

Better Training for Safer Food



BTSF Newsletter is prepared by the Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency (Chafea) and issued six times a year. If you wish to receive the newsletter, please register [here](#).

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BTSF: What is the main aspect of the DG SANTE Training Sector's work on BTSF?

Thierry Chalus: From the start of BTSF until the outsourcing of management tasks to Chafea in 2009, our Sector was responsible for the entire programme, including preparation and publication of calls for tender and execution of contracts, as well as communication issues. Since 2009, we have been able to focus primarily on policy and in this, I would say that our key role is defining the training offer each year by identifying areas where a need for EU-level training exists. This need could be due to reasons such as shortcomings in implementation of EU requirements in a certain field in Member States or potential for training at EU level to generate added value. Alternatively, it might be considered necessary to resume or continue training on a subject covered in past years.

BTSF: How are these areas identified?

Thierry Chalus: We look at previous programmes to see if they were well implemented and garnered positive results and whether continued training on a given subject will be beneficial. Reviewing contractor performance, particularly through reports and feedback from Chafea, has become even more relevant to this aspect of our work since the introduction of two-phase contracts for training implementation. We also consult sources such as Food and Veterinary Office reports and notifications received by the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed, as well as key BTSF stakeholders. These include other European Commission services with an interest in the subjects we cover, and Member State authorities through our network of National Contact Points with whom we coordinate regularly and usually meet twice a year.

BTSF: Are there any other factors behind your decisions?

Thierry Chalus: Budgetary constraints are always a factor. It's not always possible to run training on every subject that we would like to cover and we have to prioritise. We take account of the scope of BTSF as defined in its legal basis as we sometimes receive suggestions for training on subjects which lie beyond our scope. In addition, we look at content of activities which are ongoing or in the pipeline in order to avoid overlaps. The degree of interest in a subject is another factor and staying in touch with national authorities and having a clear view of their training plans and priorities helps us to gauge this. Furthermore, we have to be aware of the legal state of play regarding subjects we want to include, particularly as regards possible upcoming changes to relevant legislation.

BTSF: What happens when you decide on the subjects?

Thierry Chalus: For each subject, it's necessary to have an idea of details such as aims, content, numbers and types of events, expected participation levels, target countries and required budget. It's then possible to draw up an annual work programme. Based on this, the Commission can adopt an implementing decision on financing the programme we propose. Subsequently, we send the information to our colleagues at Chafea who prepare and publish calls for tender. We are the single point of entry to the European Commission for the Chafea BTSF team as regards training-related matters.

BTSF: What are the other important elements of your work?

Thierry Chalus: We provide input, particularly at the preparatory stage, into studies on and evaluations of BTSF in order to ensure that terms of reference and subsequent work is framed appropriately. Such work is fundamental for setting the programme's policy direction. In a similar way to standard training, our consultations help us to define subjects, content and format of e-learning modules. We work on key aspects of BTSF policy including improving identification of priorities, training quality, dissemination and participant homogeneity. Furthermore, our Sector now includes colleagues who previously worked on BTSF third country programmes within the DG SANTE Multilateral International Relations Unit and have wide experience of international capacity building on sanitary and phytosanitary issues. We are thus well placed to identify opportunities for synergy in these areas with other Commission services and international organisations.

BTSF: At what stage are you now as regards planning of future training?

Thierry Chalus: The programme for 2016 is fixed with certain programmes continuing, others re-starting and some new subjects to be introduced. The programmes for which contracts began in 2015 will continue into 2016. We have launched the second two-year phase of certain other contracts, while new contracts will also be concluded in due course. Looking further ahead, consultations with stakeholders, particularly within the Commission and Member State competent authorities, are on-going with a view to identifying possible new subjects and subjects covered in previous years on which it would be useful to resume training.

Brussels hosts BTSF Expert Group meeting

The latest Expert Group meeting of BTSF National Contact Points (NCP) was held in Brussels on 16 November 2015. Following events to mark the 10th anniversary of BTSF at the Universal Exposition in Milan in June, of which NCPs were shown images, the meeting began with a look at the progress BTSF has made over the past 10 years.

From low-key beginnings in 2005, the programme is now at the heart of the mission of the European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE). It has become a key player in ensuring the safety of the food chain and a globally recognised capacity-building programme. Between 2006 and 2015, BTSF has trained around 55 000 people across some 1 300 events for a budget of approximately EUR 125 million.

