

FSA and Official Controls: Annex B Interview topic guide

Respondent introductions

- Name, what organisation they work for, what their role is, how long they've done it for, any experience of working in other plants/ environments.
- What's the size of the organisation? How many employees?
- [Meat sector only] What is your businesses' current Official controls compliance rating?
[Good / Generally satisfactory / Improvement necessary / Urgent Improvement necessary]
- When was your last inspection?
- Key challenges and top priorities for your business currently.

Spontaneous views of the FSA (5 mins)

Purpose: to ascertain unprompted views of the FSA and some benchmarking 'scores'

For Northern Ireland Meat and Dairy sector: In Northern Ireland, some of these Official Controls are delivered by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) on behalf of the Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland (FSANI) including meat hygiene official controls. Depending on the subject matter businesses receive communications from FSANI as well as from DAERA, where relevant please only consider your communications with the FSANI.

- how would you rate your overall experience of working with the FSA: would you say it was very good, good, average, poor or very poor?
- why this score?
- what 3 words would you use to sum up your experience of working with the FSA?
- can you explain why you said this?

Moderator to explain that we'll pick up on these responses later in discussions, but before then...

- what is your understanding of what the FSA's role and purpose is?
- And what do you understand their remit is, i.e. the range of activities they are involved in?
- what services does the FSA provide?
- how do you think the FSA funds these activities?
- what interaction do you have with the FSA...
- on a regular/ ongoing basis? Who with? For what purpose? Do you have a continual presence of FSA staff working on-site?
- on an ad hoc/ occasional basis? Who with? What?
- does your business have an FSA account manager, or someone who is assigned to all dealings with the FSA? If so, what advantages or disadvantages do you think this brings to your business?

Attitudes towards the FSA (10 mins)

Purpose: to explore spontaneous views in greater depth and understand reasons for their views.

- overall, to what extent do you value the FSA and its role generally, i.e. in ensuring people can trust that the food they buy and eat is safe and is what it says it is?
- to what extent do you value the FSA and the role it plays in your business?
- overall?
- is there any difference between the different services you receive – any you value more/less? Why?
- how has this changed over time?
- what difference, if any, is there between your views of the FSA as an organisation and your views of the individuals you work with?
- what does your experience of working with the FSA depend on – what makes it better or worse? **Probe:** around certain times of day / year; level of business; level of financial pressure; individuals you are working with; service provided etc.
- how has the relationship changed over time, if at all?

Experiences of FSA (15 mins)

Purpose: to explore FBO's experiences the FSA's processes, and where these experiences work well or need improvement

I'm going to read out a list of different processes that the FSA delivers [NI: directly or that DAERA deliver on behalf of the FSA], and for each, I'd like to find out if you've experienced them, and if so, how you would rate your satisfaction with the process: would you say you are very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?

Meat

- approval of new establishments/premises
- re-approval following a change of activities
- unannounced visits
- enforcement of FSA regulations
- inspections including for animal welfare [Animal welfare not in NI]
- exports to new markets [ENGLAND AND WALES]
- the FSA Team including Official Vet [England and Wales]/ DAERA Official Vets and official auxiliaries [NI]
- audits
- health and safety advice [England and Wales]

Wine

- new wine business registration visits
- the Food standards Agency wine inspections team
- enforcement
- inspections

Dairy

- approval of new establishments/premises
- re-approval following a change of activities
- unannounced visits
- enforcement of FSA regulations

- the FSA team
- inspections including for animal welfare [Animal welfare not in NI]

Shellfish

- classification reviews
- new area applications
- **[England only]** Sanitary surveys and reviews
- action state reports [England]/ Outwith investigatory emails [NI]
- consultation

For each you have experience of...(NB if running out of time focus on the services with most dissatisfaction)

- why did you give it that rating?
- how does it compare to other interactions you have (or have had) with FSA?
- were you charged for the process? Do you know how much? How fair was the charge, in your view?
- how much do you feel you know about how the FSA makes decisions in these cases? What makes it clear/ unclear?
- what did you do as a result of the process?
- anything you've changed as a result?
- following an audit [meat]/ hygiene inspection [dairy/ wine] [not relevant for shellfish]– do you use the audit scores in your business? What impact do audit scores have on their business?
- what could FSA do differently to improve this experience or process?

