

1. Home (<https://www.gov.uk/>)
  2. Government (<https://www.gov.uk/government/all>)
  3. Government efficiency, transparency and accountability  
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/government-efficiency-transparency-and-accountability>)
  4. Sustainable procurement: the GBS for food and catering services  
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainable-procurement-the-gbs-for-food-and-catering-services>)
- Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs>)

Guidance

# Government Buying Standard for food and catering services

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## Contents

Mandatory standards

Best practice standards

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Central government procurers directly or through their catering contractors are required to apply this Government Buying Standard (GBS). Others are encouraged to follow it. It includes a set of minimum mandatory standards for inclusion in tender specifications and contract performance conditions. It also includes some best practice standards which are recommended but not required.

The balanced scorecard is a supporting tool to use in order to procure food and catering services. It goes beyond production standards, resource efficiency and nutrition helping provide a comprehensive tool for setting technical specifications and evaluating bids. It includes award criteria to reward good practice, and to further stimulate investment and innovation.

## **Mandatory standards**

The following standards are mandatory.

### **A. Production, processing and distribution**

#### **1. Production standards**

All food served must be produced in a way that meets UK legislative standards for food production, or equivalent standards. Please refer to Annex for a list of relevant legislation.

If in any particular circumstances, this leads to a significant increase in costs which cannot reasonably be compensated for by savings elsewhere, the procuring authority shall agree with the catering contractor or supplier to depart from this requirement and the reasons for doing so shall be noted and recorded. This decision shall be signed off by the Head of Procurement or equivalent senior official of the government department or other public body.

Procurers or catering contractors must ensure that food is verifiable as meeting these standards by either checking that farm inspection systems meet UK standards of inspection or their equivalent, or if not, that they are subject to an independent assurance system.

#### **2. Traceability of fresh, chilled and frozen produce**

Catering contractors or food suppliers shall ensure the traceability of fresh, chilled and frozen produce in accordance with current UK legislation or equivalent.

#### **3. Authenticity**

The catering contractor or supplier must have systems in place to enable it to check and ensure authenticity of products.

#### **4. Origin of meat and dairy**

In line with the industry principles on country of origin information, food and catering service suppliers shall indicate the origin of the meat, meat products and dairy products either on the menu or accompanying literature. If this is not practicable, then at minimum the information must be available and be provided on request to the procuring authority or end consumer.

#### **Animal welfare**

#### **5. Animal welfare**

All food served must be produced in a way that meets UK legislative standards for animal welfare (<https://www.gov.uk/animal-welfare>), or equivalent standards.

UK standards are generally similar to EU standards for food production. There are, however, differences in animal welfare standards for some aspects of pigmeat and broiler chicken production. Broiler chicken, pork and pork products must be compliant with UK standards, as set out in the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2007 (as amended).

If in any particular circumstances, this leads to a significant increase in costs which cannot reasonably be compensated for by savings elsewhere, the procuring authority shall agree with the catering contractor or supplier to depart from this requirement and the reasons for doing so shall be noted and recorded. This decision shall be signed off by the Head of Procurement or equivalent senior official of the government department or other public body. In such an eventuality, EU standards shall be met at minimum.

## **6. Eggs**

All eggs, including fresh in-shell, liquid and powdered eggs, are sourced from systems that do not use conventional cages. If from a caged system, enriched cages must be used.

## **Environment**

### **7. Higher environmental production standards**

At least 10% of the total monetary value of primary commodity (that is, raw ingredient) food and drink procured shall be inspected and certified to:

i) publicly available Integrated Production (IP) or Integrated Farm Management (IFM) standards that require the systematic and integrated management, at farm level, of:

- natural habitats and biodiversity
- prevention and control of pollution
- energy, water and waste
- management of soils, landscape and watercourses

and contain within their scope requirements that are consistent with the definition of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) contained in European Council Directive 2009/128/EC

or

ii) publicly available organic standards compliant with European Council Regulation 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products.

Note: the 10% is of the total monetary value and can be made up of any combination of commodities allowing the procurer flexibility to find the best solutions for their circumstances.

## **8. Palm oil**

From the end of 2015 all palm oil (including palm kernel oil and products derived from palm oil) used for cooking and as an ingredient in food must be sustainably produced<sup>[footnote 1]</sup>.

## **9. Fish**

All fish<sup>[footnote 2]</sup> are demonstrably sustainable with all wildcaught fish meeting the Food and Agriculture Organisation Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (includes Marine Stewardship Council certification and Marine Conservation Society 'fish to eat', or equivalent).

No 'red list' or endangered species of farmed or wild fish shall be used (Marine Conservation Society 'fish to avoid').

## **Variety and seasonality**

### **10. Seasonal produce**

In respect of the use of fresh produce, menus shall be designed to reflect the natural growing or production period for the UK, and in-season produce shall be highlighted on menus.

