

Local Authority Capacity and Capability:

Chapter 6 Recommendations for future focus

This Phase 1 research focused on discovery, aiming to support a more holistic understanding of barriers and facilitators to the recruitment and retention of suitably and appropriately qualified and experienced officers across EH and TS career pathways. The issues raised in this research are wide-reaching and are not all within the scope of the FSA's role and remit.

In Phase 2, the FSA will assess the findings and recommendations from participants to:

1. Identify which findings are for the FSA to address in its role as the Central Competent Authority. The FSA will then review any associated recommendations from interviewees and assess the cost and deliverability of these to take forward a project which will tackle the issues identified.
2. Act as a convenor and collaborator to bring stakeholders together to assess the findings and recommendations that do not sit within the FSA's remit and to encourage collaborative working that seeks to address these issues.
3. Identify which findings the FSA has no remit to change and make clear where these will not be taken forward.

1. Considering the wider ecosystem of regulated controls

The research has found that competing pressures within LA can contribute to a lack of allocated resources for official food and feed controls. The REA has found that LA services are having to adapt to resource constraints (Plume, 2018; SDPPW, 2021). To address this, participants suggested:

- **Greater engagement with other government departments and regulatory bodies** to support the resourcing of regulatory controls / official controls as a whole.
- Consideration of the extent that LAs are requiring **officers competent in food standards delivery to undertake additional training** to deliver food hygiene controls and the nature of the training delivered.
- **Promoting EH/TS careers and food and feed roles** in LAs.

The lack of awareness of EH and TS careers and food and feed roles in LAs was a consistent theme across stakeholder groups. To address this, participants suggested:

- **Promotion of EH and TS careers in schools and universities.** This was seen as a joint effort between professional bodies, education providers, LA regulatory teams, and the FSA.
- **Promotion of food and feed careers in LAs** to be led by the FSA and LA regulatory teams.
- **Collaboration across FSA and government department with regulatory responsibilities, including the LGA,** to ensure that the system of official controls as a whole is sustainable, regardless of specialism.
- **Collaboration across FSA and relevant education providers** to support promotion and access of students to relevant courses, and capture statistics on current and prospective students.

2. Leveraging existing experience in food

This research identified that previous experience in the food industry was a key driver for people joining the career pathway. This was also seen as an opportunity to:

- **Attract people from the food industry into food and feed roles within LAs** through promotional work targeting those who are looking for a career change.
- **Support students who have an interest in food and previous experience in the food industry** to consider a career in food and feed roles in LAs.

3. Supporting apprenticeships

Apprenticeships and apprenticeship degrees were perceived as a valuable way to address recruitment issues raised by stakeholders. Apprenticeships were viewed as an attractive option both for students and LAs, and benefits such as the Apprenticeship Levy was considered as a facilitator. However, the time and resources required to fully train an individual coming through this route was perceived as a barrier. In this context, stakeholders identified a need to:

- Position apprenticeships as a way to attract more people into relevant LA roles and engage a new generation of professionals.
- Support trainees coming through an apprenticeship pathway. To achieve this, LA managers suggest that the FSA needs to take a more strategic view of the overall funding position to ensure there are sufficient resources within LAs to support apprentices.

4. Flexible qualification routes

An important finding from this research was that stakeholders find the current qualification routes complex to navigate. These were also perceived as too rigid and onerous given the jobs they lead to, which was seen as a deterrent for people to complete them. Given the need to attract more people into relevant education pathways, stakeholders put forward recommendations to:

- **Simplify the education requirements and focus on training staff in specific competencies required to perform their roles.** For instance, it was suggested that qualifications should be offered by modules focusing on specific competencies which do not require people to invest a lot of time to get qualified.
- **Promote high quality CPD opportunities as a way to address competency gaps.** LA managers believed this should be championed by the FSA as part of their role as a national regulator.
- **Work with professional bodies and LA regulatory stakeholders** to ensure that individuals in the EH / TS pathways have a clear understanding of routes to qualification and progression through these careers.

5. Enhancing support and opportunities for early careers staff

A challenge raised by stakeholders was a perceived lack of support provided to early careers staff. This was seen as largely driven by insufficient resources and exacerbated by the lack of experienced officers to mentor new joiners. To ensure that early careers staff are better supported, stakeholders suggest to:

- **Provide training on the job.** From the perspective of LAs, having this opportunity was considered essential for the future of the profession, and a provision that would attract new

recruits.

- **Provide financial support to students, particularly regarding food and feed specialisation.** Stakeholders suggested that sponsoring students to take relevant professional qualifications could attract more people to LA roles. Some stakeholders suggest that the FSA should subsidise these qualifications.
- **Offer more trainee and graduate positions for students in LAs.** This recommendation was raised by Education providers.
- **Support the completion of food and feed specialisms.** This includes facilitating the completion of their portfolio and workplace experience requirement.

6. FSA's Competency Framework

This research identified challenges around understanding and using the FSA's Competency Framework, and particularly making judgments about whether current or potential staff are appropriately qualified to deliver official food and feed controls. Further research may be required to explore existing barriers and identify opportunities to improve how the Competency Framework works in practice. Other steps could include to:

- **Explore LA workforce understanding of the Competency Framework** and develop, through engagement with LAs, a more specific understanding of the barriers faced in practical implementation when authorising LA and contracted staff.
- Making the Competency Framework more **useable and accessible**.
- Consider **working with the CIEH and CTSI** to map the FSA Competency Framework against their professional frameworks to make it easier to use.
- Consider **working with education providers** to map "suitable" and "appropriate" qualifications to the Framework.
- Consider **using the Competency Framework to map a pathway through the professions**.
- **Map the FSA training offer to the Competency Framework** and consider doing the same with other partner training providers.
- **Regularly engage with LAs** to ensure that the requirements of the Competency Framework are clearly understood and that it responds to their needs.
- **Providing training** and consistency exercises for Lead Officers assessing competence.

7. Pay and job conditions

Some LA officers and managers raised pay and job conditions as a key challenge facing LAs. Given that this was an important element to address retention challenges, LAs officers and managers suggested:

- **Remove pay disparities between LAs and having more consistency across the profession.** This would support retention in individual LA teams.
- **Ensure pay is in line with the expertise and qualifications of staff.**
- **Ensure flexible work conditions.** This include allowing staff to work flexibly and remotely without having an impact on pay.

8. Value EH/TS professionals

This research also highlighted a need for LAs to value and support their regulatory workforce. LA managers, officers and former employees mentioned that there is a need to acknowledge the important work officers do to ensure public health and safety. The development of strategies to celebrate and value the achievements of the existing workforce could be the first step in this direction.