

Why did the FSA commission this work?

The FSA wanted to better understand how the guidance was received, understood and acted on by both local authorities (LAs) and food business operators (FBOs), and to identify any areas for improvement.

How much did the research cost?

The total cost of this research was £123,712 (excluding VAT)

How was the research conducted?

The first stage of the research was a number of interviews with local authorities and food industry representatives. The purpose of this stage was to inform the development of the questionnaire for the second stage. The second and main stage was a quantitative, telephone survey with FBOs and LAs. This involved 2051 FBOs and 150 LAs. The third and final stage involved qualitative interviews with some of the businesses and local authorities involved in the survey, as well as with management staff of large food business chains, to follow-up on some of the issues and understand them in more depth.

Who by? Was it independent?

The Research was conducted by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) of the University of Westminster, and by IFF, and independent research company. PSI co-ordinated the research, designed the questionnaire, in collaboration with the FSA, and conducted the qualitative interviews. IFF delivered the telephone survey.

I wasn't asked to take part. Why?

The research was conducted with a sample of FBOs and LAs, as it would not have been practical to survey everyone who belongs to one of these groups. Rather, representative proportions of FBOs from different sectors, countries across the UK and establishment size were interviewed. We selected LAs from across England, setting a target of 100, and a target of 50 for the LAs in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

What are you going to do with the findings?

The findings have informed a paper to the FSA Board on 13/11/12 which concluded that the guidance has been a useful resource. However the findings have highlighted that there are opportunities to improve the guidance and provide additional support to raise awareness and understanding and the Agency proposes to take action in relation to these areas.

How reliable are the findings?

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach of a quantitative survey and qualitative interviewing, therefore adding both breadth and depth to the research. The questions for both the survey and the qualitative interviews were designed in consultation with both policy and methodological experts. The survey questions and interview topic guides were rigorously tested in a pilot, with some minor changes being made as a result.

What are the main findings? (three key bullets)

- Awareness: More than half (56%) of FBOs were aware of the guidance
- Understanding: 67% of FBOs and 63% of LAs found the guidance easy to understand
- Virtually all businesses acknowledged benefits associated with changes made, with 31% referring to reduced health risks, and 28% benefiting from their staff now having a clearer idea of their responsibilities and good practice.

What can you say about the impact the guidance has had on food businesses?

This research was not designed to measure the eventual impact of the guidance, although it does provide some indication on potential outcomes, for example in relation to understanding of risk (as indicated above) and changes made by FBOs.