

VisitScotland Food & Drink QA Scheme

Taste Our Best

Criteria/Guidance Notes

Stand Alone Businesses

(Restaurants, Cafes, Tearooms, Takeaways, Pubs, Bars and other similar operational style businesses)



The Taste Our Best food and drink scheme brings together the tourism and food and drink industries in Scotland.

It is designed to recognise businesses including hotels, restaurants, cafes, takeaways, visitor attractions and B&Bs that not only offer a quality food and drink experience, but include and promote Scottish produce on their menus to give consumers choice.

Research has shown that visitors are willing to pay up to 15% more for food that is of Scottish or regional origin and businesses that provide local food can typically enjoy higher level sales of up to 20% per year. Visitors currently spend around £800 million per year on food and drink in Scotland and more than 70% of potential visitors to Scotland want to taste traditional dishes, regional specialities and fresh local produce.

The Taste Our Best scheme is the latest addition to VisitScotland's Quality Assurance (QA) Schemes, which aim to drive up quality in tourism products across the country. Taste Our Best provides businesses with an assessment of their food provision and their menu by qualified assessors, with those meeting the necessary criteria gaining the award. The scheme responds directly to identified consumer needs.

Promoting Scottish produce in season not only meets consumer preferences but can have a wide range of benefits, as well as contributing to your business's sustainable practices. Local food can provide freshness, reduce food miles, offer benefits to local farmers and communities while seasonal food can offer better taste and be more affordable.

Taste Our Best has been shaped to take account of consumer preferences and has been developed by representatives from the public and private sectors with particular experience in the tourism and food sectors.

Categories.

For the stand alone food sector there are three types of categorisation. Each will receive a visit from one of our food scheme assessors, a de-brief on the experience with a report and advice on quality and making the most of our Scottish produce.

The three categories are as follows:

Taste our Best Quality Assurance scheme – Category 1: Takeaways
Taste our Best Quality Assurance scheme – Category 2: Coffee shops and Cafes
Taste our Best Quality Assurance scheme – Category 3: Restaurant, Bistro, Brasserie, Bars and Pubs

How will my visit be conducted?

The assessment takes into account the quality of the establishment and facilities, hospitality and service, cleanliness, quality of the food and the menu. In particular the assessment looks at the extent to which Scottish produce is featured and promoted on menus. The aim of the scheme is to give recognition to those establishments who have a policy of sourcing and using Scottish produce and also promoting this to our visitors. Quality of cooking, service and presentation skills are also considered as part of this assessment.

There are various channels which can be used to highlight your use of Scottish produce to your visitors. Details of your purchasing policy can be featured on your website and on menus. Many establishments also promote sample menus on their website, both for lunch and dinner where provided. Dishes can have Scottish produce individually highlighted or a credit section added to the back of the menu detailing your suppliers. In some establishments a personal approach is sometimes given and menus are handwritten and displayed on black boards or similar, highlighting regional or Scottish specialities and local produce.

There is a set of core criteria that our Quality and Tourism Advisors will follow when making this assessment which includes a check on the use of Scottish produce, details of provenance and promotion to the consumer.

Criteria / Guidance Notes

The food and drink assessors will be reviewing the following areas. These are all quality scored on a basis of 1 - 5 marks;

1. An acceptable standard
2. A good standard
3. A very good standard
4. An excellent standard
5. An outstanding standard

A score of zero would reflect an area which is below standard.

Dependent on the establishment's operational style the following is some guidance to the food and drink quality establishment.

The booking procedure

- This takes into account all telephone or face to face reservations made where appropriate. In this section we would be looking at the service offered, choice of tables, special dietary requirements are checked, directions offered and also confirmation of booking nearer to arrival. In smaller establishments such as takeaways, tearooms and cafes booking procedure may not be scored as not applicable; this would not dis-advantage the overall food and drink assessment

Hospitality on Arrival

Greeting / Friendliness

- This may take place in a hotel reception as well as a restaurant / cafe or dining room. Staff should be smart, cheerful and welcoming, make friendly conversation and demonstrate a willingness to oblige.