## **B. Nutrition**

### **11. Reducing salt intake**

Vegetables and boiled starchy foods such as rice, pasta and potatoes, shall be cooked without salt.

Salt shall not be available on tables.

At least 75% of meat products, breads, soups, cooking sauces and ready meals procured by volume, and 75% of breakfast cereals and pre-packed sandwiches provided meet current core salt targets (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/sugar-reduction#salt-reduction->) and any subsequent revisions<sup>[footnote 3]</sup> to this target and all stock preparations shall be lower salt varieties (that is, below 0.6g/100mls reconstituted).

Note: The 75% applies individually to each food category described in the above specification, and not only to the combined provision / volume. The requirement relates to meeting maximum targets, or using an average target as a maximum where a maximum target is not set.

Government will extend the period of compliance by 2 years, allowing a total implementation period of 3 years for the salt standard.

### **12. Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption**

A portion of fruit shall be sold at a lower price than a portion of hot or cold dessert.

Half of desserts available should contain at least 50% of their weight as fruit – which may be fresh, canned in fruit juice, dried or frozen. This excludes whole fresh fruit as a dessert option. Whole fresh fruit can be a dessert option but should not be included as an option when calculating whether half of dessert options should contain at least 50% of their weight as fruit.

Main meals within a meal deal should include a starchy carbohydrate which is not prepared with fats or oils, and the meal deal options should include at least 1 portion of vegetables and 1 portion of fruit.

### **13. Meal deals**

Any foods and drinks within a meal deal must also meet the relevant GBSF standards for the healthier options, for instance healthier sandwiches.<sup>[footnote 4]</sup>

### **14. Reducing saturated fat**

Meat and meat products (procured by volume), biscuits, cakes and pastries (provided) be lower in saturated fat, where available.

At least 50% of hard yellow cheese procured by volume shall have a maximum total fat content of 25g/100g.

At least 75% of ready meals procured by volume shall contain less than 6g saturated fat per portion.

At least 75% of milk procured by volume is lower fat (semi-skimmed, 1% or skimmed milk).

At least 75% of oils and 75% of spreads procured by volume are based on unsaturated fats.

At least 50% of pre-packed sandwiches and other savoury pre-packed meals (wraps, salads, pasta salads) provided contain 400kcal (1680 kJ) or less per serving and do not exceed 5.0g saturated fat per 100g for an implementation period of eighteen months and will increase the standard to 75% thereafter with a further implementation period of 18 months.

## **15. Increasing fibre**

At least 50% of bread provided contains at least 3g fibre per 100g (that is, is a source of fibre), excluding pre-packed sandwiches.

At least 75% of pre-packed sandwiches provided contains bread with at least 3g fibre per 100g.

## **16. Reducing sugar Intake**

At least 75% of products provided that are included in the following categories covered by the sugar reduction programme to not exceed the following:

- biscuits - 100kcal
- cakes - 220 kcal
- morning goods - 220 kcal
- puddings - 220 kcal
- yogurts - 120 kcal
- ice cream - 220 kcal

Note: The 75% applies individually to each product category described in the above specification, and not only to the combined provision.

## **17. Breakfast cereals**

At least 50% of breakfast cereals provided are higher in fibre (that is, at least 6g/100g) and shall not exceed 12.3g/100g total sugars (10g additional allowance for dried fruit in cereal).

## **18. Fish**

If caterers serve lunch and an evening meal, fish is provided twice per week (2X 140g portion), one of which is oily. If caterers only serve lunch or an evening meal, oily fish (140g portion) is available at least once every three weeks.

## **19. Savoury snacks**

Savoury snacks are only provided in packet sizes of 35g or less.

Note: Savoury snacks include crisps and any product made from small pieces of potato, wheat, rice, corn or other base ingredient, which have been baked, extruded, cooked or processed in any way. Crisps are defined in this instance as products that comprise sliced whole, fried potato.

## **20. Confectionery**

At least 75% of confectionery and packet sweet snacks provided are in the smallest standard single serve portion size available within the market and do not exceed 200 kcal (maximum) for chocolate and 125 kcal (maximum) for sugar confectionery.

## **21. Beverages**

No more than 10% beverages provided can be sugar sweetened beverages (SSB).

At least 90% of beverages provided must be low calorie/no added sugar beverages.

All SSB to be no more than 330ml pack size. Any SSB that are hot or cold milk-based drinks including milk substitute drinks such as soya, almond, hemp, oat, hazelnut or rice need to meet 300kcal cap.

Any meal deals should not include any SSB.

At least 75% fruit juice, vegetable juice and smoothies to be provided in single serve packs.

For further guidance on how sugar sweetened beverages, low calorie and no added sugar beverages are defined is available in the supporting documents.