Overall, how consistent would you say the FSA is in implementing these processes?

- to what extent does it change... depending on who carries out the process? ...depending on when it was carried out (i.e. has the approach changed over time?)?

How easy or difficult is it to comply with FSA guidelines and requirements? Overall, would you say it was very easy, quite easy, neither easy nor difficult, difficult, or very difficult?

- how easy is it to understand...
- what is required?
- what you need to do to comply?
- how you can evidence compliance?
- are there any areas where you're not compliant? If so, what stops you complying?
- what could FSA do to make compliance easier?

FSA Communications (5 mins)

Purpose: to understand the extent to which FSA comms meet the needs of FBOs

What are the different ways in which FSA communicates with you as a business (Spontaneous, then probe: face-to-face, email, newsletters/ magazines, posters, phone calls, events, ad campaigns)?

How satisfied are you with the FSA's communication with you overall: would you say you are very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?

What types of communication from the FSA works best for you? What do you find... most useful? ...Most engaging?

? Content – Can you give me examples of what you read/ engage with?

? Channels – email? Web pages? Social media updates? Face-to-face

? Frequency?

To what extent do you use FSA comms in your own comms / marketing e.g. do you highlight good audit scores?

How do FSA comms compare with comms from other organisations you deal with?

- what else do you read/ use/ interact with? Which organisations' views do they value / look to?
- what can others learn from the FSA communications? What can FSA learn from other organisation's communications?

EU exit, COVID-19 and OTP (5-10 mins)

Purpose: to understand the extent to which FSA response to COVID-19 and EU exit impacted businesses, as well as level of knowledge of OTP.

Businesses asked these questions only if in survey they say they were affected by COVID/EU Exit.

Covid-19

[In the survey you mentioned that COVID 19 had impacted your organisation's ability to comply with FSA regulations and made them -a lot easier/ slightly easier/ neither easier nor difficult/ slightly more difficult / a lot more difficult].

- could you tell me a bit more about how COVID-19 has impacted your organisation?
- in what way, if at all, did the FSA support your organisation during the restrictions brought in as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic? How clear were their communications? How did this help your organisation?

EU Exit

[In the survey you mentioned that UK's exit from the EU had a large impact/ a small impact/ no impact on your business]

- could you tell me a bit more about how the UK's exit from the EU has impacted your business?
- in what way, if at all, did the FSA support your organisation during and since the UK's exit from the EU? How clear were their communications? How did this help your organisation?

[Ask All] Operational Transformation Programme

Can you tell me in your own words what you know about the Operational Transformation Programme, and what impact this will have for your business?

Interviewer then read out:

The Operational Transformation Programme (OTP) is designed to modernise the way the FSA delivers regulatory activities in the meat, dairy and wine sector.

The aim is to move towards a more proportionate risk and evidence-based approach to regulation. The FSA are exploring introducing new technologies in the audit, inspections and approvals processes, the potential to take a more risk-based approach to how the FSA utilises its resources and the potential to use a different regulatory approach following changes to our current legislation.

- [Heard of OTP:] Have you had any engagement with the FSA directly or via a trade association about the OTP? What did this entail? How clear were these communications?
- do you think the OTP initiatives will make it easier or more difficult to comply with FSA regulations? Why do you say that?
- [If not heard of OTP ask:] In principle how does that sound to you? Do you have any concerns?

Looking to the future and summing up (5 mins)

Purpose: to summarise the points made and get a sense of FBOs' priorities

- what are the three things the FSA does best? What three things could it most improve on?
- what's the one thing you'd change / one service you'd abolish?
- do you have any other thoughts or comments on the topics we've discussed?

Thanks, final admin and close (2 mins)

Check consents for including anonymous quotes in reporting and recontacting in future.