Efficiency

- Where a table has been booked, whoever greets the diner should have a record of the booking and should be able to find it at once. He/she should know which table has been allocated, and for what time, they should also know how many are in the party. Offer of menus, explanation of specials or any menu restrictions. Coats, bags etc should be taken and returned at the end of the meal. Staff should be attentive without being obtrusive.
In smaller establishments, such as takeaways, tearooms and cafes booking procedure may be left un-scored as not applicable; this would not dis-advantage the overall food and drink assessment.

Offer of Drinks, etc.

- This also includes knowledge of drinks. Staff should know what drinks the restaurant has- types of sherry, wine, beers, etc, and be able to offer helpful advice and suggestions. The promotion and knowledge of Scottish brands of both alcoholic and soft drinks.

Offer of the menu

- Prompt offer of menu or indication of blackboards or similar display soon after arrival. Helpful information on, for example, the “soup of the day” or the “chef’s special”. If any dishes are no longer available or have been changed in some way this should also be made clear at this stage.

Offer of Wine / drinks list

- Similar considerations to the menu apply here. This again takes in product knowledge. The waiting staff should be able to answer pertinent questions about the wines and other drinks on the list and to make suitable suggestions when asked about required wine styles, and which wines on the list would meet them. They should also be knowledgeable about any other drinks such as fortified wines, beers, spirits and liqueurs served on the premises. Again the promotion and knowledge of Scottish brands of both alcoholic and soft drinks would be expected.
- The appearance of the wine and drinks list plus the extensiveness of the choice will be commented upon.

Ordering and Service Skills

Ordering:

- This covers the manner and efficiency of staff taking the order of both food and drink. The manner in which all the pre-meal service is conducted is also of great importance.

Service Skills

- An integral part of the overall experience of eating out is the service received. The elements assessed under this section will vary widely according to the style of food service operation. In a formal dining environment, we would expect to find more polished and disciplined serving skills and would assess them accordingly. In a more informal setting, whatever the style of food operation, service should be undertaken efficiently. This assessment looks at technical skills and professional expertise.

Water

- The style of water service will differ. Essentially water should be offered or be available - preferably a choice of tap water/bottled water/still/sparkling.

Wine / Drinks Service

- This includes the service of pre-meal drinks and snacks, and takes in such things as:
 - Provision of accompaniments to drinks ice, lemon etc.
 - The service of any canapés or 'nibbles'
 - Appropriate serving temperature
 - Pouring of drinks, beer, bottled and draft, wine, and soft drinks
 - Correct glass for the drink.
 - Presentation of teas and coffee
 - Provision of a mat or coaster.
 - Clearing away of empty bottles/glasses.
- These skills should be apparent at all levels of the market. However, in a formal establishment a more structured and approach to service would be expected.

Bill Payment

- This section also covers the acceptance of payment. Staff should be well versed in accepting and processing credit cards and cheques if the establishment accepts these. Staff should be sensitive to when customers require their bill.

Menu Balance, Variety and Choice

- This section looks at the range and choice offered to suit all tastes and dietary requirements. Plus the balance of items on the menu such as dark and light meats, fish and vegetarian options. Offer lighter choices or smaller portion options. If there is good reason or purpose for a restriction in variety and choice then this will be understood and accepted.

Menu appearance

This section covers the text, content, design and physical appearance of the menu offered.

Courses

Refers to courses offered by establishment and can cover starter / main / dessert where available. In a smaller establishment this may comprise of a snack or baking option.

Appearance / Presentation

This broadly refers to the visual impact of dish as it is served.

- Assessors will have made specific note of each dish as described on the menu to ensure all elements appear in the presented dish

Quality of Main Ingredients,

This would also include any sauce or other accompaniments including vegetables or salad that form part of the plate of buffet.

The quality of the raw ingredients will have a marked effect on the finished dish. Points to consider regarding the selection and quality of the raw ingredients when eating the finished dish are:

Taste and combination of flavours:

- The taste should exemplify the main ingredient, complemented by the other flavours on the plate thus delivering a balance where each ingredient has a recognisable taste but forms part of a coherent whole.

Technical ability and consistency:

- The level of technical ability will be commensurate with the style of establishment and judged accordingly. Consistency is very important and the ability to produce food to a high standard at every meal will be credited.

Creativity:

- Creativity will be judged wherever it is found based on its suitability for the occasion, originality, purpose and its balance within the overall meal.

