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# Understanding Barriers to Accreditation in the Food & Drink Sector in Wales

## DECK ONE: Executive Summary

A report by the Food Industry Centre at Cardiff Metropolitan University for the Welsh Government Food Division as part of Lot 9: Programmes to Support the Food & Drink Sector.

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## Background

### The need for FSSs

Food Safety Schemes (FSSs) are essential to the food and drink industry, they provide the framework for compliance within the industry to assist in the production of safe and legal food, growth and entry to the market place.

FSSs are evaluated by a systematic examination of a food business known as an audit to measure the compliance of practices with a predetermined system, and whether the system is implemented effectively and is suitable to achieve objectives

### Action Plan for the Food and Drink Industry 2014-2020

The Welsh Government Action Plan for the Food and Drink Industry 2014-2020 demonstrates a clear commitment by the Welsh Government to promote and support the improvement of recognised FSSs of food and feed businesses in Wales.

Approximately only thirty per cent of Food & Drink Manufacturing and Processing Businesses (FDMPB) in Wales comply with FSS standards such as BRC or SALSA. Consequently, there is a need to obtain an in-depth understanding of the barriers that exist to FDMPBs (micro and small) implementing, obtaining and maintaining such FSSs.

Determination of such data may inform the development of support mechanisms to enable increased accreditation and accelerate food sector growth in line with Welsh Government aspirations.

### Research approach

A triangulation of research methods was utilised, including:

- A desk-based review was conducted to obtain an understanding of available FSSs and evaluate how robust, respected, credible and practical schemes are,
- A series of focus groups with stakeholders, FSS auditors/mentors,

Welsh FDMPBs and in-depth interviews with retail representatives were completed to identify and understand what the barriers are to achieving accreditation to FSSs,

- A self-complete online questionnaire with FDMPBs and stakeholders was conducted to determine how to equip FDMPBs to obtain compliance to FSSs; and
- Cumulative research findings enable recommendations to be made to support FDMPBs in Wales to achieve FSS compliance which will lead to growth in line with Action Plan targets.

## Findings

### Evaluation of available FSSs

The desk based review identified 30 FSSs currently available and implemented by FDMPBs in Wales, the majority (93%) were targeted to the FDMPB. It was identified that there is a lack of accessible information to the FSSs for FDMPBs, particularly regarding cost.

### Drivers for FSS compliance

From the focus groups, the two key factors identified as drivers for obtaining compliance to FSSs were:

- customer requirements, and
- product safety.

***“If you haven’t got it, you can’t trade.” (FDMPB).***

***“Customer requirement is the main thing. If they didn’t insist on it, would we do it all?” (FDMPB).***

***“The key legal one, is that this will generate an efficient due diligence defence scheme should they ever need to call up on it.” (FSS mentor).***

### Benefits of FSS compliance

Five factors were identified as benefits for FDMPBs for obtaining and maintaining compliance related to:

- culture and community;
- business growth;
- due diligence;
- brand protection, and
- global supply chain security.

**“You’re maintaining those high level standards, so people keep their jobs, the factory doesn’t shut” (FDMPB).**

**“...food safety system will improve the profitability of the business.” (FSS Mentor).**

**“Obtaining certification against a food safety scheme does show that suppliers have met the basic requirements of a scheme, ..., rather than having to do audits that focus on what our brand would consider to be the ‘basic requirements to meet food safety’.” (Retail representative).**

**Barriers to FSS compliance**

Participants identified that there is a difference between the barriers faced to achieve compliance and the barriers faced to maintain compliance to FSSs. However, all barriers related to:

- knowledge and skills;
- time, cost and resources; and
- communication and access to information.

**“The food industry on the whole has got a shortage of qualified technical staff, there is a general shortage.” (FSS auditor).**

**“Cost is obviously the biggest barrier. To achieve certain accreditations. Sometimes their business size will not allow them to comply.” (Retail representative).**

**“So maybe one of the barriers is knowing which standard is appropriate for your business.” (FDMPB).**



**Support mechanisms for FDMPBs in Wales to comply with FSSs**

The support mechanisms perceived to be most beneficial and necessary to implement and maintain FSSs were funding for advice and training (68%), support for the implementation of FSS

documentation (64%), on-site support (50%) and pre-audits (46%) (Figure 1).

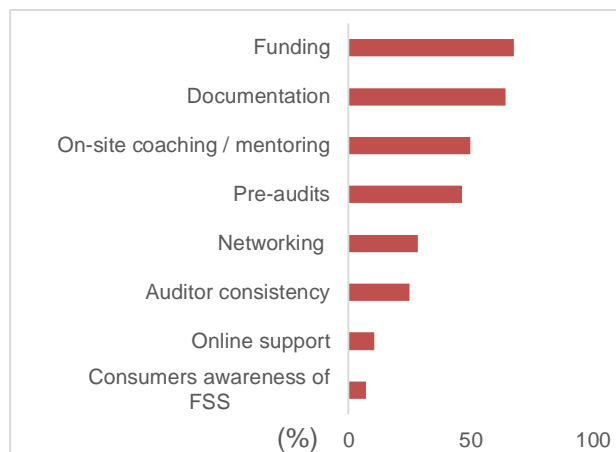


Figure 1 Support mechanisms believed to be most beneficial (n=28)

**Recommendations for support mechanisms**

Research findings were analysed by the research team to enable suggestions for support mechanisms.

