# Operational Modernisation Programme Update

FSA BC 24/06/07 - Report by Junior Johnson and Richard Wynn-Davies

## 1 Background

1.1 The Operational Modernisation Programme was established following the closure of the Operational Transformation Programme (OTP) in January 2023. It is a Tier 2 FSA programme, led by Junior Johnson as SRO. The programme encompasses change projects with a medium level of complexity in terms of risk, cost, and stakeholder engagement. Portfolio Board oversight is not provided and is instead delegated to the SRO. Change Control Board has been established to oversee all Operations change activity and makes decisions on priorities and use of Operations resources. The previous update on the programme to Business Committee took place in June 2023.

1.2 The Business Committee is asked to:

- note the work completed under the Programme since June 2023.
- note the competing change priorities across Operations delivery and associated resource constraints.
- comment on the key risks, dependencies, and next steps.

## 2 Introduction

2.1 The Operational Modernisation Programme focuses on improvements to the way Official Controls are delivered through the introduction of technology and digital capability, streamlining processes, and improving the quality of data. The overarching purpose of the programme is to ease administrative burdens on FSA staff and support the FSA in being a modern regulator.

2.2 The programme has several key projects underway that aim to deliver improvements in the areas of data capability (quality and accuracy of data), the introduction of digital services and use of remote technology. The programme has delivered approximately 80% of its 23/24 milestones, including:

- delivery of remote technology services for follow-up audits
- completion of several phases of live projects outlined in this paper.
- in depth stakeholder engagement and change management activity within Operations, which has improved as a result of the implementation of operational wide change board.

## 3 Wider Operational Context

3.1 Whilst progress within the Modernisation Programme has been positive, our ability to move at significantly greater pace has been restricted by the overall volume of Operational change delivery and capacity within supporting functions. Much of the work within the Operations change

portfolio is being delivered by the same resource within Operations and enabling functions such as Openness, Data and Digital (ODD).

3.2 The Veterinary Resourcing and the Risk and Crisis Management Programmes are the other two major Change programmes within the operational portfolio, and alongside these there are 27 other change initiatives currently being worked on (please see Annex 1).

# 4 Operational Modernisation Projects: Evidence and Discussion

4.1 **Improving the accuracy and efficiency of inspection data collection**

4.2 Background: Two separate internal audits into data quality highlighted that many of the current tools/processes used in meat plants to gather ante and post-mortem inspection results are outdated, prone to error and difficult to validate, and where modern FBO systems are used, there is no timely method for automatically transferring that data into FSA systems. This information is used by FSA, FBOs and livestock producers/vets to assess performance, monitor trends and take action to ensure ongoing compliance in both food production and animal health and welfare.

4.3 Benefits: The initial phase of this work is focusing on providing a flow of inspection data between FBO and FSA systems. This will remove the need for manual data input by meat hygiene inspectors (MHIs) following inspection activity. It will also improve data accuracy by removing errors associated with re-keying data.

4.4 The second phase of the project will look to utilise this electronic interface to support the use of alternative devices for smaller plants who operate without digital in-house data capture systems.

4.5 Progress: User research with industry demonstrated a general appetite to improve data flow and integration if it could be done at reasonable cost. A proof-of-concept technical solution was completed, and testing is underway with Dunbia. This is shown to have been partially successful to date, with some technical issues remaining to be resolved.

4.6 Risks: The key risk relates to cost implications in the adoption and implementation of the new data transfer mechanisms by FBOs. Early conversations with FBOs have indicated a willingness to engage as estimated costs are not deemed prohibitive.

4.7 Next Steps: Once further testing and evaluation has concluded in Q1, that demonstrates effective connectivity and exchange, an exercise to validate the data will be undertaken by MHIs in Dunbia over Q2. This will be followed by implementation into live operations with Dunbia. Subject to further expansion of testing we plan to achieve circa 60% of throughput across the 35 biggest plants. We also plan to commence phase 2 of the project to begin a proof of concept for the introduction of devices in the smaller plants by the end of the financial year (subject to prioritisation).

# 5 Digital Services

### 5.1 FBO Account and Data Access

5.2 Background: FBOs currently receive (live) manual notifications of non-compliances and enforcement activities, via the physical day book on site, but are not able to view a digital “real-time” summary of all recent enforcement activity. In response, the programme is developing an online FBO account that will share enforcement and contravention data.

5.3 Benefits: Sharing real-time contravention data with FBOs in a timely manner will ensure easier access to their own plant-specific information. This should lead to more responsive decision making, resulting in quicker remedial action with industry to improve relationships, compliance and food safety. This will particularly benefit larger FBO groups, who have multiple plants, enabling them to compare performance and take appropriate action(s) across multiple sites.

5.4 Progress: We have worked closely with industry to map current processes, define the business and technical requirements and complete options analysis to select the preferred FBO account solution. Two phases were completed in April 2024, one looking at operational and technical data capture processes and a second looking at the building of an FBO account solution, reviewing the requirements and assessing the options available.

5.5 Risks: The complexity of historical processes and how contravention data is stored has led to delays in the project to date. Ways of working need to be simplified further to best support the technical solution.

3.3 Next Steps: The technical solution for FBO account access will now be built during Q2. The intention is that this solution, in conjunction with relevant operational processes, will be tested, and subsequently made available to all FBOs over the remainder of the financial year.

### 5.6 Digital Audit and Inspections

5.7 Background: The manual way in which audits and inspections are conducted has evolved in a fragmented way over the years. This has led to inconsistencies in how information is gathered and used across the meat, dairy and wine establishments we inspect. Introducing technology and digital solutions to collate information and generate reports will improve consistency, job satisfaction, and save processing time.

5.8 Benefits: We anticipate that the solution will provide additional time savings through automated workflow and better usability as well as compliance benefits through focusing inspection activity on high-risk production premises. Introducing a digital audit and inspection solutions will also support the FSA compliance framework and strategic objective of being risk based and proportionate. The updated framework will be intelligence led and improve the targeting of inspections and address the data security concerns with the current system.

5.9 Progress: During 2023/24 discovery activity was undertaken to and identified dairy inspections as the most urgent area to address.

5.10 Next Steps: The delivery phase will begin in May by defining the scope of the new data collection model with the build and subsequent implementation of a new digital solution during Q2 -3. If capacity and priorities allow, the intention is to then move onto commencing similar work for audits/unannounced inspections.

# 6 Remote Assessment Technology

### 6.1 Remote Technology

6.2 Background: Remote Technology has been in use by veterinary auditors since its launch in 2021. Current levels of usage are creating approximately 0.5FTE additional auditor capacity, with 20% of partial audits now done remotely.

6.3 Benefits: The wider application of remote technology will expand the benefits already seen with the Vet Audit team. This will include reduced processing times, quicker evidence-based decision making, savings in relation to time and fuel costs associated with on-site visits and

environmental savings benefits associated with reduced carbon footprint because of less frequent travel. It also supports the FSA strategic objective of being risk-based and proportionate in our regulatory activity, by reducing the burden on FBOs where we can.

6.4 Progress: In October 2023, following a full competitive tender, TEXO were secured as a long-term partner to supply remote assessment technology, which has provided improved connectivity, better graphics, and wider functionality than the previous software. The improved functionality is now being trialled with the Dairy Team to assess the extent to which it can support process improvements in their day-to-day activity.

6.5 Risks: There have been some issues in terms of uptake in certain areas due to connectivity issues (poor wi-fi/mobile data in plant) and some FBOs unwilling to use the technology and requesting an in-person visit instead. Work is ongoing to provide support and guidance to FBOs, via our auditors, to reduce levels of resistance.

6.6 Next Steps: Whilst optimising usage within the audit process, we will continue to identify how the technology can be most effectively deployed into other inspection processes (outlined above). Evaluation of the Dairy trial will take place in Q2 and trials for using the technology for Official Auxiliary training will start in Q2 with evaluation in Q3.

# 7 Risk Based Intervention

### 7.1 Risk Based Assessment (RBA)

7.2 Background: An AI-based model was tested in 2022, but proved to be overly complex and difficult to explain to FBOs so was abandoned last year in favour of a simplified tool. This will allow FSA to objectively assess risk and more effectively support and challenge FBOs, to ‘do the right thing’ and remain compliant.

7.3 Benefits: The tool will provide an objective risk-based system for Field Veterinary colleagues to help plan and prioritise their visits. This project supports the FSA strategic objective of being risk based and proportionate in our regulatory activity and allows us to be more effective in how we deploy limited veterinary resources. The tool also provides an evidence-based methodology of targeting plants, For audit interventions. Progress: The tool has been developed using data from poultry plants initially. A model has been developed that incorporates a number of data sources to (e.g. audit results, enforcement activity, animal welfare and prosecution information) that auditors can explain to FBOs, which is an advantage on the previous tool.

7.4 Risk: Many of our operational intervention processes are driven by FBO performance and a level of data and intelligence and although this brings all the data into one tool there is a challenge around buy-in from veterinary colleagues. There are also limited activities for which we can use this approach until current regulations are reformed allowing a more varied approach to how official controls are performed in plant, at which point we could envisage using this approach to inform daily physical presence and inspection in plants. In the meantime, this data approach is extremely useful, and this alongside other indicators provides assurance of FBO compliance to the Operations Leadership team.

7.5 Next Steps: The RBA tool will be piloted in Field Operations alongside existing tools they use to establish a control group comparator. This will start in Q1 and be evaluated by Q3.

# 8 Cross Government Data Improvements

### 8.1 Livestock Information Transformation Programme (LITP)

8.2 Background: The DEFRA-led Livestock Information Transformation Programme (LITP) is a joint government-industry scheme set up to create a single system of registration and tracing movements for livestock in England and Wales. This will replace three existing systems used for sheep, cattle and pigs. The initial focus is on cattle. The new system will be used to record and transfer Food Chain Information (FCI) which is used in plant by FSA Official Veterinarians (OVs) to ensure that animals are fit for slaughter and to enter the food chain. Currently all FCI is transmitted by paper but as the LITP solution is rolled out, this information will be in digital format and FSA needs to be ready for this change.

8.3 The Operational Modernisation Programme continues to coordinate FSA involvement in the LITP to ensure that the data access requirements of FSA staff in plant are delivered as part of the overall digital solution. LITP provided an initial demonstration of the Programme Minimal Viable Product (MVP) roadmap in November 2023 to provide initial assurances that FSA requirements are recognised and are being addressed in the initial service offering.

8.4 Benefits: The electronic transmission of Food Chain Information (such as age/breed/body weight data) digitally rather than via paper-based processes will improve data accuracy for DEFRA and FSA, reduce transcription errors and loss of paper records, as well as speeding up access to the data as part of the overall end-to-end traceability process.

8.5 Risks: Outside the overall programme risks being managed by the LITP within DEFRA, the main delivery risk to FSA is in ensuring that in-plant Official Veterinarians (OVs) continue to have timely access to accurate FCI once the information shifts from the clerical to the digital channel. This risk is being managed through ongoing engagement with the LITP programme.

8.6 Next Steps: The Minimum Viable Product (MVP) has been delayed from October 2024 until Autumn 2025 due to internal RPA/DEFRA delays). In preparation, FSA will work with LITP to prepare for implementation and ensuring that Official Veterinarians (OVs) working with FBOs have the required tools and training to be able to access the required FCI in digital format prior to accepting animals for slaughter.

# 9 Conclusions

9.1 The Operational Modernisation Team is progressing the work that was outlined to the Business Committee in June 2023 and is ensuring that new change management governance controls, overseen by the Operations Change Control Board, are embedded throughout the Operations Directorate.

9.2 Whilst positive progress is being in terms of project progression (80% of 2023/24 milestones achieved) and stakeholder engagement, overall pace and scope of modernisation activity has been constrained by resources, capacity, and capability both within Operations and other FSA enabling functions such as our Digital and Data teams. This has meant that we have not been able to make as much progress, as quickly, as initially intended. This will continue to be a challenge as we move forward, with competing change priorities across Operations (and beyond) and strict restrictions on headcount.

9.3 Operations plan to undertake a reassessment of current change delivery priorities to ensure we have resources assigned appropriately to our most pressing needs, for example should the FSADOC retender lead to the need to transition to a multi-supplier model. This in turn may impact the planned work on our live modernisation projects.

9.4 The Business Committee is asked to:

- note the work completed under the Programme since June 2023.

- note the competing change priorities across Operations delivery and associated resource constraints.
- comment on the key risks, dependencies, and next steps.

# Annex 1

- For the full breakdown of all change initiatives within Operations, please find attached the Change Log, which is reviewed monthly.
- As referenced in 2.1, some of the wider significant pieces of work are:
- the restructure of our veterinary technical portfolios to ensure we are focusing resources in supporting front line colleagues and industry in dealing with the most pressing and impactful operational technical issues to improve compliance and food safety and support trade.
- establishing our new Operational Excellence function, a new Agency capability that will enable us to improve analysis, performance, planning and risk management within Operations, making us more productive and effective in delivering official controls and other corporate objectives.
- the work to secure PACE powers for the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) so that we can independently investigate serious food crimes without always relying on other law enforcement partners.
- a retender under NFCU to secure a new provider of digital forensics capability, a key tool for investigating serious food crimes.
- the work required to respond to the recent Home Office changes to salaries for overseas workers and the impacts on resourcing and the FSADOC contract so that we can address the risks these pose to our ability to be able to deliver full official controls.
- ongoing activity to streamline the allocation and management of incidents along with improved storage and management of incident related data so that we can better prioritise, improve response times and more effectively address food safety risks.

Other examples include work on continuous improvement such as reporting and use of data to inform our interventions, the ongoing work with Defra on providing additional support to the small abattoir sector, changes to the usability and accessibility of the Manual of Official Controls and the progression of multiple initiatives with industry as part of our Partnership Working Group such as the collection, storage and governance of  visual data (photo/video), implementation of vet attestations to support export activity and the implementation of Qurbani mitigations to support trade during the festival whilst maintaining food safety.