Scottish / Seasonal Content:

- Credit will be given to those establishments who use fresh, seasonal Scottish ingredients locally purchased.
- For vegetables and salads, whether on the main plate or served separately, the same assessment factors apply. They should look attractive and have a range of flavours, colour and texture. They should be arranged and garnished in an appealing way.
- The basic quality and condition of the raw ingredients will come into consideration along with the quality of preparation and cooking.

Culinary Skills including serving temperature

The level of technical ability will be commensurate with the style of establishment and judged accordingly. Cooking is a highly complex activity with innumerable variables. The result will depend on the quality of the ingredients and the skill of the cook / chef and the team on any given occasion.

- Culinary skills will take in the main elements on the plate and any sides of vegetable or salad.
- Expectations are that the plate of food and any sides will arrive at the table at the appropriate temperature and warmed plates used where appropriate.

Sundries and additional courses

This would include water, bread and butter, nuts, olives, crisps, canapés, petit fours, etc.

- The style of water service will differ. Essentially water should be offered – preferably a choice of tap water, bottled water, still or sparkling.
- The choice and quality of butter and butter substitutes will also be taken into account.

Hot Beverages

In this section, an assessment will be made of the quality of beverages served.

- Ideally, there should be a reasonable choice - range of fresh brewed coffee and tea to include a herbal selection is desirable,
- The service of teas and coffees, quality of presentation, tea pots, coffee pots and sundries also taken into account.

Housekeeping and hygiene

This applies to all the applicable public areas, eating venue and toilets.

- Cleanliness of public areas, eating venues, toilets and general housekeeping are of fundamental importance.

Taste Our Best Standard

In addition to the above quality standards our food and drink assessors will also be looking for some additional information and criteria as part of the taste our best assessment, outlined below;

- **Management, Bar and Waiting staff demonstrate knowledge of Scottish produce on the menu dishes offered**

- *Measurement criterion - our Food and Drink Assessors will ask questions regarding the menu to test knowledge on dishes, provenance, Scottish produce and key ingredients.*
- **Where lunch and / or dinner provided; demonstrates menu dishes are changed to reflect seasonality of produce / ingredients**
 - *Measurement criterion - menus changed twice a year minimum. This enables businesses to maximise the use of seasonal produce and reflect this in their menus. We will look for details of menu changes on websites but may also ask for further information at the time of the debrief.*
- **Demonstrates use of Scottish produce on dinner and/or lunch menus**
 - *Measurement criterion - A minimum of 40% Scottish produce is identifiable on the menu*
 - *Menu dishes for Category 2 establishments ; this will cover starters , main course and dessert , for the main course this equates to - Scottish produce as the main ingredient (main ingredient of menu dish) plus one Scottish sourced accompaniment (e.g. vegetable dish or sauce)*
- **Scottish produce highlighted on dinner and/or lunch menu; listed below is a ready reckoner for the 40% calculation. Your Quality and Tourism Advisor will be able to discuss in more detail at the time of the visit.**

Total number of dishes (starters, main courses, desserts)	10	12	13	14	15	16	18
Total number of dishes with recognisable Scottish produce needed	4	5	6	6	6	7	8

Taste Our Best - accreditation standard

In summary, to achieve a Taste Our Best accreditation, a business should demonstrate the following;

- 40% of the (customer facing) menu identified as being Scottish produce
- A minimum quality score of 3 out of 5 must be scored in all food related sections in your annual Taste Our best grading visit.
- Management and staff demonstrate knowledge of Scottish produce used by the business and featured on the menu.
- Menus are changed at least twice a year to embrace seasonality (Restaurants only).

At the time of the QA visit any shortfalls can be discussed with the Food and Drink Assessor. Where a business does use the level of Scottish produce required but has not communicated this on their menu, the opportunity exists to amend their consumer facing information on menus and send it to VisitScotland for a re-assessment of the Taste Our Best award.

Advice will be provided, at the time of the annual visit, on sources of information on the use and sourcing of Scottish produce.

