



**Social research
strategies to explore
trust in the food
system and its
regulator**



Food
Standards
Agency
food.gov.uk

We often look at things through the lens of trustworthiness

- The uncomfortable truth is that your average person has very little knowledge of the journey their food has taken, before it got to their kitchen or their plate.
- That disconnect breeds unease and distrust. Years spent building reputation and trust are undermined if someone, somewhere, in the food system getting it wrong.
- Our qualitative research consistently shows that the public worries that food production is so complex that it's impossible to know what to choose. They delegate responsibility to us to take care of their interests. We need to demonstrate that we deserve that trust (cf. O'Neill).
- For us, our basis in science, evidence and openness helps us deserve that trust – but to do so sometimes means communicating a level of honest uncertainty.

We engage regularly with consumers

- About three-quarters of consumers tell us that they trust the food they buy to be what it says it is (75%) and trust food in restaurants (74%). 69% of them trust the FSA to do its job. Of the 79% of people who say they know what we do, 72% trust us to tell the truth, and 60% trust that the industry is regulated fairly.
- Trust in whether the people producing food have the consumers' best interests at heart is much lower (41%)
- This has obvious implications for science, for policymakers and for Governments. It also has particular implications for food.

Trust is a complicated concept, feeling and action: definitions were complex, fluid and often seemingly contradictory

Trust is a:

Necessary evil – required to navigate the people, organisations and systems around us

Enjoyable part of being human – something that we want to do, that feels good

Vulnerability – a surrender of control

Source of strength – being supported, a problem shared

Decision – attempting to avoid risk

Instinct – something largely automatic, felt without deliberation

Personal feeling and behaviour – something I feel/do - or don't,

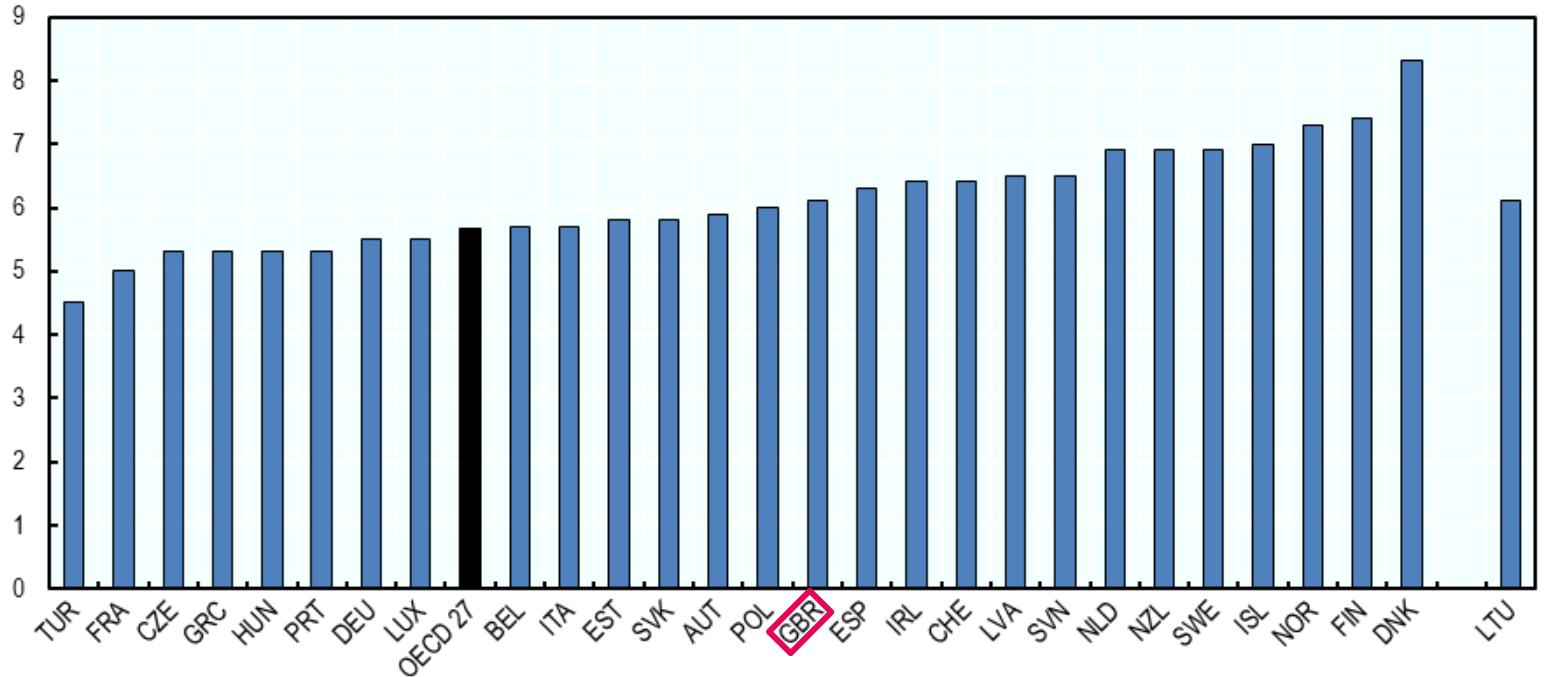
Relationship – a give and take between me/other

