

THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY'S INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

Report by Steve Cowperthwaite

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SUMMARY

1. An International Strategy paper was presented to the Board at the March meeting following a review of the existing FSA international strategy. It was concluded that the next step in this work would be the development of a draft International strategy, which is now presented for the Board's consideration.
2. The Board is invited to:
 - **consider** the draft international strategy
 - **comment** on the approach and options being taken
 - **comment** on and **endorse**:
 - our proposed international vision;
 - the aims to support the FSA's international ambitions;
 - the approach for delivering these aims; and
 - the fact that the strategy will evolve in response to external changes.

INTRODUCTION

3. The paper presented at the March Board recognised that the FSA's international work to date had until recently lacked a clear framework. It brought together information about the FSA's past and existing international and EU activity to form a solid plan for action that aligns with the FSA's strategic objectives.
4. The proposed strategy that has been developed since the March Board meeting sets out the overall direction and key objectives for the FSA's international work and takes account of the comments raised during the Board's discussion of the paper in March.
5. Following approval of this strategy, detailed delivery plans will be agreed covering:
 - core workstreams and key delivery objectives;
 - strengthened governance arrangements; and
 - appropriate tools more effectively to track the benefits of our activities.
6. The strategy will need to be adjusted for EU exit dimensions once our future relationship with the EU is clear.

CONTEXT

7. In the last 18 months, FSA has significantly increased its engagement with other countries and global partners, firmly supporting wider Government commitments to be a global champion for an open economy and free trade and helping to maintain the UK's leadership position in relation to food safety and standards. In this context we see opportunities for the FSA to move faster, smarter and more effectively into the future, working closely with countries and trading partners on matters of common interest. We aim to achieve this by introducing a more strategic and coherent approach to the FSA's international engagement.
8. The FSA is already influential and respected at an international level and has been instrumental in raising international standards in food safety and ensuring standards adopted are science based. However, as a comparatively small department with limited resources we need to be confident that resources and efforts are being focussed in the right areas and that we are clear about the objectives and benefits of the FSA's priorities.
9. Equally we need to ensure that the FSA supports the delivery of wider Government's core strategic objectives. As the UK Central Competent Authority for food safety, the FSA has an important role to play in facilitating trade as the UK prepares to leave the EU. We will also need to continue working closely with other Government departments to identify synergies and take a more integrated approach across departments to assess how we can be mutually supportive on specific policy areas.

THE FSA'S INTERNATIONAL VISION

10. To grow the FSA's influence internationally, becoming a strong and influential voice on the world stage, promoting the FSA as a world leader in approaches to regulatory modernisation and a global leader in food safety. Success in this will help us to deliver our core purpose to protect public health and the consumer's wider interests in relation to food, where we are focussed on ensuring that food is safe and what it says it is, and helping consumers to have access to a healthy, affordable, sustainable diet.

Our aims

11. To maximise the FSA's impact as a department internationally, and advance our recognition and weight across Whitehall, promoting the FSA as an influential global voice and firmly supporting and delivering the Government's international objectives through:
 - *supporting UK Government commitments to be a global champion for an open economy and free trade and maintain the UK's international leadership position and trust;*

- *contributing to a more systematic approach across Whitehall regarding international engagement with priority countries and international organisations and institutions;*
 - *ensuring that the FSAs work is identified and prioritised in cross-Whitehall work as appropriate; and*
 - *helping to shape and contribute to the delivery of core UK priorities.*
12. Demonstrate to our trading partners that a robust and effective regulatory model is in place in the UK maintaining high levels of food safety and improving regulatory approaches and outcomes by:
- *helping to maintain and enhance the world-class reputation that UK businesses trading overseas currently benefit from;*
 - *working with our international partners to deliver robust, science and evidence based food standards to enhance consumer protection, and support international trade;*
 - *using opportunities to explain and build trust/confidence in the UK regulatory system both now and post EU Exit;*
 - *comparing regulatory systems in potential future trading partners and gaining a deeper understanding of barriers to trade, including developed/developing country issues;*
 - *targeted and proactive engagement with our close international partners, taking a flexible, imaginative and differentiated approach to achieve the best possible outcomes; and*
 - *promoting fair practices in international trade to support movement of goods more freely.*
13. Champion greater cooperation with international partners, organisations and institutions. Ensuring that UK knowledge is fully informed by the latest developments, UK expertise remains at the heart of international decision making and that the UK plays its part in developing systems and standards that facilitate global trade and consumer protection through:
- *better oversight, planning and strategic coordination of international engagements;*
 - *strengthened working level relationships through increased international engagement and cooperation on issues of mutual interest with priority countries and across the various international fora;*
 - *clear plans to achieve progress on key issues and common areas of interest with like-minded partners such as development of food safety systems recognition framework, horizon scanning, food fraud, surveillance, recognised audit and inspection frameworks and use of public-private partnerships;*
 - *taking an active role in global standard setting organisations, such as the Codex Alimentarius (food standards), the OIE (animal health standards);*

- *ensuring the UK plays its part bilaterally to deliver common goals and address specific challenges that we face internationally, such as antimicrobial resistance (AMR); and*
 - *working with global partnerships to support potential opportunities to improve food safety in lower and middle-income countries*
14. Build a network of contacts around the world to ensure effective food safety management, improving the management of incidents and emergencies and facilitating the flow of information and the cooperation between countries by:
- *facilitating a more active approach to information sharing and ‘soft’ intelligence on a global level;*
 - *improving feed and food safety in the global supply chain, and working towards common food safety objectives with our global partners;*
 - *developing greater resilience to respond quickly and effectively during incidents;*
 - *developing a clearer understanding of risk appetite and the different approaches to risk management and risk assessment;*
 - *improving our understanding of the global food crime threat at a strategic level as it impacts upon UK interests; and*
 - *raising awareness of food crime among global law enforcement partners and sharing good practice in counter food crime.*

HOW TO DELIVER THE AIMS

Agree a flexible and differentiated approach

15. It will be important to show a flexible and differentiated approach to engagement. Whilst there are some common areas of interest across countries, organisations and institutions, there are also differences in terms of the focus and scope of shared priorities. Our engagement with one country for example, will likely look very different to another in certain cases. We will therefore be identifying who our priority countries are – developing country specific engagement plans and liaising with other government departments to agree where we can offer support to wider work and to develop a joined-up approach.

Identify key focus areas

16. We will look to the big international organisations and institutions to assess where we can be more influential or to continue developing an enhanced UK presence.
17. We will also be reviewing our specific policy areas that the FSA leads on to assess where the key areas of common interest with countries, organisations and institutions are and agreeing how we take this work forward. The precise detail and mechanics of this would obviously need to be agreed with the relevant policy teams and this will form a critical part of the detailed implementing plan for taking all this work forwards.

Maintain and enhance credibility and trust

18. International business is most effectively conducted through personal relationships and it is vital we maintain, develop and utilise these relationships to drive forward the FSA's international work.
19. International engagement is a two-way process and can happen through a multitude of channels. As well as working with global standard setting organisations we must continue to foster relationships directly with key international partners through inbound and outward international visits and events maximising learning and relationship building opportunities.
20. At the same time, trust and reputation are critical and it is therefore important to ensure that we act quickly and effectively to implement the key messages we are promoting in the UK thereby demonstrating that the UK maintains a high level of food safety and enhancing trust amongst our key partners.

Strengthen governance arrangements

21. To underpin our ability to successfully operate internationally we will be introducing stronger governance arrangements including appropriate tools to more effectively track the benefits of our activities.
22. These governance arrangements will enable us to:
 - introduce changes regarding how international work and relationship building is done including through the creation of an engagement grid to facilitate a more co-ordinated and strategic approach;
 - maximise the benefit of the influencing opportunities and engagements through increased sharing of intelligence from international engagements, including through post-international engagement debriefings;
 - deliver new knowledge retention systems which are key to learning and relationship building from international visits and engagements;
 - introduce improved risk management and opportunity spotting on international issues;
 - monitor progress against the delivery objectives through clear and targeted KPIs; and
 - these will be set out in detail in the plan for implementing and delivering the FSAs international activities and priorities.

Improve international capability and resilience within the FSA

23. We will be assessing the skills required for the FSA to deliver its ongoing international business and considering what changes may be needed as we continue efforts to increase our international presence.

24. This work will need to align with wider professional development Standards for common international skills that have been created right across government, to ensure that the FSA is able to adapt these standards to make them relevant to the specific international work we do.

Create opportunities to widen the FSA's international influence through strategic communications.

25. We will continue to work closely with the Strategic Comms team to create opportunities to widen the FSA's international influence. The FSA is well established on social media and we will continue to use this to listen to, engage with and influence the international audience, and identify influencers.
26. This activity will provide key stakeholder insight that can be applied to the international strategy. In addition, communication strategies and planning will continue to consider the international audience to ensure our communications are effective and efficient.

CONCLUSION

27. This strategy will ensure the FSA is focussed on the right priorities, relationships and routes to achieve our objectives. Delivery plans will ensure sufficient flexibility to adjust to changing circumstances and unexpected opportunities or risks. Becoming more focused and strategic in our international engagement, will allow the FSA to concentrate our efforts in areas that make the greatest difference, both bilaterally and multilaterally, and to clearly monitor the benefits of our activity.
28. The Board is therefore invited to **comment** on the proposed international strategy, to deliver and support the FSA's international aims and ambitions.