

Chapter 4: Conclusions

Overall, attitudes often came down to whether participants felt the potential risks of the FDM could be mitigated. To support a change to the current Official Controls process, participants needed to believe it would lead to an increase in standards.

Those persuaded by the case for change who believed the FDM would maintain or improve standards, felt comfortable with the proposals. They could see the potential benefits of the FDM and described the reassurances they wanted in place to give them confidence in the new model. For example, these participants recognised that increasing the number of unannounced inspections and making performance scores visible to the public could lead to greater compliance and improved standards.

“I think having transparency [is my priority]. That’s the driver of everything else. If you are forced to be honest, transparent and open, then you’d have to drive for a standard. You wouldn’t want a poor standard published. Everything cascades from that point.” – **Reconvened workshop participant, England**

They maintained the importance of the independence of the FSA and saw opportunities to improve. For example, these participants emphasised the potential to make greater use of technology and existing FSA resources by tailoring their presence and sharing more data with industry. However, it was essential that steps were taken to ensure standards did not slip including maintaining the current levels of FSA presence in lower performing businesses and providing independent training to food business employees carrying out inspections in the future.

“To continue the work they’ve put in over the years and to make sure they don’t forget why they were set up. To make sure that the changes make it better, improvements rather than to go backwards or to step away. It’s to keep engagement and to use the technology to their benefit.” – **Reconvened workshop participant, Northern Ireland**

Some participants remained sceptical about the FDM after hearing the case for change and discussing the implications in greater depth. These participants were often concerned about the impact of the FSA not being present in all businesses. They worried about giving responsibility for checking carcasses to the industry and felt that businesses may not act in the consumer’s interest. As such, they argued the FDM could result in lower standards and wanted to maintain the current Official Controls process.

“My view hasn’t changed from the start. I don’t know if these changes are really needed. I’m worried about accountability. I worry about small businesses and large businesses saying this is the standard we need to reach to get things put through... There are no personal relationships anymore within the companies. I just don’t think it’s a better system.” - **Reconvened workshop participant, Northern Ireland**

Among this group, there was a degree of resistance to making changes that were not seen as necessary. They were concerned that this could put food safety at risk and worried about the implications to public health.

Low levels of awareness about meat processing and wider food regulation influenced participants’ views. As they became more familiar with the Official Controls process and had time to consider the FDM from different perspectives, they were able to articulate the reassurances they wanted in place under the new model. For many, this alleviated their initial scepticism as illustrated by

higher levels of support for the FDM at the end of the second workshop compared to the first. This highlights the importance of thinking carefully about how to communicate future changes to the Official Controls process given levels of existing knowledge among the public and a degree of scepticism towards current meat processing.