

# Memorandum of Understanding: Annex E- Communications protocol

This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) sets out the working relationship between the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) and the principles that FSA and FSS will follow in the course of day-to-day working relationships.

## 20. Guiding principles for communications

The FSA and FSS will ensure consumers and stakeholders, including the media, across the UK receive consistent, evidenced and factually correct information via their respective communications strategies and channels, in their respective countries of responsibility.

The communication teams in both organisations will work together closely to deliver this information, co-operating where appropriate to reach out to audiences in the most effective way. In particular, we will ensure each organisation works in a timely manner with the other, ensuring full visibility of assets and materials.

Materials should be shared at least two working days before the planned publication or dissemination, even in draft form. In exceptional circumstances where time is limited, each organisation must take responsibility for ensuring the other is made aware of potential communications at the earliest possible opportunity.

Where there is divergence of policy, strategy or organisational approach, the FSA and FSS communications teams will work together to ensure the differences are clearly understood and articulated, and the potential impact on the other organisation is considered in communications handling.

The FSA and FSS will respect the jurisdiction of each organisation in the development and delivery of communications priorities that support each organisation's respective objectives. This will include consideration of media buying, branding, media relations and research (as expanded upon below).

In their communications with one another, the FSA and FSS will be open, transparent, helpful, collaborative, timely and proactive in alerting the other to communications issues which may impact their organisation. The communication teams will meet on a regular and frequent basis and the Director of Communication (FSA) and Head of Communication and Marketing (FSS) will also discuss relevant issues on an ongoing basis.

In all communications, both organisations will be mindful of the fact that there are two food regulatory bodies in the UK and will ensure that this is clear to the public and stakeholders.

The FSA and FSS will ensure both organisations are involved in the development of any required co-ordinated communications from the outset.

## **21. Media and communication**

The FSA and FSS will collaborate on communications, particularly involving each other in the development of planned press material (such as releases and statements), and digital content, web stories and social media, where there is common interest to both organisations and the public that they serve.

Where there is a four-nation approach to media / communications, the FSA and FSS will work together in the development of any communication products and share internally with respective Communications teams prior to sending on to senior management for input and approval.

The FSA and FSS will ensure that the other body receives:

- drafts of any planned publications with specific implications for either organisation in advance, wherever this is possible;
- drafts of any announcements including press releases and web stories with specific implications for either body, with as much notice as is practicable, before they are released to the media; and
- early notice of any press engagement that could potentially impact, or which might be better handled by, the other organisation to allow as much time as possible for preparedness.

The FSA and FSS will respect the confidentiality of any documents shared in advance of publication and will not cause the content of those documents to be made public ahead of the planned publication date.

While the FSA and FSS will endeavour to produce consistent communications, should the need arise, both bodies reserve the right to tailor messaging for use in Scotland by FSS and in the rest of the UK by the FSA, whilst having due regard for the potential impact of differential messaging on each other and the public.

The FSA will issue communications to the media in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, including national news outlets. In cases where there is a communications issue of UK-wide interest, but which is generated in Scotland and where FSS is the lead authority, FSS will issue communications to the Scottish media and national news outlets to ensure that the Scottish public is fully informed of Scotland-specific issues and advice. The FSA and FSS commit not to issue communications to the same news outlets on the same issues. In these cases, both the FSA and FSS will share key messages, lines to take and Q&A with each other to ensure consistency of messaging. The FSA and FSS reserve the right to use their own spokespeople for their own media but will ensure they are briefed according to the agreed communications plan.

## **22. Marketing campaigns and media buying**

The FSA and FSS will advise one another at an early planning stage of the development of relevant marketing campaigns in their respective geographical areas. Each organisation will have the opportunity to discuss running those campaigns on a case-by-case basis in their own locale should there be shared objectives as appropriate. Any financial contribution to joint campaign development and delivery will be agreed at the outset. The lead organisation will keep the other body apprised of development and provide sight of materials but will ultimately retain control over creative output and strategy regardless of any financial contribution from the other body.

Should it be agreed that the FSA and FSS will run the same campaign, all related campaign materials, whether physical or online, must be jointly branded and/or branded FSS in Scotland and the FSA in the rest of the UK, as agreed at the time.

When planning and buying media for campaigns, crossover into the other organisation's geographical area should be avoided, with media agencies being briefed on this requirement as a matter of course. Where there will be unavoidable crossover, for example via social media channels and some digital TV channels, the organisation buying the media must advise the other body as early as possible. This extends to partnerships marketing activity, where, for example, UK-wide organisations and bodies may use materials in the other organisation's locale.

## **23. Social media and alerts**

The FSA and FSS maintain separate social media channels but, where there is a rationale for joint social media activity, for example during a UK wide incident or product recall, this should be discussed and agreed at as early a stage as practicable.

Allergy and Food Alerts will be issued by each organisation according to the incident handling protocols set out in Annex A. Templates and approaches for these should be agreed as part of the Efficacy of Recalls project to ensure consistency of communications approach across the UK and to avoid confusion amongst the public.

FSS will use the FSA's APIs (Application Programming Interface) for Allergy and Food Alerts for FSA-led incidents where there is distribution to Scotland.

## **24. Branding and publications**

Where publications, reports and other communications materials are to be jointly developed, consideration must be given at an early stage of dual branding, including overall 'look and feel' and use of brand colours, fonts etc, as well as the use and positioning of both organisation's logos. This will ensure joint publications are clearly distinguishable as being from both the FSA and FSS and adhere to both organisations' brand guidelines as far as practicable. Templates for such instances should be developed and signed off by both organisations to ensure a consistent approach.

In such cases, any cost-sharing and the percentage split between both organisations will be agreed at the outset of a project.

## **25. Stakeholder communications**

The FSA and FSS will communicate with stakeholders within their jurisdiction regarding matters of joint and separate interest. Where one organisation will be communicating with UK-wide bodies or stakeholders, it should apprise the other in advance of planned engagement, providing adequate notice to allow for input or participation where appropriate. Subsequently, discussion points, outcomes or decisions should be shared from such meetings to ensure transparency and mutual understanding.

## **26. Digital and websites**

Each organisation will allow the other to link to pages and sections on each other's websites.

Digital assets, such as interactives, education resources and training tools, remain the property of the organisation which developed them. However, sharing and rebranding of those assets for use by the other organisation should be considered on a case-by-case basis, with financial contribution agreed as appropriate to offset development and resource costs.

Joint digital projects should be considered at an early planning stage where doing so will be to the benefit of consumers across the UK. The organisation which proposes the activity will generally be the lead organisation and will retain control over the process and outputs, with input from the other organisation to ensure these are mutually agreeable and beneficial. This will be discussed and agreed at the outset.

FHRS and FHIS data should be searchable on both FSS and the FSA websites.

## **27. Incident communications**

Details of specific communications protocols related to the management of incidents are contained in the 'Incident Handling protocol' in Annex A.

## **28. Risk communications**

Details of specific risk communications protocols related to the risk analysis process are contained in the 'Protocol on Analysis' in Annex G.

## **29. Regular meetings**

The FSA and FSS communications teams will meet on a monthly basis to review ongoing projects, share updates and identify areas for collaboration. Additionally, the heads of division for both organisations will meet fortnightly to discuss strategic priorities, address emerging issues and ensure alignment at a senior level.

## **30. Evaluation metrics and continuous improvement**

To ensure the effectiveness of joint communications activities, particularly in the context of incidents, the FSA and FSS will establish a process for regular evaluation. This will involve reviewing the timeliness, consistency, reach and clarity of joint messaging and assessing how effectively the communications protocol supports collaboration.