Attention then turned to the state of play of BTSF strategies and firstly, the cost-effectiveness study. This is to be performed over 12 months by the Food Chain Evaluation Consortium. It will estimate the cost-effectiveness of the current training model, recommend key performance indicators and a robust cost-benefit model and carry out SWOT analysis of different strategies to identify a model which best enables BTSF to reach its goals.

Although being one of the tasks of the latter study, new performance indicators will be introduced in 2016 to better assess the impact of the BTSF programme. These are currently quantitative (numbers of participants) and qualitative (participant satisfaction levels). New indicators will aim to better understand learning, involving pre- and post-training tests for participants, and its use when back at work, and dissemination, using questionnaires to see how and to whom participants disseminate knowledge from training.

Discussion of strategy was not complete without a look at e-learning. The presentation gave an overview of the history of e-learning within BTSF, including the initial feasibility study from 2010 and the launch of the pilot phase in 2011. Details were provided of the six modules currently running and their various language versions, as well as participant numbers, which currently total around 5 300.



Next steps include the launch of four more modules, with those on the EU plant quarantine regime for imports and hygiene of fishery products and live bivalve molluscs set for December 2015 and those on transmissible spongiform encephalopathies and welfare of poultry at slaughter due in early-2016. Also set for launch in December 2015 are the German and French versions of the modules on health of aquaculture animals and feed law and the Spanish and Portuguese versions of those on animal welfare, food contact materials and the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed.

Chafea will continue to gather feedback and the modules will be evaluated in 2016 with a view to drawing conclusions and making recommendations. Subject to a DG SANTE management decision, long-term plans will be crystallised in the 2017 Financing Decision.

Linked to e-learning is the BTSF campus platform which will host the e-learning campus, along with a repository of training material for dissemination, a BTSF alumni database and training schedules. It will also have links to contractor websites and provide a forum for discussion of BTSF matters. Work on the platform is covered by the 2015 Financing Decision. Chafea will soon launch a procurement procedure for development.

Following this, NCPs were given an overview of EU and third country training in 2015, including numbers of events completed and participation levels, drawing attention to a participation deficit in food hygiene at primary production courses on plant products. Chafea also updated NCPs on execution aspects, including the training information sheets which accompany participant invitation letters and standardisation of participant application forms, introduced in April and September 2015 respectively. An IT tool to provide each NCP with monthly feedback on participation from their country is in its initial testing phase. It will subsequently be tested by some NCPs prior to implementation in the first quarter of 2016.

The list of subjects for 2016 was given, including programmes continuing from 2015, those entering second phases of existing contracts and new programmes. For programmes entering a second phase, Chafea explained that assessment meetings had taken place in October and November 2015, with conclusion of contracts planned for December, kick-off meetings for January and February and the start of training from April. For new programmes, publication of calls is scheduled for late-2015, with a view to organising kick-off meetings by summer 2016 and starting activities in the autumn.

In terms of activity from 2017 onwards, a new planning cycle is to be implemented which will simplify execution of the different phases of BTSF activity and fit better with the principle of annual budgets. Consultations on training subjects started in September 2015. Around 60 suggestions had been received from 17 Member States and definition of priorities had begun, with adoption of a work programme and financing decision planned for February 2016.

Chafea organises information day on new BTSF calls for tender

Chafea held an information day on the new calls for tender for BTSF training programmes starting from 2016. It ran from 9.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesday 15 December 2015 at the Hotel Marriott Renaissance in Brussels.

The event was attended by representatives of prospective contractors and enabled them to get detailed explanations of the programmes covered by the calls. They also had the chance to ask questions on technical specifications and contractual obligations, as well as a range of other technical and operational matters.



The aim of the information day was to help ensure that good quality offers for training implementation are received from the widest possible selection of operators combining high-level expertise on EU legislation relevant to BTSF with strong international logistical capabilities. These are essential elements for the successful organisation of training activities across the EU.

A general session on BTSF policy and strategy took place during the morning. This began with a welcome and introduction from both Chafea and DG SANTE. The DG then outlined the objectives of BTSF and the training perspectives for 2016. Following this, a question and answer session allowed participants to get further information and clarification on the issues covered.



After a buffet lunch, the afternoon was taken up with a special session on BTSF implementation. Chafea gave participants details about the calls and new elements introduced in the 2015 procurement procedures, before explaining the submission form for tenders and the BTSF database in which information on training contracts is stored.

Further presentations from Chafea during the session focused on reporting and payment procedures, including reimbursable payments and time lines for payments. The day concluded with a second question and answer session.

