

Value of FHRS Consumer Research: Chapter 1 Introduction and methodology

1.1. Background

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is responsible for food safety across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. As part of its work on the Achieving Business Compliance (ABC) programme, the FSA wanted to understand in more detail how Local Authorities (LAs), businesses and consumers feel about the current Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS). In addition, the FSA wanted to capture consumer views about potential changes to the regulatory approach. To this purpose, the FSA commissioned Ipsos UK to conduct qualitative research to explore consumers' views.

There were two research objectives for the consumer strand of this research:

1. Assess the value of the FHRS according to consumers.
2. Assess consumer views of possible areas of change in regulatory approach.

This report sets out the main findings from the consumer strand of the research. Alongside the evidence from the business and Local Authority research, the findings will help inform the work of the ABC programme in the future.

1.2. Methodology and sampling

Fieldwork was conducted between 9th February and 22nd February 2022, with participants from various locations across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The research with consumers consisted of two parts, reflecting the research objectives:

Part 1: Assessing the value of the FHRS

Four online workshops were conducted to explore consumers' attitudes towards the FHRS: Two workshops took place with participants located in England, and one each with participants located in Wales and Northern Ireland, reflecting the demographics of the UK population by nation. Each session ran for two hours.

Part 2: Assessing consumer views of possible areas of change in regulatory approach

The workshop groups were reconvened one week after the first session. In this second workshop, consumer views of hypothetical changes to current aspects of food regulation were explored. As such, this second workshop focused on possible changes to the wider regulatory approach to food hygiene and safety, not exclusively the FHRS.

Location of participants	Initial workshop	Reconvened workshop
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England	9 February 2022	16 February 2022
England	18 participants	18 participants
Wales	10 February 2022	17 February 2022
Wales	15 participants	14 participants
England	14 February 2022	22 February 2022
England	16 participants	16 participants
Northern Ireland	15 February 2022	22 February 2022
Northern Ireland	16 participants	16 participants
Total number of participants	65 participants	64 participants

Across the workshops, 64 participants took part in the research. To capture a broad range of views, each group brought together a mix of consumers across the following demographics:

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Working Status
- Socio-economic grade (SEG)

Across each workshop, one group had limited/ no awareness of the FHRS prior to the workshops. The remaining groups in each workshop included those who had said they knew a lot or knew a little about the FHRS. Annex 1 includes more information and details on the sampling approach and the makeup of the workshops.

The design and structure of the workshop sessions were informed by the key research objectives. The first session explored participants' spontaneous understanding of and expectations around the FHRS, before explaining to participants how the FHRS works in more detail, and how this applies to different kinds of businesses. The reconvened session focused on consumers' attitudes to potential changes to the food hygiene and safety regulatory approach as a whole. This second session began by gathering any further thoughts participants had on the FHRS from the first workshop. Participants were then shown six scenarios outlining possible changes to how food hygiene standards could be assessed more broadly.