

MY LIFE IN THE GROCERY TRADE

CHRISTINE TACON, GROCERIES CODE ADJUDICATOR

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT ROLE?

I am the Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) and I regulate the 13 largest grocery retailers designated by the Competition and Markets Authority, I monitor, encourage and enforce their adherence to the Groceries Supply Code of Practice.

BRIEFLY OUTLINE YOUR BACKGROUND

I started my career as a production engineer and have always been interested in efficient supply chains. I have worked in fast moving consumer goods (Mars, Anchor, Vodafone) and I ran the Co-op's farming business, the largest in the UK for 11 years. I could see that the food chain could work so much better and applied for the GCA role as I thought I could make a difference.

WHAT DOES YOUR ROLE INVOLVE?

My statutory powers are to investigate breaches of the Code and to arbitrate when disputes over the Code cannot be resolved. I have adopted a collaborative approach, raising the issues that suppliers tell me about in regular progress meetings with the retailers' Code Compliance Officers. I have had over 250 of these meetings and additionally meet with the retailers' Audit Committee chairs every year and the CEOs when required. I attend many events for grocery suppliers to listen to their issues and encourage them to get trained in the Code. I also have an annual survey which is invaluable to identifying issues for me and the retailers to address.



WHAT ARE THE BEST/WORST PARTS OF YOUR JOB?

I love efficiency, making systems work better. In 2014, my annual survey demonstrated that 80% of suppliers reported experiencing any Code issues; in 2019 that figure had halved. I am regularly told by suppliers that my work has made a significant difference to retailer behaviour and their trading relationships.

One of the challenges is suppliers don't tell me about their issues. I have a statutory duty of confidentiality, but I get less than a couple of suppliers a week contacting the office, so that's why I have to go out to supplier events, where people do tell me face to face. Part of the problem is that less than 50% of suppliers have been trained in the Code.

BRIEFLY OUTLINE A TYPICAL DAY

The GCA role is three days a week. I tend to spend two of them in the office with my small team of five, preparing for and having meetings with retailers studying retailers' responses to issues I have raised and ensuring we are making good progress. One day a week tends to be out meeting suppliers at events at their premises or visiting retailers. However, when I have an investigation or arbitration, there is a considerable amount of reading and I conduct interviews and hearings, and this totally changes my work pattern.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO TO UNWIND AWAY FROM WORK?

Growing vegetables, walking the dog, parkruns and narrow boating; all rather slow activities.

TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF NOT MANY PEOPLE MAY KNOW

I am a veteran car enthusiast – an interest I inherited from my father. I own an Austin 7 Top Hat Saloon 1929, which is like a little box on wheels.

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