'The new standardised application system is a very good thing even though we are still fine tuning it'



Svenja Sickert of the German Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL) is her country's BTSF National Contact Point (NCP). She spoke to us about the main challenges of this role.

What challenges do you face in your role as German NCP?

In terms of population, Germany is the largest EU Member State and this is reflected in the size of the BTSF target audience. In addition to that, the number of German participants has risen considerably. We had about seven times as many participants in 2015 as in 2008, which partly results from the expansion of BTSF in general and the introduction of e-learning in 2014. Having more potential participants often means that we need more time to identify the right people for each course. Added to this is the fact that Germany is a federal republic in which the individual states have a lot of responsibility for issues of relevance to BTSF. More coordination is therefore needed with state administrations than might be the case in more centralised countries. This can add to the workload and lengthen the selection process. You also have to factor in the fact that BTSF is now a well-recognised and highly-regarded name and there is a lot of demand to take part in its activities.

Does language also present a challenge?

A lot of the traditional workshops are held in English, and while many of our national- and state-level staff speak and understand this language well, there can be instances where a language barrier exists. However, BTSF has made great strides in this direction. Firstly, in the area of e-learning, language is not a problem for German speakers as the modules are available in our mother tongue. In addition, for a number of training programmes, courses have been held in German which obviously eliminates any language issues. But still, demand for courses in German far outstrips what is currently on offer. I often bring this issue up with the Commission at the BTSF expert group meetings in Brussels and they try to provide as many German training courses as possible, which we very much appreciate.

How do you view the new application system?

Very positively. Before, information from contractors on upcoming courses came in different formats and at different times. This could often make things harder to follow and meant a lot of extra work for the NCPs. The new standardised application system is a very good thing even though we are still fine tuning it. It is also a great joint success for all of the NCPs who worked together on it and moved things forward. Contractors' invitation letters and participant application forms now follow a set format which makes relevant information easier to find. Nevertheless, in practice, it is natural that issues arise and adjustments still need to be made.

Do you face any problems with the training subjects?

I wouldn't say that there are problems. Every country is different and the issues that they face also differ. Some subjects are of greater relevance to German participants than others. I'm sure that other NCPs would say the same. In any aspect of work, improvements can be made and we try to get as much feedback as possible from participants and pass this on to Chafea. BTSF caters for participants from all EU Member States as well as a lot of non-EU countries and has to ensure that the courses are as relevant as possible for everyone. We understand that it is not always feasible to make all of the adjustments that our participants suggest. In the same way, new subjects are introduced to BTSF every year and we often have proposals for subjects which we would like to see included. However, it is not possible to cover every subject and the feedback shows that our participants are very happy with the training that is on offer.

What is your opinion of the cooperation which takes place through the BTSF expert group?

The cooperation within the expert group is very important for me as NCP. The regular meetings in Brussels allow me to speak to Chafea and the European Commission face to face about the issues which I face and any points raised by German BTSF participants in their correspondence with me. It also provides a good opportunity to meet and speak with NCPs from other countries to share experience and views on our work. Additionally, we get in-depth information about the work done on BTSF behind the scenes which we maybe don't see in our day-to-day tasks but which is certainly very relevant to us. Aside from the meetings, the existence of the expert group ensures that we can stay in touch with one another and can bring any problems to the attention of Chafea quickly.

Regarding your own background, how long have you worked for the German Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL) and what does your work entail, aside from BTSF matters?

I have been working for the BVL for a year and a half and I have been the NCP for BTSF throughout that time. At the BVL I work in the Legal and International Affairs unit and have equal responsibility for both of these issues. Legal affairs can involve everything from small litigation matters to major court cases in the food safety area. Within international affairs, I am in charge of various European projects implemented by the BVL such as twinning initiatives, TAIEX and EuropeAid programmes. In addition, I coordinate international and European relations with

other states and their authorities working in the same area as the BVL.

What did you do professionally and academically before you joined the BVL?

I studied law and specialised in European and international economic and legal relations. Working in the BVL Legal and International affairs unit therefore very much corresponds to what I aimed for as a profession. Before I joined the BVL, I worked for an international law firm in Cologne mainly doing corporate law and consultations with start-up companies. From my studies and my legal clerkship I gained a lot of experience studying and working abroad, for example studying in the USA and in Spain for a year each and working in a law firm in the USA and Peru and at the German Embassy in Australia. These are the experiences on which I draw in my work in the international area.