

Value of FHRs Business Research: Chapter 4

How do businesses view the mandatory display of FHRs rating?

Businesses were asked to consider their views on mandatory display of FHRs ratings. In Wales and Northern Ireland, it is mandatory for businesses to display their rating in the establishment. In England, the display of FHRs ratings is voluntary, although businesses are encouraged to display them. The FSA publishes the ratings for all businesses in scope across the three countries on the FHRs website.

Overall, businesses across all three nations generally supported the mandatory display of FHRs ratings. This support was common across businesses of different sizes and types, and regardless of their current FHRs rating. However, a few businesses were concerned about either introducing, or continuing with, mandatory display.

“To me, what's the point of doing it [FHRs inspections] if that business doesn't take it seriously? If you don't have to display it, they haven't taken it seriously and they're hiding behind a failure.”

(England, small business (10-24 employees), 5 FHRs rating)

In England, businesses generally supported mandatory display of FHRs ratings. Most businesses in England said they already display their rating, and it would not be an issue for them if doing so became mandatory. As with other nations, businesses in England argued that if they were under no obligation to display the rating this undermined the value of the scheme to consumers overall. Many businesses felt that mandatory display would be beneficial for businesses by encouraging compliance. They also thought there was value for consumers, as it would allow them to make informed decisions about where they wanted to visit based on knowing that all businesses had to display their rating on the premises.

“It's a positive thing. I think it's a very positive thing. A lot of businesses, they'd love to put their 5 stars up there, wouldn't they?”

(England, small business (10-24 employees), 4 FHRs rating)

“The benefit would be mainly for the customers, because now they have a better chance to take a better option, for example some people may not want to go to an establishment below 3, or below 4, and when it's clearly displayed, they can make an informed decision.”

(England, small business (10-24 employees), 3 FHRs rating)

Indeed, some businesses in England did not know that the scheme was voluntary and had always assumed they had to display their ratings. They thought displaying a rating was the outcome of the FHRs process. A few suggested that inspectors had told them that the ratings stickers had to be displayed.

“I thought it was compulsory. If I'm really honest I was just presuming that it was part and parcel [of] a food business.”

(England, small business (<10 employees), 5 FHRS rating)

“You have it displayed because you have to have it displayed. That's the law. But I don't have an issue with it.”

(England, small business (10-24 employees), 4 FHRS rating)

The main concern about mandatory display of FHRS ratings among businesses in England was that it was unfair if businesses were inspected on a ‘bad day’, and then had to display this rating for a long time. In particular, some businesses had concerns about the potential for a disproportionate impact on small businesses. For example, if an inspection coincided with a period when staff were off through illness, the assessment may not reflect the business’ usual standards.

“If on the day you found that you had something broken and it caused you to have a worse rating, or if it's something that will be fixed, or you have a specific staff member that needed either more training or that you had a problem with and they let the side down, then I would say it's quite harsh to be stuck with displaying it because you can lose a lot of customers.”

(England, small business (25-49 employees), 5 FHRS rating)

In England support for mandatory display was consistent across different FHRS ratings, including those with current FHRS ratings of 1 or 2. While these businesses with lower scores acknowledged that mandatory display might not suit their current circumstances, they felt the scheme needed ratings to be displayed to be effective.

“I don't mind. I mean, it's a sense of pride as well. I mean, it's a bit of showing off of the way that you work and the fact that you have everything as it should be. It would be a bit difficult, of course, if the rating is low.” (England – small business (<10 employees), 1 FHRS rating)

One business in England said they had displayed their rating when they received a rating of 5, but when they dropped to a rating of 3 they removed the sticker. They did this because they had the choice to do so. Even so, they felt that the displaying of ratings should be mandatory to ensure that the scheme achieved its overall aims of ensuring compliance and giving consumers consistent information.

“If we got a 5, we would have displayed it. Because we only got a 3, we didn't display it.”

(England, small business (10-24 employees), 3 FHRS rating)

In Wales and Northern Ireland, there was support for continuing with mandatory display. Businesses felt that FHRS ratings were a source of pride for those who achieved high scores, and helped encourage a sense of responsibility to consumers, giving confidence they were eating in ‘safe’ premises. They also argued that mandatory display incentivised businesses to improve if they received a lower rating.

“Mandatory is fine, if you've got nothing to hide it's no problem, is it? And if somebody has been rated as a 0 or a 1, yes, they need to pull their socks up and get it sorted.”

(Wales, small business (<10 employees), 5 FHRS rating)

“I think it should. Say if it's bad, I definitely think it should. If you're not going to display it, what's the reason why you're not displaying it? Are you not displaying it because it's bad? So, then they're hiding that. So, what else are you hiding? If you're not doing things right, you've got a risk there.”

(Northern Ireland, small business (10-24 employees), 5 FHRS rating)

However, a few small businesses in Wales did not support mandatory display. One operating near the English border said that they did not think it was fair that they had to display their ratings, while nearby businesses in England were not under the same obligation. Another business could see the argument for incentivising better safety and hygiene practices through mandatory display, but cited examples of businesses that had received poor ratings because of issues around paperwork or because they had been caught on a 'bad day'. They felt it was unfair that these businesses had to display their poor rating.

“It shouldn't be a requirement to display it, why should Wales have to do it and not England?”

(Wales, medium business (50-249 employees), 3 FHRS rating)

“It's a tricky one. My big issue is it is used almost as a cross on the door. If you've got a 1, somebody has still got to put it up regardless.”

(Wales, small business (10-24 employees), 5 FHRS rating)

Among large businesses, there was strong support for mandatory display. Large businesses felt that mandatory display was valuable for consumers as they could make more informed decisions on the types of businesses that they visited or ate at. Some large businesses, including a takeaway chain operating across all 3 nations, said they asked all stores to display their rating, including in England. A national food retailer assumed that it was mandatory, as all of their units are told to display their ratings.

“We tell them they all have to display it. If we have a standard, we apply it across all of our stores unless there is country legislation.”

(Large restaurant business)

“We were putting them up before we were asked to do so, so yes, it's been a good driver for us.”

(Large retail business)

“It's about time England caught up. It's been talked about, mooted, parked. It has been in Wales, Northern Ireland [for a while].”

(Large retail business)

The only concern about mandatory display mentioned by large businesses related to the overall consistency of the scheme. They argued that it was problematic if there were issues with the consistency of inspections, and if individual premises were assessed differently to others which they felt were carrying out the same practices and receiving higher scores.

“I don't really have a problem with mandatory display at all. I think it's fine. The only challenge... [is] if it was completely consistent across the board, then mandatory display is fine. But unfortunately, when you get a rating of 1 and you absolutely objectively know that it shouldn't be a 1, then it sticks somewhat, having to display that rating, I think.”

(Large retail business)