

Choosing a Food Safety Consultant

INTRODUCTION

At times, food businesses may wish to use external food safety consultants to provide specialized support - for example in food safety training, to help with a particular food safety issue, or to assist them in the design and implementation of their food safety management system (HACCP).

The following advice may be of assistance to food businesses who are about to engage the services of an external food safety consultant.

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO FIRST?

Prior to contacting a consultant you should determine what you want to achieve i.e. what your desired outcomes are. This will give you a starting point for your discussion. The ability of the service provider to meet your expectations is dependent on both parties understanding the level of service required.

When selecting a consultant to meet your food business needs, you should contact a number of consultants to discuss your requirements. Details of food safety consultants may be found from websites that hold details of food hygiene/safety trainers and consultants. Some of these links are provided in the Council's Food Matters website.

Discussions with prospective consultants can be through telephone conversations or meetings and will enable you to make an informed decision on the consultant you choose to work with.

WHAT ISSUES SHOULD I CONSIDER?

When discussing your requirements you should consider the following:

a) Is the consultant interested in identifying you're the specific needs of your business?

Is s/he willing to spend time with you, listen to you and explain the best method of meeting your requirements?

b) How does the consultant assess your business needs?

Will s/he:

- visit your company - are you happy s/he will visit for the right reasons e.g. to assess your current practices etc.?
- meet with key representatives - what does s/he they want to achieve by doing this?

c) *Will they adapt their material and delivery method to meet your needs?*

The success of the service provided is dependent on how relevant the materials and delivery methods are to your business.

d) *Are they willing to show you some of their training aids or previous work?*

This will give you an indication of the quality of work you can expect to receive. It also allows you to assess whether the service provided is generic, or customer-specific.

e) *What type of follow up support will they provide?*

The success of the service provided is dependent on how it is implemented in the workplace. Visits following delivery of the service may prove beneficial as they assist in the implementation of knowledge obtained. These visits can also help clarify any issues that have arisen since the service was provided.

f) *Do they encourage management participation?*

Proprietors / managers should be familiar with, and have ownership of, their food safety management system. Therefore it is important that the consultant and proprietor / manager work together to address all food safety aspects relating to the business.

g) *What do some of their previous clients say about them?*

Talking to some of the consultants' previous clients will inform you of the quality of the service you may receive. It must, however, be kept in mind that the success of the service is dependent on the consultant's **and** your business's input.

h) *Do they have an appropriate qualification?*

The person delivering the requested service should be competent in the task they are undertaking. They should have an appropriate level of technical knowledge; in addition, relevant experience in the food industry may be of benefit when addressing issues in your food operation.

Where a consultant is providing/ implementing:

* **food safety training:** s/he should :

- (a) have a clear understanding of the level of competence required of employees
- (b) have the necessary knowledge and experience to explain adequately why these skills are required
- (c) have the ability to design and deliver a programme of systematic training / instruction which addresses the target groups' needs and achieves a level of competence appropriate for your operation
- (d) where applicable, be accredited/registered with an organisation (e.g. CIEH) to deliver its food safety qualification courses

*** a food safety management system (HACCP):** s/he should:

- (a) help you to develop a system, customised to your business's needs
- (b) have the technical knowledge and ability to help you identify the hazards in your food operation
- (c) have a clear understanding of the principles of implementing a HACCP system
- (d) also ensure that at least one person in the business (preferably the proprietor / manager) understands the HACCP system and how it is to be implemented and reviewed.

The responses you receive to the above questions will assist you in making your final decision.

Note: the success of the service provided by an external consultant depends on your willingness to encourage its implementation. A consultant can only provide you with the tools; it is the commitment of the individual food business that ensures the success of the project.

[This text is based on a guidance document provided by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland]