and 'no food safety management system'

I felt a bit cheated and rather sorry for the proprietor.

ALTERNATIVE Scenario 1B

It's my husband's fortieth birthday and I want to arrange a large family dinner. People are arriving from all over and I want it to be a very special occasion. I've heard that there is a new restaurant opening up run by a chef I've heard of from the TV. I go down to the restaurant to check out the menu and see what it is like and on the door I notice it has a PASS rating from the food hygiene inspection.

DISCUSSION

What do you think a pass means?

What would it show if it had failed?

Would it influence your decision?

How important would it be in making your decision?

Would you consider the hygiene rating to be a risk factor for you?

Is it a good thing to have an indication of standards?

CONTINUE SCENARIO 1B

PASS doesn't sound very good.....but there nothing actually saying there's anything wrong. So I go ahead with the booking.

I get home and feel a bit worried about it so I go on to the web site to check it out a bit further. I find out that a PASS is as good as it gets and think well that's OK then.

Bring two groups back together and reveal each others scenario and get them to discuss further... and allow a comparison of the two different scenarios.

Which of these two schemes in this scenario seems to be best? Discuss reasons.

Which scheme is easier to understand?

Which is more informative /meaningful to consumers/ is consistent / fair? ³

SECTION 3 DETAIL (10mins)

What level of information is required from any information scheme for consumers?

How should this be communicated to the public? Discuss means of getting information to the public.

Should the restaurant have to display its result somewhere publicly? Should this be at the premise or just on a website?

What is the benefit / disadvantage to it being displayed on the door?

What is the benefit / disadvantage to it being published on the Internet?

³[NOTES for facilitator and to be brought into discussion if required:

The criteria for three stars is not a higher standard than 'Pass' in terms of compliance Three stars allows recurring minor non-compliance (since recurrence is not specified as a bar to achieving a score of 5) Minor non-compliance under FHIS is further clarified by the explicit condition that it is 'not critical to food safety' The only known condition where a 'Pass' has a risk score greater than 10 relates to CIM where there is no track record but where compliance was found at the time of inspection.]

To what extent do you feel you would be influenced by the information provided by such a scheme? Discuss reasons for and against.

SECTION 4 UNDERSTANDING THE RATINGS (15 MINUTES)

There are a two schemes being considered to provide information to the public. SHOW PROMPT MATERIAL AGAIN.

- A a 'three star, plus fail' (four tier) system**
- B a 'pass /improvement required' scheme**

MATCHING EXERCISE

Split group into two groups. Give each group the matching exercise. Return to full group to discuss findings

Where was a pass perceived to be?

What do you think 'improvement required' means?

Would it influence your decision to buy if you saw an improvement required result?

What do you think two stars means? What do you think one star means? Would it influence your decision to buy if you saw a one star result?

SECTION 5 UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS BEING MEASURED (10 minutes)

What do you expect the inspectors to be measuring when they are deciding on a rating? [Write suggestions on flip chart for later reference.](#)

How would these things be measured? Do you think that they could be measured objectively / consistently?

PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION (REF poster)

The score a business gets will be dependent on a number of different factors. Different schemes will take into account different things

Levels of compliance determined by:

- **food hygiene and safety**
 - *food handling*
 - *temperature control*
- **structural**
 - *cleanliness*
 - *layout*
 - *condition of structure*
 - *lighting*
 - *ventilation facilities etc*
- **confidence in management / control procedures**
 - *track record willingness to act of previous advice*
 - *complaint history*
 - *attitude of management towards hygiene and food safety technical knowledge available*
 - *satisfactory HACPP based procedures*

Facilitator should see appendix 4 for more detailed information of what is included within the different schemes

Compare this with the list on the flip chart.

Is there anything there that you might not expect to be there?

Do you agree that all of these things are relevant and fair? Discuss.

What are the priorities?

SECTION 6

INTRODUCE Scenario 2 with whole group (10 minutes)

I visited a friend in Anyshire last week and we decided to have a quick meal on our way back to the station. We knew that Anyshire council had a star rating scheme for hygiene but didn't see any sign of it as we walked round town. Eventually we found a restaurant displaying a one star rating and decided that it should at least be meeting minimum hygiene requirements.

