

Food
hygiene ✨
information
scheme

**Guidance on the operation of the
*Food Hygiene Information Scheme***

February 2010

The Food Hygiene Information Scheme (FHIS) is intended to be simple for consumers and businesses to understand and for Local Authorities to apply.

What is the Food Hygiene Information Scheme?

The Food Hygiene Information Scheme is designed to provide consumers with information about hygiene standards at food premises and is being rolled out across Scotland. Each business is given a rating to reflect the standards found at the time of its statutory food hygiene inspection. This type of scheme is intended to allow consumers to clearly differentiate between businesses that meet legal requirements¹ and those that have failed to meet these requirements.

The Food Hygiene Information Scheme is voluntary for local authorities to operate and for businesses to display their 'Inspection Outcome' on the door of their establishment; however the web display is not voluntary.

How long has the Food Hygiene Information Scheme been running?

The demand for such a scheme was first recognised in Scotland by Consumer Focus Scotland² in its paper 'Food Law Enforcement – A Study of the Views of Environmental Health and Food Safety Officers in Scotland' (February 2004) as an important mechanism for informing consumer choice.

The Food Hygiene Information Scheme (FHIS) was established in 2006 as a pilot *Scores on the Doors*³ project in Scotland in partnership with five volunteer Local Authorities. The project was overseen by a Steering Group that incorporated consumer, industry and enforcement representation. The pilot ran from November 2006 to November 2008.

In December 2008 the Food Standards Agency Board recommended continuation of the Food Hygiene Information Scheme as the appropriate format for a scheme for Scotland. This recommendation acknowledged the prevailing views of stakeholders in Scotland received during the public consultation process.

Who inspects food premises?

Local authorities are responsible for enforcing food hygiene laws. To do this, enforcement officers from Environmental Health inspect food premises to ensure they are meeting legal requirements. Essentially, inspection frequency is determined by the nature, compliance performance and risk that the business poses to public health. There are two outcomes of food hygiene inspections under the Food Hygiene Information scheme, 'Pass' or 'Improvement Required' (failure to achieve a Pass).

¹ These requirements are established at European Community level and are given effect in the UK by the Food Hygiene (Scotland) Regulations 2006 and separate but parallel legislation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

² Formerly the Scottish Consumer Council

³ Scores on the Doors is the common name given to schemes whereby each food outlet is given a hygiene rating or hygiene score that reflects the inspection findings and may display this in their premises where consumers can see it. Scores are also available via websites where consumers can see the scores for all the businesses in the local area

It should be noted that the certificate awarded to the food business equates solely to the standards found at time of the assessment but offers the best available information from local authorities.

A 'Pass' certificate should provide reassurance that the establishment meets legal requirements at the time of inspection and looks like this.



Any establishment falling below the required standard for a 'Pass' at the time of inspection is classified as 'Improvement Required' and the certificate looks like this.



It is recognised that an 'Improvement Required' certificate is unlikely to be displayed by the food business.

Establishments that have registered under hygiene legislation but have not yet been inspected by their local authority enforcement officer are entitled to an 'Awaiting

Inspection' certificate. Once inspected the establishment will be awarded either a 'Pass' or 'Improvement Required' certificate. An 'Awaiting Inspection' certificate looks like this.



What is the scope of the Food Hygiene Information Scheme?

The Food Hygiene Information Scheme is designed to provide hygiene information in all circumstances where consumers make a choice about the food they purchase or consume. Operations that could be considered to be outside the scope of the scheme are therefore restricted to wholesale and other inter-business supply.

However, there are some operations that are registered as food businesses but which would not normally be considered by consumers to be food businesses. Visitor centres selling tins of biscuits amongst a range of other goods may be an example. In these circumstances the establishment may be exempt if both the food business operator and the Local Authority agree that the operation should be exempt

What has been put in place to ensure fairness to business?

The Food Hygiene Information Scheme provides safeguards aimed at being fair to all businesses. These can be summarised as follows:

- a) The immediate remedy for all issues that result in an assessment of 'Improvement Required' is in the hands of the business operating a food establishment and remedial action will not exceed the requirements of food hygiene legislation.
- b) The Local Authority will revisit to reassess compliance within seven days of being notified by the business that all matters have been rectified.
- c) All relevant businesses within an area where the Food Hygiene Information Scheme operates are entitled to a certificate.
- d) The right of appeal and review of decisions is a crucial safeguard but will be accommodated within the existing Local Authority framework.

What is the remedy, if a business gets an 'Improvement Required certificate?

Since the 'Pass' standard is based on compliance at the time of assessment, the remedy for businesses assessed as 'Improvement Required' should always be in the hands of the food business operator. The local authority inspection report will give details of the short falls in reaching standards of legal compliance.

What is the status of this guidance document?

This guidance has been based on the best information available at the time of drafting. Revision or updated information will be issued as and when necessary.



How does the Eat safe Award fit in with the Food Hygiene Information Scheme?

The Food Hygiene Information Scheme is entirely compatible with the Eat Safe Award scheme. The two schemes although separate, have operated concurrently without difficulty during the two-year Food Hygiene Information Scheme pilot.

The Food Hygiene Information Scheme is designed to rate hygiene standards against the legal requirements and is distinct from the Eat Safe Award scheme, which is designed to recognise businesses that have achieved standards **over and above** the legal requirements.

The Eat Safe Award provides businesses operators who wish to demonstrate a standard of excellence **over and above** legal requirements with the ideal opportunity to do so.

However, in keeping with the right of all businesses to a certificate in terms of the Food Hygiene Information Scheme, the Eat Safe Award does not prevent a business displaying both 'Pass' and an Eat Safe Award certificate should they wish or alternatively only an Eat Safe Award Certificate.

An Eat Safe award certificate looks like this.

