

Annual Communications Update

FSA 22-12-14 - This paper provides the annual update on communications and engagement to the Business Committee. It covers the communication priorities for the forthcoming year and an update on communications and engagement activity in the past twelve months.

1 Summary

1.1 This paper provides the annual update on communications and engagement to the Business Committee. It covers:

- the communication priorities for the forthcoming year; and
- an update on communications and engagement activity in the past twelve months.

1.2 The Business Committee is asked to review the activities of the Communications Division and comment on its priorities for the year ahead.

2 Introduction

2.1 The Food Standards Agency (FSA) Communications Division is a team of 35 staff in the Strategy and Regulatory Compliance Directorate with an annual programme budget of £590,000. In addition, FSA in Wales and FSA in Northern Ireland (NI) have small communications teams funded by the Welsh Government and Department of Finance NI.

2.2 All three countries work closely together to ensure common purpose and expertise and all communications staff are members of the Government Communication Service (GCS) and uphold its standards of professional practice.

2.3 The communications team provides a 24/7 service throughout the year. On average it receives more than 100 enquiries and contacts a day, and in the past 12 months has supported the communications and engagement work in publishing 60 science reports, 19 formal public consultations and published 71 proactive news releases. In addition, the team handles out of hours media enquiries and publishes recalls and alerts with more than 300 being issued on average each year.

2.4 Communications staff also work closely with colleagues in Food Standards Scotland (FSS), sharing insight and expertise in line with the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two organisations, and collaborating on UK-wide activity around incidents and consumer advice.

3 Context

3.1 The approach to communications, priorities and overarching messaging reflects the FSA's current operating context, in particular:

- government focus on economic growth, in particular on reducing perceived burdens on businesses, for example the Retained EU Law (REUL) bill.

- growing economic and cost-of-living pressures, which are impacting on household food insecurity and in turn, may lead to new food safety risks, and bring further pressures on businesses. For example, the recent FSA recent consumer tracking survey found that 18% of people were turning off their fridges or freezers at least once a month because of money worries.
- an increasingly volatile food system vulnerable to global issues including conflict, climate change, energy supply, labour shortages and disease (human and animal)
- the possibility of further industrial action driven by cost-of-living pressures, and public spending pressures, impacting on food supply and distribution.

4 Communication Priorities for the Year Ahead

4.1 Building profile to maintain and enhance reputation – by building stronger, ongoing relationships with key audiences to demonstrate the value the FSA brings. Part of this will involve a digital and social media listening function established by the team to track what influential stakeholders are saying and doing with respect to food. This enables the FSA to be part of topical conversations and be well informed about attitudes and opinions.

4.2 Parliamentary briefings – continued regular briefings to parliamentarians – in all three countries – to build familiarity with and advocacy for our work. Over the last 12 months this has included parliamentary presence at launch events for the FSA Strategy and the Annual Report on Food Standards. In addition, the team has issued targeted briefings on CBD, the Precision Breeding Bill, the Register a Food Business campaign and on meat hygiene delivery to MPs and Peers. Plans are being developed to enhance and expand parliamentary engagement.

4.3 Protecting consumers – continuing to ensure people have the advice and information they need on food safety and authenticity, in particular through supporting the FSA's response to food incidents with the following planned activity:

- further developing the Always On function (see paragraph 5.4 below), which enables direct, real time engagement with topical discussions where the FSA has advice to offer, through online and on social media via our own, partner, local authority and influencer channels.
- continuing to increase the number of subscribers to the alerts and recalls services.

4.4 Supporting businesses – making it easy for businesses to do the right thing, by breaking down barriers to engagement and making guidance for businesses more accessible, particularly by working with others across the FSA to overhaul flagship products such as Safer Food Better Business (SFBB). Planned activity includes:

- using lessons learnt from previous campaigns such as Here to Help, Register a Food Business and business communication on allergens to develop Here to Help 2.0. This will promote the FSA's business resources and the support the Agency can give to businesses, with the aim of making it easier for businesses to ensure consumer safety.
- the Safer Food Better Business (SFBB) modernisation project is due to kick off in early 2023. SFBB is by some distance the most engaged with content in the business facing sections of the food.gov website. The project will look to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the food safety management information and advice. The aim will be to improve user experience and ensure SFBB meets the needs of food businesses in an ever-changing landscape.

4.5 Our people – increasing our people's alignment to the FSA Strategy (the line of sight and connection from their work to overarching organisation objectives) with targeted interventions and recognition of successes. The team will continue to ensure the FSA vision and mission is clearly understood and advocated by all colleagues, to promote the visibility of senior leaders and provide the opportunities for staff voices to be heard. Planned activity includes:

- themed months based around the FSA guiding principles with case studies, content, teach-ins and workshops;
- the second annual FSA staff awards with revised categories aligned to strategy and priorities;
- in person events including the FSA awards ceremony, tailored resources for managers and dedicated events; and
- enhanced engagement with operational staff which has been developed using insight from a comprehensive survey of front-line colleagues.