## **C. Resource efficiency**

### **22. Water**

Tap water is visible and freely available and such provision is promoted.

Pre-bottled water (mineral or spring) is not included in the hospitality menu.

### **23. Reducing landfill**

Where waste management is included in the contract, facilities shall be available to staff and customers for recycling cans, bottles, cardboard and plastics.

### **24. Food waste**

Food and catering supplier with off-site meal preparation operations shall provide evidence of a systematic approach to managing and minimising the impacts of waste throughout their direct operations, that is, those operations over which they have direct financial and/or operational control. This shall include evidence of a continual improvement cycle of objective setting, measurement, analysis, review and the implementation of improvements actions.

Catering service suppliers which will supply on-site catering services shall:

- take steps to minimise food waste in their onsite operations by creating a food waste minimisation plan, describing what actions they will undertake

- review and revise the actions they are taking with suitable regularity so as to continue to reduce food waste wherever possible; and
- feed back to clients on progress and results with suitable regularity

The contracting authority shall check whether a separate food waste collection service can be provided. If the service can be provided, while achieving value for money, then it shall meet the best practice standard.

## **25. Energy management**

Energy management policy (off-site catering operations):

Catering service contractors with off-site preparation kitchen operations shall have in place an energy management policy appropriate to the nature and scale of their energy use and consumption. Their policy shall commit the organisation to the continual improvement of its energy performance.

Energy management policy (on-site catering operations):

On-site catering operations shall be run in accordance with the host building's overall energy management policy.

## **26. Catering equipment**

The minimum mandatory Government Buying Standards for catering equipment apply as well as the duty under Article 6 of the Energy Efficiency Directive.

Kitchen taps shall have flow rates of not less than 5l/min delivered through either automatic shut off, screw down/lever, or spray taps; and non-flow rate elements shall meet the Enhanced Capital Allowance Scheme (ECA) Water Technology List criteria.

## **27. Paper products**

The minimum mandatory Government Buying Standards for paper products shall apply where relevant, for example kitchen paper, napkins and cardboard cups.

## **D. Social-economic**

### **28. Ethical trading**

At least 50% of tea and coffee is fairly traded

### **29. Inclusion of small to medium enterprises (SMEs)**

Provide opportunity for separate contracts for supply and distribution; and advertise all food-related tenders to SMEs.

### **30. Equality and diversity**

The catering contractor or food supplier shall have a written equality and diversity policy to help ensure it and its sub-contractors are compliant with employment law provisions in the UK Equality Act (2010). In addition, to ensure the procuring authority meets its public sector equality duty, the contractor or food supplier shall have a policy in place as to carrying out its business, such as in terms of awarding subcontracts or procuring goods, in a way that is fair, open and transparent.

## **Best practice standards**

The following standards are best practice.

### **A. Production, processing and distribution**

#### **31. Environmental production standards**

At least 40% of the total monetary value of primary commodity (that is, raw ingredient) food and drink procured shall be inspected and certified to:

publicly available Integrated Production standards or Integrated Farm Management standards, or

publicly available organic standards compliant with European Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products.

### **B. Nutrition**

#### **32. Reducing salt intake**

At least 75% of all products (procured by volume / provided) that are covered by the current salt targets (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/sugar-reduction#salt-reduction->), and any subsequent revisions to this target<sup>[footnote 3]</sup>, meet this target.

Note: The 75% applies individually to each food category described in the above specification, and not only to the combined provision / volume. The requirement relates to meeting maximum targets, or using an average target as a maximum where a maximum target is not set.

Government will extend the period of compliance by 2 years, allowing a total implementation period of 3 years for the salt standard.

#### **33. Increasing fibre**

To ensure at least 50% of all bread provided contains at least 3g fibre per 100g (that is, is a source of fibre), as per the mandatory standard

and, in addition to the mandatory standard,

at least 25% of all bread provided contains at least 6g per 100g (that is, high in fibre), excluding pre-packed sandwiches.

Additional voluntary best practice standard:

To ensure main meals containing beans and /or pulses as a main source of protein are made available at least once a week.

#### **34. Breakfast cereals**

To ensure at least 50% of all breakfast cereals provided contain at least 6g per 100g of fibre (that is, high in fibre) and shall not exceed 12.3g/100g (10g additional allowance for dried fruit in cereal), as per the mandatory standard

and, in addition to the mandatory standard,

at least 25% of all breakfast cereals provided contain at least 6g per 100g (that is, high in fibre) and shall not exceed 5g/100g (10g additional allowance for dried fruit in cereal).

### **35. Snacks**

Savoury snacks are only available in packet sizes of 30g or less.