When I got home I checked out Anyshire council's website and found that there were a lot of two star establishments around the station. Curious about why I had seen nothing on display, I called the Council. They told me restaurants didn't have display certificates as it was voluntary. I asked about the premises that I had visited and she explained how that particular score was arrived at. The business had apparently scored really well for structure but had 'some major non-compliance' in relation to food handling practices. There was also a 'poor appreciation of hazards and 'no food safety management system

If one star could include, in some circumstances a business that fully complied with hygiene regulations but in other circumstances might have 'some major non-compliance' in relation to food handling practices, a 'poor appreciation of hazards and 'no food safety management system':

What information does the one star rating provide to the consumer?

If businesses with two stars are described as 'satisfactory', what would the effect be on consumer choice if such businesses didn't want to display their certificates?

SECTION 7

Introduce concept of awards scheme. (5mins)

In addition to the food hygiene information scheme there are food awards that can be awarded for standards achieved which are above the level expected by inspectors. Does this help?

What are the benefits of having an awards scheme?

⁴

⁴ Notes for facilitator

extract from consultation paper:

“We are committed to the wider Government Better Regulation agenda and the Board was also conscious of the need to avoid 'gold-plating' the legal requirements.

As with some of the other key elements of SOTD schemes, the greater the number of tiers, the greater the possibility of 'regulatory creep' with upper tiers being linked to standards above full legal compliance”

The Agency will not therefore have a SoTD scheme that knowingly exceeds compliance standards. If information about standards beyond compliance was favoured, it would have to be separate.

SECTION 8 Summary (5mins)

How easy to understand do you think each scheme is?

How useful would this scheme be? Would it help you to make informed choices?

To what extent would a scheme like this influence where you bought from?

If a business well short of compliance but later improved marginally but still not compliant, would you be more inclined (or less disinclined) to buy from there?

Which of the two schemes do you prefer?

Appendix 2 Certificates

Scores on the Doors

Joe Bloggs Catering
22 Bloggs Street
Anytown



This establishment was inspected by Anyshire Council in accordance
with current food hygiene legislation and passed the inspection on

DATE ISSUED

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE ISSUING AUTHORITY

For more information regarding the Food Hygiene Information Scheme please contact

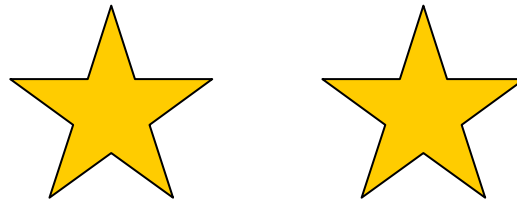
Anyshire Council on XXXXX XXXXXX, or alternatively visit our website

at www.anyshire.gov.uk

This certificate remains the property of the issuing authority, which reserves the right to remove it at any time.

Scores on the Doors

Joe Bloggs Catering
22 Bloggs Street
Anytown



This establishment was inspected by Anyshire Council in accordance
with current food hygiene legislation and passed the inspection on

DATE ISSUED

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Scores on the Doors

Joe Bloggs Catering
22 Bloggs Street
Anytown



This establishment was inspected by Anyshire Council in accordance
with current food hygiene legislation and passed the inspection on

DATE ISSUED

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE ISSUING AUTHORITY

For more information regarding the Food Hygiene Information Scheme please contact

Anyshire Council on XXXXX XXXXXX, or alternatively visit our website

at www.anyshire.gov.uk

This certificate remains the property of the issuing authority, which reserves the right to remove it at any time.

Food
hygiene
information
scheme

Joe Bloggs Catering
22 Bloggs Street
Anytown

PASS

This establishment was inspected by Anyshire Council in accordance with current food hygiene legislation and passed the inspection on

DATE ISSUED

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE ISSUING AUTHORITY

For more information regarding the Food Hygiene Information Scheme please contact

Anyshire Council on XXXXX XXXXXX, or alternatively visit our website

at www.anyshire.gov.uk

This certificate remains the property of the issuing authority, which reserves the right to remove it at any time.

Food
hygiene
information
scheme

Joe Boggs Catering
22 Bloggs Street
Anytown

IMPROVEMENT REQUIRED

This establishment was inspected by Anyshire Council in accordance with current food hygiene legislation and was found to require improvement on

DATE ISSUED

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE ISSUING AUTHORITY

For more information regarding the Food Hygiene Information Scheme please contact