4.6 Across all these areas, the team will provide targeted, evidence-based communications advice and support for the FSA's key priorities for the next 12 months, including its wider regulatory reform programmes, and work to support overall government priorities such as REUL and the Borders Target Operating Model (BTOM).

5 Reflecting On the Last 12 Months

5.1 At the Board discussion in December 2021 the communications team set out proposals to improve the impact of its work in the 12 months ahead. Below are detailed the priority areas from the past year and the highlights and learnings from the activity the communications team committed to undertaking in December 2021.

5.2 Improved media profile – the team have pursued more media opportunities, increasing proactive coverage by 17 percentage points (from 10% to 27%). We have reached 75% of the UK population by framing the FSA's work in a way that resonates with public and stakeholder concerns. For example, the team used the issue around the absence of post-Brexit import controls to position the FSA/FSS Annual Report on Food Standards with the media and external audiences. This generated almost 30 pieces of national coverage in prominent outlets with Bloomberg, FT, Guardian and Mail online all running FSA content including a quote from the FSA Chair.

5.3 Improved online and social media engagement – the FSA's social media following is up across the board, with notable increases on LinkedIn (up 12% year-on-year) and Instagram (up 30%). The engagement rates across all social media platforms are higher than industry standard average, with Twitter engagement times higher than standard at 3.05% average. On Facebook the FSA number of interactions per 1,000 fans is higher than Defra, the Environment Agency, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority (MHRA) and the US Food and Drug Administration.

5.4 Implementing new campaign models – the team has established a dedicated digital campaign function - known as Always On - that, instead of relying on traditional costed campaign models, can respond in real time to opportunities such as promoting key hygiene advice to consumers, or flagship brands such as FHRS. The most recent 'Always On' Student Food Safety Campaign aimed to improve knowledge of food safety and hygiene within the student community. For this campaign, we used our social media channels, an external toolkit provided to university contacts and two collaborations with influencers. This resulted in the establishment of a strong relationship with the University of Leeds where they created an interactive quiz which was completed by 6.6K people nationwide on Instagram. Across the campaign, total reach was in excess of 60K and resulted in a significant jump in traffic to the Student Guide page on food.gov.

5.5 All FSA campaigns are produced in English and Welsh and the regulatory body for the Welsh language, the Welsh Language Commissioner, recently identified the FSA's bilingual communication campaigns as an area of best practice in terms of innovation and collaboration and in ensuring campaigns that work as effectively in both languages. The FSA's campaigns have been included as an area of effective practice on the [Commissioner's website](#).

5.6 Growing stakeholder engagement profile – key events such as the Annual Report on Food Standards and FSA Strategy launches have helped to grow the FSA profile with key stakeholders. Events across all three countries were well attended and received and provided an opportunity to demonstrate the value of the FSA’s work. For example, joining FSA speakers at the FSA strategy launch in Northern Ireland was DAERA Minister Edwin Poots and Deputy Chief Medical Officer from NI Department of Health. Regular engagement with NGOs, and targeted engagement events (for example, a forum on alternative proteins) have also helped build the FSA’s reputation and manage communications risks more effectively. Subscriptions to the stakeholder newsletter have grown from 845 in Sept 2021 to 3,539, and this channel is now firmly established as an effective way of reaching the stakeholder audience on topical issues, with each edition getting good click through rates and further contact from stakeholders. Comms has also supported the Chair and Chief Executive’s speaking engagements throughout the year, using these opportunities to communicate key messages to influential audiences, and grow profile.

5.7 High levels of staff engagement – through the successful staff awards programme and our promotion of the FSA strategy and its guiding principles, staff engagement levels have increased to an organisational high of 71% (as measured in Mar/Apr Internal Quarterly Survey)

5.8 Supporting the FSA response to major incidents – ensuring that people have the information and advice they need to make informed decisions during food incidents. In April, May and June we issued consumer focussed news stories on the substitution of sunflower oil, the Kinder egg recall and a warning over counterfeit chocolate bars resulting in widespread national media coverage reaching 85% of UK adults with the messaging. The team provides a 24/7 service which handles both out of hours media enquiries and publishes recalls and alerts with more than 300 being issued each year.

5.9 FSA awards - We received 204 nominations for the internal staff awards (a response rate of 14.5%) significantly outperforming benchmarked organisations such as DWP (0.3% response rate), Environment Agency (2.3% response rate) and Defra (0.5 response rate). 47 staff volunteers from across the organisation led the scoring and decision making around the winner and runners up. Our award ceremony was attended by over 100 members of staff.

6 Conclusions

6.1 The Board is asked to:

- review the activities of the communications division; and
- comment on its priorities for the forthcoming year.

Annex A – Case Studies

Case Study One: Register A Food Business

Aims:

The campaign aimed to motivate more food businesses to register with their local authority, particularly those trading from home and online.

When:

24 February 2022 - 20 March 2022

Spend:

£107,000 (England, Wales & NI combined funding)

What we did:

The Covid-19 period saw a huge increase in food being sold from people's homes with the internet making it easier for this type of market. According to our digital registration service 37% of new ventures registered since the start of the pandemic (March 2020) were run from domestic kitchens at private addresses. The objective was to encourage as many of these new start-ups to register with their local authority.

