

Value of FHRs Business Research: Chapter 7

Conclusions

Many businesses across all three nations were positive about the value of FHRs. An important aspect of the value that the FHRs offered, was giving businesses an independent assessment of how well their business was complying with food safety and hygiene standards. The importance of this aspect of the FHRs was emphasised across small, medium, and large businesses of different types across all three nations.

Many businesses also felt that FHRs ratings had value for their customer engagement, helping to attract and retain customers. However, some businesses thought that the FHRs made little difference to their customers. These businesses described consumers as not paying attention to FHRs ratings or pointed to limited choice in their location as a reason consumers would continue to use their business even if it had a low FHRs rating.

Other aspects of values from the FHRs were mentioned less often but were important to some businesses. These included the role of the FHRs in insurance cover, using FHRs ratings as a marketing tool on social media, and FHRs ratings allowing businesses to trade through online aggregators.

Businesses wanted to see FHRs assessments happen at least as frequently as they do currently. Businesses linked frequent inspections to the value they attribute to the scheme and particularly FHRs ratings. Different experiences of inspection frequency seemed to shape businesses' specific views about how often inspections should happen.

Businesses were generally supportive of reduced inspection frequency based on compliance. They felt compliant businesses had proven themselves, and generally assumed standards would largely be maintained. However, a minority of businesses were sceptical about reduced inspection frequency, suggesting this could encourage businesses to drop their levels of compliance. Significant management or staff turnover were seen as reasons for having a new inspection, even among businesses who supported reduced inspection frequency based on compliance.

Views about reduced inspection frequency for compliant high risk businesses were largely similar to their general views on reduced inspection frequency based on compliance. However, a few businesses raised concerns about reduced inspection frequency for these businesses. They felt that changing the current approach to higher risk compliant businesses would undermine the role of the FHRs in protecting consumers.

Businesses of different sizes and types generally supported the mandatory display of FHRs ratings. In Wales and Northern Ireland, businesses supported continuing with mandatory display, and businesses in England wanted to see the introduction of mandatory display. Support for mandatory display was consistent across businesses with different FHRs ratings, including those that currently have low ratings.

Most businesses viewed the current FHRs as fair. Those who thought FHRs was fair linked this to the standardised nature of the scheme. They suggested that the consistent approach made it straightforward to understand what was needed to achieve a high score.

When discussing fairness, the most common issue raised by businesses was consistency. Large businesses described examples of inconsistency in ratings between nations and LAs that they felt did not reflect compliance in the premises. Some small and large businesses also highlighted concerns about inconsistency between individual inspectors.

Unannounced inspections were also discussed when considering the fairness of the FHRs. Overall, most businesses thought unannounced inspections were appropriate given the purpose of the FHRs, preventing businesses with generally poor compliance from preparing in advance. However, some businesses felt that unannounced inspections were unfair as the business could be visited on a 'bad day', resulting in a poor FHRs rating that did not reflect their usual practice.

Some businesses also raised paperwork as an aspect of the FHRs they thought was unfair. They were concerned that a business could have good levels of compliance with food hygiene standards, but then be penalised for poor paperwork. Some small businesses felt that the administrative burden made it difficult for small businesses to match the standards of larger businesses.

Overall, most businesses were content with the current FHRs system and found it hard to suggest improvements. Any suggestions for improvements linked to the concerns that businesses had raised previously: ensuring consistency, reducing the administrative burden, and improving consumer and business understanding of the FHRs. A few businesses also suggested a more collaborative relationship between regulators and businesses as a way to improve the effectiveness of the scheme.