Further information on sourcing Scottish produce can be found on the following links;

www.scotlandfoodanddrink.org - wide ranging food and drink business applicable advice. Includes the Scotland's Food and Drink's Supplier Showcase (search over 1000 Scottish suppliers); Seasonality Calendar (interactive online calendar or printable poster); Food Map (Locate regional food businesses); Case Studies (how Chefs source locally, how producers successfully supply food service).

www.scottishfoodanddrinkforums.org - Helps businesses grow and connect with each other to find new opportunities. The network can help you to:- Connect with others in the Industry through a combination of regional events, workshops and social media; Participate in knowledge sharing and discuss Industry issues and challenges; Benefit from opportunities to discover new markets; Connect and find new people to work and collaborate with.

www.provenanceonaplate.co.uk - This toolkit aims to clarify legal requirements and best practice guidelines for food and drink origin declarations on menus, to help you to provide clear, accurate and consistent information to consumers when eating out. This will encourage them to make informed choices about what they eat.

www.experiencingscotland.co.uk - Supports tourism companies to provide and promote the high quality food and drink produce Scotland offers. One-to-One business advice and support is available to tourism businesses with food and drink operations.

Taste Our Best scheme - business benefits

- For stand-alone businesses, ie Restaurants, Cafes and Takeaways etc prices have been held at the same level as the previous EatScotland scheme
- For all types of businesses, the assessment will generate a written report plus a food assessment debrief, advice is also offered at the time of the assessment (if operationally convenient). If not, a follow-up appointment by telephone or email will be arranged at a mutually convenient time
- Promotional collateral for the Taste Our Best scheme will include: window sticker, A4 certificate and logos for use on your marketing materials
- Participation in the Taste Our Best food and drink scheme can give you eligibility to apply for Brown tourist road signage. More detailed information on this can be found as www.visitscotland.org
- Taste Our Best promotion to visitors will include:
 - Taste Our Best awareness activity, using highly visible visitor channels eg travel access points, online, print, VisitScotland Information Centres etc
 - Promotion in regular marketing activity communications - ezines and seasonality marketing mailers
 - Promotion through consumer PR channels
 - Detailed / localised information on Taste Our Best providers including website presence, promotion in VisitScotland Information Centres, adverts in the regional guides, inclusion in campaign activity as appropriate

Scheme participation prices

Taste our Best Quality Assurance scheme – Category 1: Takeaways	£50 +VAT
Taste our Best Quality Assurance scheme – Category 2: Coffee shops and Cafes	£75 +VAT
Taste our Best Quality Assurance scheme – Category 3: Restaurant, Bistro, Brasserie, Bars and Pubs	£120 +VAT

Contacts for more information

The Taste Our Best scheme can be discussed with your local Industry Relationship Manager details of which can be found at:

www.visitscotland.org/business_support/your_business_manager.aspx

Alternatively; go online to www.visitscotland.org our Industry website and complete a new customer form which can be found at:

www.visitscotland.org/main/new_business.aspx

One of our Industry Relationship Manager will then be in touch to discuss.

Further advice and information on sourcing and promoting Scottish produce and can be found on the following links:

VISITSCOTLAND – Tel 01463 244 111, customerservices@visitscotland.com
www.visitscotland.org/taste-our-best.aspx

Here you'll find Information on scheme criteria for your type of business, detailed guidance, and links to other useful websites.

SCOTLAND FOOD & DRINK – Tel 0131 335 0940, info@scotlandfoodanddrink.org,
www.scotlandfoodanddrink.org

Showcase - a comprehensive online showcase of over 1000 Scottish producers and suppliers. You can search by product type or by area, locate producers near you and create your own favourites list.

Seasonal Calendar – interactive online calendar and printable poster. The calendar contains extensive listings of each month's harvest with easy links to the supplier Showcase, also tips, advice and food facts from Scottish experts.

Case Studies – you can find out what other businesses like yours are doing and benefit from their learnings.

SCOTTISH ENTERPRISE – Tel 0845 607 8787, enquiries@scotent.co.uk
www.experiencingscotland.co.uk

Here you'll find information on how you can take part in Scottish Enterprise's Experiencing Scotland workshops, learn more about the opportunity for 1to1 business support, case study success stories that show the positive impact Scottish sourcing can have on your bottom line, and you can sign up for free business updates.

TOURISM INTELLIGENCE SCOTLAND – Tel 0845 601 607, info@tourism-intelligence.co.uk;
www.tourism-intelligence.co.uk

You can download the *Food and Drink Experience in Scotland* guide, full of tips and ideas including recipes using Scottish produce and how to present a Scottish menu.

Email: customerservices@visitscotland.com
http://www.visitscotland.org/business_support/quality_assurance.aspx

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