The current state of trust in food

- The narrative of ‘trust in crisis’ is not clearly underpinned by polling evidence as far as the UK is concerned.
- Generalised trust in the UK is slightly above the OECD and EU averages and persistent over time.
- The FSA is more trusted than the government more generally. Measures of trust in ‘government’ tend to show low and volatile trust.
- Regulators more trusted than the industry

Interpersonal trust

Mean average, on a scale from 0 (you do not trust any other person) to 10 (most people can be trusted), 2013



Source: [How's Life? 2017 Measuring Well-being](#) - © OECD 2017

Surveys are limited when it comes to measuring trust

Our Food Future 2015-6

- A literature review covering the evidence base exploring people's connection to the wider food system.
- Public dialogues in across the UK
- An event in London involving 200+ stakeholders from across the food system, with 2000+ people watching online



HOPEES AND FEARS?



Will we know more about our food?




Who will look out for peoples' needs?



Will we still have convenient food for modern life?



Will young people know how to cook?



Can technology make us healthier?



Will time and money limit healthy choices?

WHO SHOULD DO WHAT?

Help reduce waste at all stages of the food production journey and help educate consumers



INDUSTRY

Join up to develop strategy for safeguarding food supply, production and sustainability in the future



GOVERNMENT

Reduce waste, teach the next generation and consider changing their consumption habits



CONSUMERS

Start a conversation that informs better choices



MEDIA

WHAT PEOPLE WANT?