Anyshire Council on XXXX XXXXXX, or alternatively visit our website at

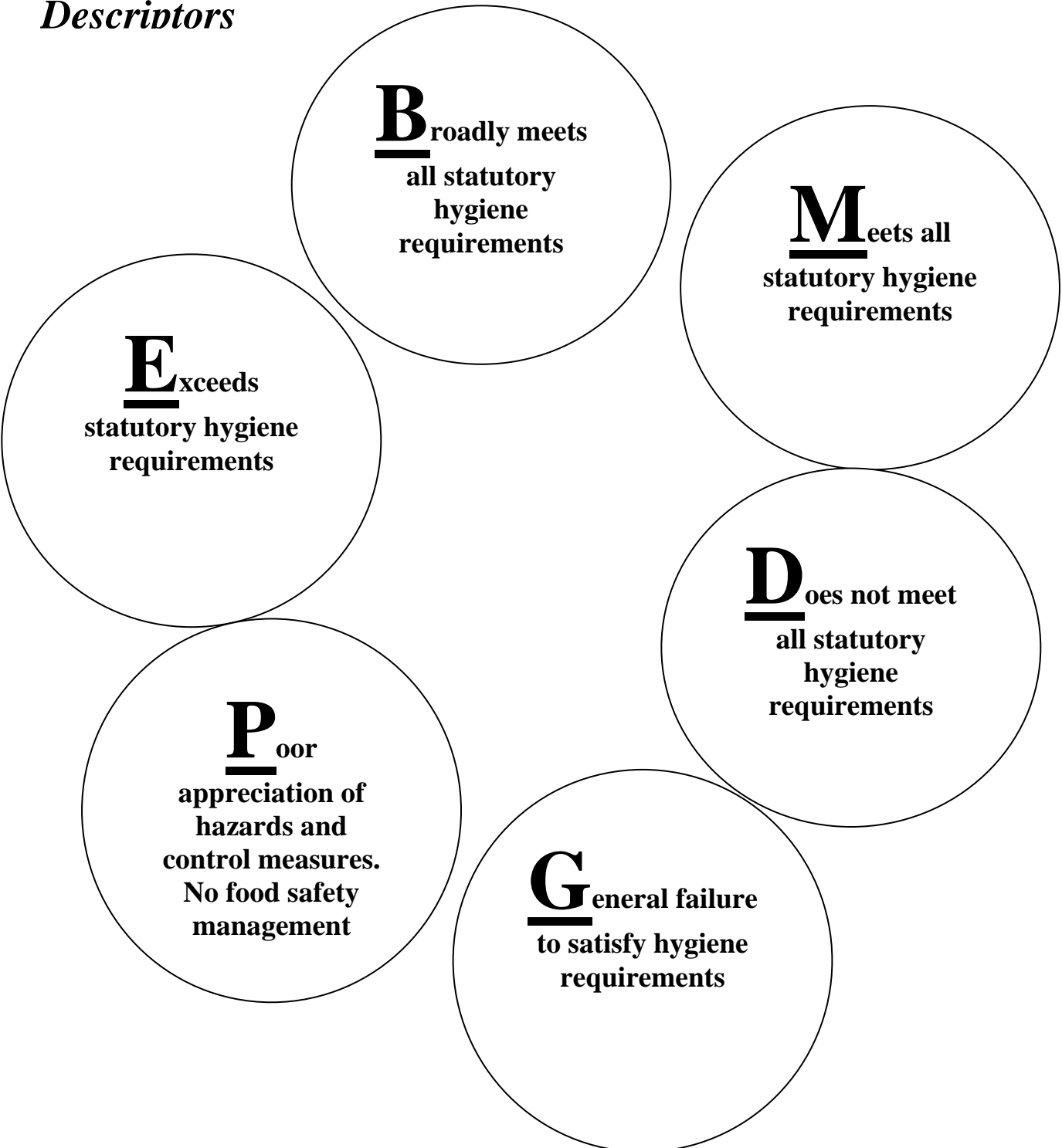
www.anyshirecouncil.gov.uk

This certificate remains the property of the issuing authority, which reserves the right to remove it at any time.

Appendix 3 The Matching Exercise

In the empty boxes, write the initial of the descriptor that you consider best fits your concept of what each of the categories of consumer information should mean. You may use the same descriptor for more than one category in each set. You do not need to use all of the descriptors

Descriptors



Consumer information categories

Set 1

Descriptor Initial

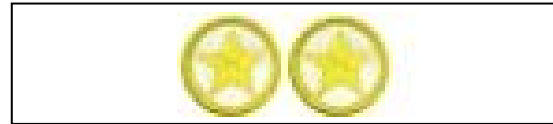
EAT *safe* Award

Pass

**Improvement
Required**

Set 2

Descriptor Initial



No Stars

Set 3

Descriptor Initial

Good

Satisfactory

Basic

Fail