### **36. Confectionery**

All confectionery and packet sweet snacks provided are in the smallest standard single serve portion size available within the market and do not exceed 200 kcal (maximum) for chocolate and 125 kcal (maximum) for sugar confectionery.

### **37. Beverages**

All beverages (100%) provided must be low calorie/no added sugar beverages, that is, no ~~SSBs~~ are offered.

### **38. Menu cycle analysis**

Menu cycles are analysed to meet nutrient based standards relevant for the majority of customers using the catering provision.

### **39. Calorie and allergen labelling**

Best practice requirement menus (for food and beverages) to include calorie and allergen labelling where not stated in law.<sup>[footnote 5]</sup> <sup>[footnote 6]</sup>

## **C. Resource efficiency**

### **40. Environmental management systems**

The contractor must prove its technical and professional capability to perform the environmental aspects of the contract through: an environmental management system (EMS) for catering services (such as EMAS, ISO 14001 or equivalent).

### **41. Packaging waste**

Packaging waste in delivering food for the catering service is minimised:

- i. tertiary and secondary packaging consists of at least 70% recycled cardboard; and
- ii. where other materials are used, the tertiary packaging must either be reusable or all materials contain some recycled content.

### **42. Food waste**

The food waste minimisation plan includes actions and estimated quantifiable reductions.

The supplier ensures that appropriate training is given to staff to ensure best practice in terms of food waste minimisation.

Surplus food that is fit for consumption is distributed for consumption rather than sent for disposal as waste, for example gifted to charities / food banks.

### **43. Energy efficiency**

The on-site catering operation is run in accordance with the Carbon Trust food preparation and sector guide (CTV035).

### **44. Waste minimisation**

Food and drink to be consumed in restaurants and canteens must be served using cutlery, glassware, and crockery which are reusable and washable.

### **45. Catering equipment**

The best practice Government Buying Standards for catering equipment apply where relevant:

- domestic dishwashers
- commercial cooking equipment, including ovens, fryers and steam cookers
- domestic fridge freezers

### **46. Paper products**

Disposable paper products (for example, napkins, kitchen tissue, take-away food containers) meet the requirements of the EU Ecolabel, or equivalent.

## **D. Social-economic**

### **47. Ethical trading**

All tea, coffee, cocoa and bananas are certified as fairly traded.

Where food is sourced from states that have not ratified the International Labour Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998), or are not covered by the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprise, the supplier of catering and food services shall carry out due diligence against ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998).

Risk based audits have been conducted against social / ethical supply chain standards, for example SA8000 compliance, audit evidence for Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI) Base Code compliance, or equivalent.

Working with suppliers to improve conditions through pro-active, direct engagement programmes.

Dairy products meet the Voluntary Code of Practice on Best Practice on Contractual Relationships (<https://www.nfuonline.com/nfu-online/sectors/dairy/code-of-practice-booklet/>).

Measures are taken to ensure fair dealing with farmers through, for example, the guidance contained in the Groceries Supply Code of Practice (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/groceries-supply-code-of-practice/groceries-supply-code-of-practice>).

### **48. Inclusion of SMEs**

i) Contracts are broken into “lots” to facilitate bids from small producers

ii) Contract documents are simplified, with a degree of standardisation. Requirements are clearly stated, up front.

- iii) Contract lengths are geared to achieve the best combination of price and product.
  - iv) Longer-term contracts are offered to provide stability.
  - v) Tenders are widely advertised.
  - vi) Potential bidders are advised on how to tender for contracts.
  - vii) Projects to help small producers do business are undertaken.
  - viii) Social enterprises are encouraged to compete for contracts.
  - ix) Small producers and suppliers are made aware of sub-contractors/suppliers, so that they know who to do business with.
  - x) Competition on quality rather than brand fair treatment of suppliers.
  - xi) Suppliers of food and catering services provide fair and prompt payment terms for their supply chain, for example 30 days maximum.
  - xii) Length of contracts and notice period are agreed fairly with suppliers.
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1. Support and advice on procuring sustainable palm oil is available from <http://www.cpet.org.uk/> (<http://www.cpet.org.uk/>) (e-mail [cpet@efeca.com](mailto:cpet@efeca.com), telephone 01305 236 100).
2. Fish includes all fish including where it is an ingredient in a composite product.
3. See PHE salt reduction: targets for 2024 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/salt-reduction-targets-for-2024>)
4. This would be for all categories of 'meal deals' such as 'breakfast meal deals', 'hot food meal deals', 'sandwich meal deals', 'hot drink and snacks, for example confectionary / savoury snack / items under the reducing sugar category'. Meal deals should not include sugar sweetened beverages. Healthier breakfast cereals should be included in the 'breakfast meal deals'.
5. See EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation 1169/2011 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011R1169>)
6. See UK's Food Information Regulations 1855/2014 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/1855/contents/made>)

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