Our suite of assets were used across a variety of channels to reach and engage with those who may be operating unregistered businesses, with a particular focus on those trading from home or online. This included podcasts, Facebook and Instagram Marketplace and online advertising via Google search.



Partnership work:

Along with the targeted channel promotion, we worked with a range of partners who supported the campaign in various ways, these included the Federation of Small Businesses, the Nationwide Caterers Association (NCASS), and the Women's Institute across all three countries. Integral to the success of this campaign was the support of local authorities. We developed a communications toolkit for the use of all of our partners which included a template press release, suggested social media posts and access to the campaign assets.

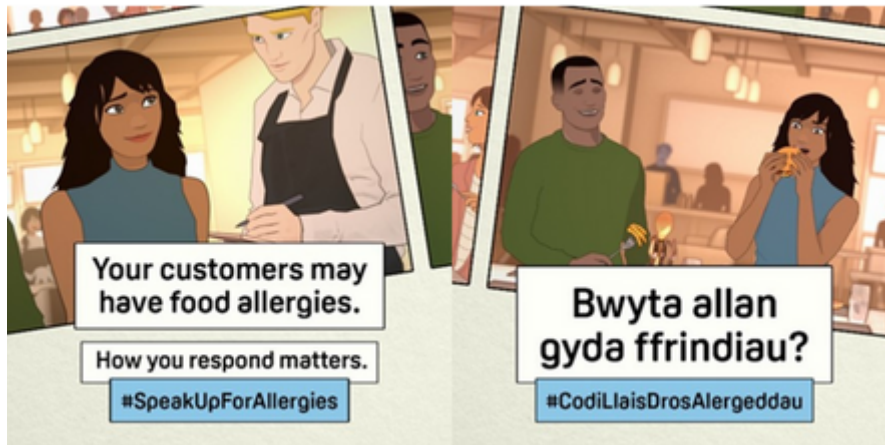
Results:

We reached over 1.4 million potential businesses across social media, Google search and advertising. Our food business registration landing page received over 24,000 visitors during the campaign. Across our social channels we achieved 22,658 clicks and reached 853,631 through paid social posts. The results in reach and clicks through to the website, demonstrate that we achieved the campaign objective of raising awareness of registration and educating the RAFB target audience groups (through clicks for more information).

Campaign materials and toolkits were shared with 42,650 owners/managers of FBOs, with the Federation of Small Businesses directing over 7,000 visitors to our webpages. This demonstrates that decision makers and business operators were engaging with the content however, as registration is not viewed to be time sensitive it is difficult to correlate registrations with campaign engagement.

We saw an increase in businesses registering who have been trading for >90days in March 2022 than all previous months (back to March 2020). There was also an increase in restaurant registrations.

Case Study Two: Speak up for Allergies Part 2



Aims:

To support and encourage 18- to 21-year-olds to speak up about their food allergies when eating out in restaurants and to normalise the conversation amongst peers by encouraging them to support a friend when ordering. For food businesses to highlight the importance of their role in responding to people with food allergies.

When:

9 March 2022 to 30 March 2022

Spend:

Business campaign: £90,000 (England, Wales and NI)

Young People's campaign £90,000 (England Wales and NI)

What we did:

We delivered two campaigns, one targeting food businesses and one young people. Insight shows that young people with food allergies are less likely to speak up about their food allergy in a busy restaurant, or if front-of-house staff are unhelpful. The insight also demonstrated that friends play an important role in encouraging a young person to speak up about their allergies and tell the restaurant when dining out and so this was a pivotal focus of the campaign.

Food business campaign:

The food business campaign highlighted the important role that FBOs have in protecting people with food allergies. It focused on how the response from a food business really matters. We launched the food business campaign first and supported food businesses to do the right thing by directing them to our online resources, including online allergen management training. We developed a [Speak Up For Allergies video](#) which was promoted to businesses using YouTube and Facebook.

Young persons campaign:

The second campaign targeted young people themselves using a digital first approach. We used a [video](#) specifically targeting young people to show the impact a supportive friend can have for someone with allergies when ordering food. This video was promoted across YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook with a link to our Speak Up for Allergies [campaign page](#). All resources were bilingual and paid content in Wales was promoted equally in both English and

Welsh language.

We worked with two social media influencers to deliver the content on TikTok and Instagram in a way that would engage our target audience.

Results:

The total reach of the paid spend for the young people's element of the campaign was over one million, the most efficient channel being Snapchat. The influencer content reached over 83,000 people. The [Speak Up For Allergies webpage](#) which included advice to young people received 14,862 visits during the campaign period which represented an increase of 12,389% when compared to the previous 3-week period. This huge increase was a direct result of the campaign and paid activity which directed people to the webpage.

We provided businesses with over 1.5 million opportunities to see this campaign and generated 23,470 visitors to the [Allergen checklist page](#). This was a 3106% increase compared to the previous 3-week period. We worked with over 120 partner organisations to deliver messages to over 200,000 businesses and saw a 700% increase in downloads of resources.