

Achieving Business Compliance (ABC) programme

The Achieving Business Compliance (ABC) programme's approach to modernising the way food businesses are regulated in England, Wales and Northern Ireland by the Food Standards Agency and local authorities.

The food landscape has changed dramatically in the three decades since the current regulatory system was introduced. Although regulation has continued to evolve, it has not kept pace with the significant changes in the food industry.

Today, 95% of our groceries come from 10 large supermarkets. Online food sales have substantially increased, with online food sales almost doubling in the last 5 years. In addition, businesses have more data available.

For some parts of the food sector, there may be more effective ways to make sure businesses comply with the rules than our current regulatory model, which is based heavily on in-person and regular inspection of food business premises by local authorities.

The ABC programme was set up in January 2020 to make sure consumers continue to have food they can trust in the future.

The ABC programme will develop a set of smarter regulatory approaches which:

- make it easier for businesses to provide safe and trusted food for consumers
- target regulatory resources at the areas which pose the greatest risk
- improve compliance across the system by working with and through others, including regulatory partners and influential businesses

Areas of work for the programme

Within the ABC Programme there are three key workstreams:

Modernising the delivery of local authority regulation

This workstream aims to reform the way in which local authorities deliver food standards controls and food hygiene controls, so that they can focus their time and expertise where it adds the most value and best protects consumers.

We are developing new approaches that will better evaluate the level of risk posed by an individual food business and will target available resource to the areas of greatest risk in the food supply chain.

We want to ensure regulatory activity is focused on businesses who fail to meet their obligations under food law and recognises those that strive to achieve compliance.

We are carrying out research to better understand some of the challenges faced by local authorities and how we can address these through the programme.

We are engaging with local authorities extensively during this process and are using their valuable feedback and insight to help shape this approach.

Testing new approaches to regulation

This workstream consists of projects which aim to test out potential new approaches which could be used in future regulation, or drive compliance across the system.

Projects within this workstream include Enterprise Level Regulatory Approaches and the development of the Aggregator Food Safety Charter.

Enterprise level regulatory approaches - We will test potential new regulatory models for some large businesses that are compliant with regulation and influential in the food chain.

Starting with the big supermarkets, we will work with local authorities and primary authorities to develop an innovative approach that regulates the whole business as one, rather than as multiple small premise-based businesses.

This will help us understand what benefits could be gained, such as reducing the duplication of inspections while maintaining consumer safety.

Online food sales - Buying food online is now an established part of the food system through social media, online marketplaces and other digital platforms. The way we regulate food businesses must evolve and adapt to this rapidly changing environment.

A one-size-fits-all assurance model, based on in-person and regular inspection of food business premises, is no longer the most effective way to protect consumers. The ABC programme will explore what types of regulatory approach will be most suitable for different types of online food businesses, and how we can work with key platforms to positively influence compliance and improve consumer protection.

This involves drawing on direct industry knowledge and experience as to how their operational landscape is adapting and growing. This will inform our decisions and recommendations to ensure regulation remains relevant.

Designing the blueprint for the future regulatory assurance system

We are carrying out a piece of policy work on the future regulatory system. This work consists of some detailed mapping of the current system to identify where different approaches could be tested or opportunities for future legislative changes.

Delivery of the programme

The ABC programme is a long-term, agile programme of work that we expect to take around 5 years to deliver.

We will work with local authorities, businesses and other partners to understand the current food landscape and to make sure potential new regulatory approaches are carefully tested and embedded over time.

If you have any questions please [contact us for more information](#).

Enterprise Level Regulation (ELR) Proof of Concept (PoC) - Evaluation Report

Assurance models to assess regulatory compliance have not kept pace with significant changes (driven by multiple factors) across the food industry. Over recent years, the whole system has experienced significant shocks and disruption, and pressure on regulatory resources has increased, while the numbers of professionals available to deliver the assurance regime have been in decline.

Our aim is to make sure consumers continue to have food they can trust in the future.? So, in a rapidly evolving food system, we need to regulate in a smarter way to make sure that food is safe and is what it says it is and need to develop a set of regulatory approaches that will:?

- target available regulatory resources at the areas which pose the greatest risk?
- improve compliance across the whole system by working with and through others?
- make it easier for businesses to provide safe and trusted food to consumers?

In order to successfully develop a future model that is sustainable, it is critical to test any proposed new approaches to regulation, to fully understand the risks and benefits, and expose any unintended consequences.

The Large Retailer Proof of Concept trial, which ran from April 2023 to March 2024, allowed us to test this in a safe way (in a sandbox, alongside existing regulation) which minimised risks. It represented a major shift of focus away from premises level compliance checks, using the LR's food safety management data to assess confidence in their system, and ultimately assure compliance.

An independent evaluation of the trial was carried out and produced the following report.

PDF

[View Evaluation of the Enterprise Level Regulation \(ELR\) Proof of Concept \(PoC\): Final report as PDF\(Open in a new window\)](#) (1.38 MB)