

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1997](#): Introduce mandatory braille labelling for food products sold in Scotland, lodged by Fiona McDonald on behalf of Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce new legal requirements on retailers to provide braille labelling on food products detailing the name of the item, and the item's 'use by' or 'sell by date.'

Food labelling legislation

The majority of food labelling law which applies in Scotland originally stems from European Union legislation. After the UK's departure from the EU, the UK and Scottish Governments undertook legislative work to ensure that the existing law remained operational.

[Food Standards Scotland \(FSS\) has responsibility for the policies surrounding food labelling](#) in Scotland; however, there are certain related elements that are reserved. This includes, e.g. weights and measures and price marking. Food Standards Scotland work closely with policy officials across the UK.

While there is already some variation in food labelling policy approaches between UK nations (where divergence within individual nations was permitted through EU Directives and Regulations), there is also a history of collaboration in this policy area. For example, the UK nations collectively launched the front-of-pack nutrition labelling scheme currently in place that uses red, amber and green to inform consumers about what they are eating.

The [Food Compositional Standards and Labelling Framework](#) sets out EU directive-derived legislation and the processes that may be used to propose new legislation in the food compositional standards and labelling standards policy area.

This common framework agreement states that collaborative working is part of the proposed approach, and the framework describes governance structures for discussing and managing the impact of any proposed policy changes made by one or more governments for the whole of the UK. A [SPICe briefing on the common framework](#) goes into detail about how this collaboration is expected to work.

Braille

Braille is a tactile reading and writing system that has been used for 200 years by blind and visually impaired people. It uses a system of 6 dots to represent alphabetic and numerical symbols and also includes musical, mathematical and scientific symbols.

It is not itself a language, rather there are versions of braille for the majority of world languages. In Scotland, the Unified English Braille (UEB) code is used.

For those who learn to use braille, it is not only used to transcribe printed communications such as books but can also be found on a variety of other items including medication, lift keypads and door signs.

Technology such as electronic braille notetakers and refreshable braille displays also enable blind and visually impaired people who know braille to browse the internet, as well as save and edit documents.

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) undertook [a survey called My Voice](#) which asked blind and partially sighted people about their access to information. They found that nine out of ten blind and partially sighted people said that information on medication or food packaging was quite difficult or impossible to read.

The survey also showed that around seven per cent of people who are registered blind or partially sighted use braille.

Scottish Parliament Action

In May 2022, Stuart McMillan, MSP submitted a written question [S6W-08703](#) asking if the Scottish Government had considered introducing mandatory braille labelling on food products. The answer states that:

“While there is no timescale at present, in due course, the food labelling legislation will be subject to review, which is likely to be a significant task and will need to be informed by EU developments on food information. During the review process consideration will be given to which areas and policy approaches are appropriate for Scotland and in a GB context this will also include England and Wales. Policy considerations are expected to include mandatory braille labelling and/or how the use of barcoded food information and new technology could help in this area.”

Motion [S6M-07391](#) was lodged on 5 January 2023 by John Mason MSP celebrating World Braille Day, which honours the birth of Braille’s inventor, Louis Braille, who was born on 4 January 1809.

Laura Haley
Researcher
26/01/2023

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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