Food waste is reduced



Food is good quality



Good quality food is affordable



People have choice



People have a good understanding of food



Food is still social



Soil and land management in the UK is looked after



Investment in research for sustainable production



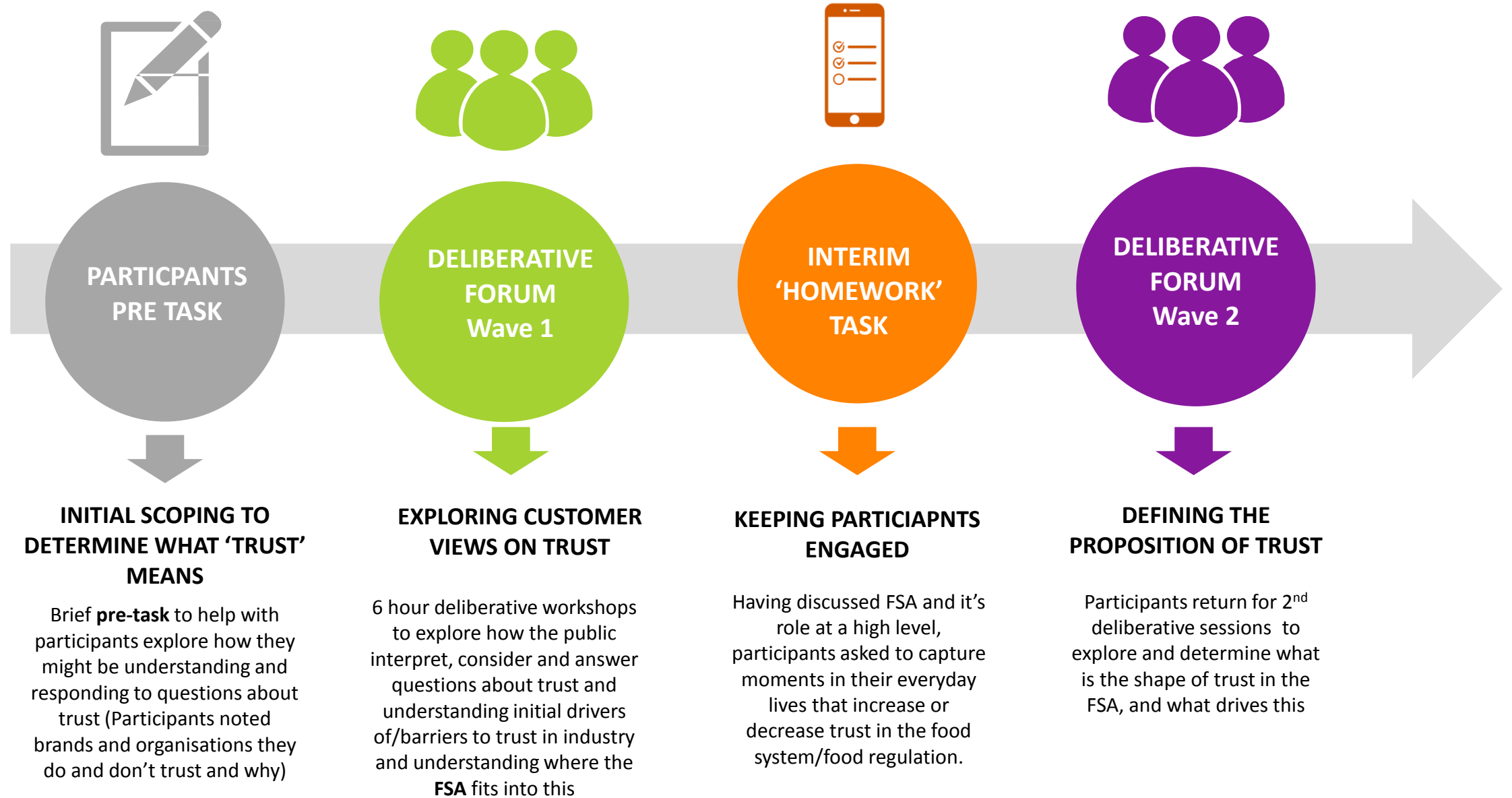
Increased transparency and data sharing by industry

Transparency and the food industry - 2017

- Qualitative research with the public exploring the gap between what people know, what they want to know, and their priorities for information.
- Participants were often surprised about the complexity of food issues and that some of their core assumptions about the UK food system were inaccurate. This realisation sparked concern and disappointment among many participants.
- Once aware of their knowledge gaps, participants saw the provision of transparent information as essential for making informed choices about food.
- Being able to exercise choice was important to participants because food met a range of their physical, cultural and emotional needs.

The Trust Project - 2018

- A rapid evidence assessment covering the drivers and barriers to trust in industry, the food system and in regulators in the modern age, including academic and grey literature
- Qualitative research – iterative focus groups or public dialogues – exploring with citizens the beliefs, barriers and drivers of their trust in food
- Analysis of these to produce a) a synthesis for consideration by the Exec and Board and b) a proposed corporate measures for the FSA
- New questions around trust in Food and You – our flagship biennial survey (in field now)
- Literature review and qualitative report published last week.