Recommendations are based on the views, perceptions and opinions of respondents and are supported by the professional judgment and industry experience of the research team

Recommendations relate to:

1. Knowledge and skills development
  - a. Education
  - b. Training
  - c. Documentation support
  - d. Mentoring
  - e. Knowledge transfer
  - f. Networking
  - g. Pre-audits
2. Improving information & communication
  - a. Online-information knowledge hub
  - b. Scheme owner communication
  - c. Consumer awareness of FSS
3. Accessing financial support



## Knowledge & Skills Development

***These recommendations aim to increase the pool of educated individuals within the sector. This will be underpinned by the development of a technical network to enable the dissemination of subject-specific information and facilitate peer-group learning and development.***

**Recommendation 1:** Explore the possibility of financial support (such as bursaries, scholarships and fee waivers) for students to complete food-related higher or further education qualifications to increase the number of qualified Food Science Technologists with specific FSS knowledge of FSSs through increased numbers attending HE and FE courses.

**Recommendation 2:** Provision of post-graduate knowledge transfer programmes (for example KITE) which particularly focus on FSS to enable graduate transition and continual learning from education into industry.

**Recommendation 3:** Consider the design and development of bespoke on-site subject-specific (FSS) staff training, and explore the possibility of 'local, flexible and shared training' between multiple local FDMPBs. Creation of a food induction training programme for new-employees from non-food backgrounds to obtain specific FSS knowledge and technical skills required for employment in the food industry.

**Recommendation 4:** Specific activity-targeted training for development, implementation and maintenance of FSMS documentation.

**Recommendation 5:** Consider the development of auditee training to ensure FDMPBs are 'audit-ready' to optimise the potential for a positive audit experience.

**Recommendation 6:** Encourage Food Innovation Wales to develop a regional Pan-Wales Technical Compliance Group (TCG) consisting of stakeholders, retailers, Scheme Owners and FDMPBs. This would provide a networking support structure to enable Welsh FDMPBs to communicate, to

access and receive information regarding FSSs.

**Recommendation 7:** Expand on the networking opportunities provided by the TCG by creating a product category specific "FDMPB peer group" mentoring system.

**Recommendation 8:** To ensure on-site mentoring remains accessible and affordable. Consideration must be given to ensuring on-site mentoring is provided by qualified and experienced mentors who can draw upon their practical experience within the industry.

## Improving Information & Communication

***The information and communication recommendations relate to the communication between scheme owners and FDMPBs and also consider potential communication to increase consumer awareness of FSSs.***

**Recommendation 9:** There is a need for research to investigate current on-line training and education mechanisms and evaluate the accessibility, acceptability, accuracy and the potential impact of such mechanisms on FDMPBs.

**Recommendation 10:** Further research with scheme owners regarding auditor consistency is required. There is a need to communicate the minimum competency requirements set by scheme owners for inspectors/auditors in the public domain.

**Recommendation 11:** Consider conducting consumer and scheme owner research into the benefits of increasing consumer awareness of FSSs. Explore the costs of making FSSs consumer facing, and the potential impact on consumer, perceptions, behaviour and willingness to pay for food products with advertised FSSs.

**Recommendation 12:** There is a need for the FSA to separate data for FDMPB sites from catering and hospitality outlets to improve transparency of information.

**Recommendation 13:** Investigate the potential overlap between the requirements of the FHRS and other 3<sup>rd</sup> party FSSs to determine the requirement for multiple-site inspections. This may reduce the burden of

multiple-inspections on FDMPBs and have a positive impact on EHO time allocation/workload.

**Recommendations 14:** Consider the potential consolidation of FSSs and the number of audits to prevent duplication of activities, reduce costs and burden on the FDMPBs.

**Recommendation 15:** More consideration for the size of the business and the number of staff members involved in the implementation of the FSMS could be considered by the scheme owner or service provider.

**Recommendation 16:** A minimum set of FSS criteria should be agreed by the food and drink industry, and all scheme owners should make the information available to its stakeholders.

**Recommendation 17:** There is a need for greater communication to FDMPBs regarding FSS availability and the potential benefits from scheme holders.

**Recommendation 18:** Encourage FIW to develop an information portal which would act as a knowledge hub for Welsh FDMPBs. Experts within FIW would be responsible for maintaining the document library and disseminating the relevant white papers to food and drink businesses. Access to authoritative reports and guidelines may enable FDMPBs to make informed decisions based on facts and best practice.

### Accessing financial support

**Although financial support is required for the recommended mechanisms to be implemented, financial support is also suggested for resource procurement.**

**Recommendation 19:** Financial support for FDMPBs for capital expenditure (e.g. building and equipment) to be documented during the relevant application processes.

**Recommendation 20:** There is a need for greater signposting of information for FDMPBs to access financial support that is currently available to enable training costs to be covered.

## Research recommendations

**Completion of the project has also identified additional areas to expand upon the research.**

**Recommendation 21:** There is a need to continue to capture current data to compare the number of FDMPBs with FSSs as a percentage of all regional FDMPBs to obtain a realistic insight to the true number FDMPBs in Wales with FSSs

**Recommendation 22:** Expand on the research conducted to compare FSS content to determine key differences in scheme requirements. By its nature, this research will identify duplication in FSS content and more importantly would identify unique scheme requirements which may enable businesses to access new market opportunities and achieve growth.

**Recommendation 23:** To further build on the findings identified within the desk-based review of FSSs, it is recommended the research methodology is extended to communicate with all scheme owners to capture scheme information not available within the public domain.

**Recommendation 24:** Undertake an annual survey of FSS compliance activity within the Welsh Food and Drink sector to determine the impact of the implemented support mechanisms identified in this research.

**Recommendation 25:** Discussions should take place with FSS scheme managers and the food chain businesses to determine the feasibility of applying earned recognition basis to inspections/ audits.

## Conclusion

The recommendations within this report should serve to inform the development of policy and interventions in line with the Welsh Government Action Plan to encourage and support FDMPBs in Wales to investigate and progress towards achieving accreditation standards.

Ultimately, the recommendations within this report will support the delivery of a resilient and robust food industry in Wales which is

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