

Online display of food hygiene ratings by food businesses in Wales: Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion

Participants were overall supportive of the proposal to mandate the online display of food hygiene ratings by food businesses. The ice breaker used as part of the workshop demonstrated that accessing up-to-date, online information on ratings presents challenges for consumers who are generally not aware of the information being available on the FSA's website. The proliferation of websites providing food hygiene ratings, some of which are not up to date, has the potential to confuse uninformed consumers and there is a risk that they will use out of date information from these websites to inform their decision making.

Concerns about the potential impact on businesses, particularly small businesses who may not have the skills in house to ensure online ratings information is kept up to date, were allayed when participants were advised of the potential for a technological fix which would automate this process. Participants requested exploration of a similar technological fix which could reduce the burden on LAs associated with monitoring compliance.

4.2 The way forward

Participants were excited about the opportunity for Wales to continue to improve the robustness of the Scheme and emphasised the need for small businesses particularly to be involved in discussions at an early stage.

Participants suggested that different stakeholders should be brought together during the discovery phase of the initiative to enable them to better understand each others views and perspectives.

Participants were advised that the FSA had already commissioned work with consumers to obtain their view on the proposals. They suggested that next steps should include exploration of the concept of mandating online display with aggregators and businesses and to work with IT experts to develop a technological solution which will facilitate automatic population of food business websites and social media with up-to-date ratings information from the FSA's website.

As new legislation will be required to mandate online display of ratings, participants suggested early engagement with Welsh Government lawyers to apprise them of the proposals and explore any potential legal barriers.

Participants expressed their view that the FSA could and should do more to raise consumer awareness of food hygiene ratings information currently available on the FSA website and work to make it more accessible to consumers. There was a general feeling that the Scheme has evolved over time but the technology has not and that consumer expectations of technology has increased. They now expect information to be available at their fingertips. There was strong support for the FSA to develop a food hygiene ratings app with enhanced functionality that will enable consumers to quickly and easily access up-to-date food hygiene ratings.