CONTEXT



How easily trust is given, gained and lost depends on context.

Sensitivity is much higher in some situations, and for some people

SOCIAL TRUST



Trust relies on a social assessment of intention: do you intend to do me well?

Without this belief, trust is difficult if not impossible!

COGNITIVE TRUST



Then, it's down to delivery.

Can you do what you said you would do for me?

Adapted from Lewis, J. D.; Weigert, A. 1985. Trust as a social reality, *Social Forces* 63(4): 967–985.

Consumer trust is:

- weak, routine, not reflexive in general
- Based in underlying norms and values

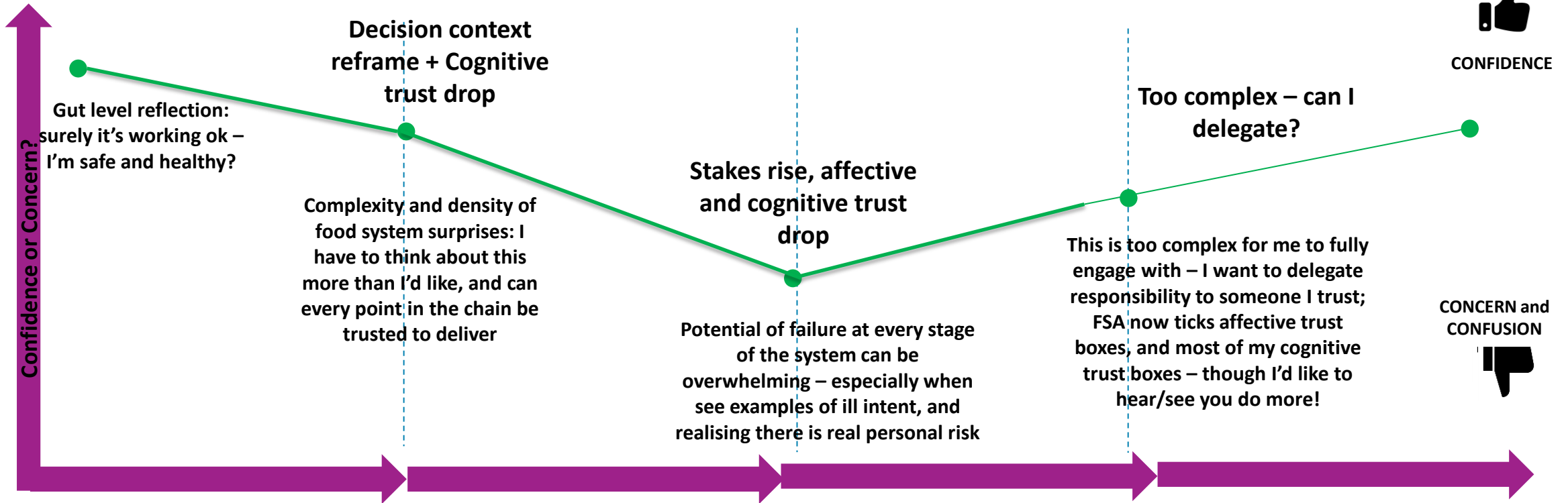
Trustworthiness can be established by:

- Competent, positive intent, openness
- Response to crisis
- Consistency of regulatory/industrial behaviour over time
- Neutrality of the regulator

However, transparency can also mean complexity (and anxiety)

Increasing knowledge of complexity raises salience of risk but knowledge of FSA raises confidence in safety

Pre consideration – individual experience reigns



Decision context
reframe + Cognitive
trust drop

Too complex – can I
delegate?

Discussing food sector
and food safety in the
UK

Food system stim
revealed

Discussing food safety within
the context of understanding
the food system

Role of FSA as regulator
stim revealed