

Consumer Insights Tracker Review: FSA Social Science Team response

Background

The Consumer Insights Tracker is the FSA's monthly tracking survey that monitors changes in consumers' behaviour and attitudes. It collects data on the following topics (these topics change according to FSA requirements):

- food insecurity
- food availability
- consumer concerns
- trust and confidence in the food supply chain
- trust and confidence in the FSA as a regulator

We commissioned the Advisory Committee for Social Science (ACSS) [Wider Consumer Interests \(WCI\) working group](#) to carry out an independent review of the Consumer Insights Tracker. The objectives of the review were to:

- Determine whether the Consumer Insights Tracker should become a permanent FSA project, by assessing whether it is needed by internal and external stakeholders.
- Review the Consumer Insights Tracker (including the purpose, aims, scope, content, outputs and methodology) and report actionable recommendations to the FSA and ACSS.
- Review and comment on the Invitation to Tender (ITT) for the new supplier contract.
- Advise on the extent to which questions within the Consumer Insights Tracker and Food and You 2 (F&Y2) should be aligned, and to advise on the best ways to communicate the differences between these research projects with FSA stakeholders.

The approach taken was:

- Interviews with a range of internal and external stakeholders (including from FSA and other government departments)
- Review of tender specification for new contractor
- Review of Consumer Insights Tracker survey questions

The [findings and recommendations](#) from the review were published in August 2023.

Recommendations with FSA Social Science Team Responses

We welcome this independent review of the Consumer Insights Tracker. We have carefully considered the findings and recommendations and have made several improvements to the Consumer Insights Tracker as a result. For instance, we have made improvements to the Tracker slide deck, making this shorter and more visual. We are also now publishing the slide deck on the FSA website, so it is available to all stakeholders. We have increased the range of demographic variables we analyse and have established a Consumer Insights Tracker working group to help develop the survey, which includes a representative from the ACSS WCI working group. We are also developing an overarching consumer monitoring strategy to facilitate join up between the Tracker and F&Y2. We will continue to work closely with our Tracker working group, the ACSS WCI working group and other stakeholders to ensure the Tracker is aligned to their needs.

Recommendation 1: The Consumer Insights Tracker be continued substantively unchanged for a minimum of three years.

The Tracker was recommissioned in July 2023. The new contract for the Consumer Insights Tracker has been signed for three years (with annual break clauses).

When recommissioning the Tracker, we took the opportunity to review the survey's content, methodology and outputs. We made improvements to address some of the limitations highlighted in the ACSS review, such as moving from an omnibus panel approach to a bespoke panel survey. However, due to a change in survey approach and supplier we had to begin a new time series in July 2023. We do not anticipate making further changes that will disrupt the new time series. From April 2024 we moved to quarterly reporting, but monthly fieldwork will be maintained.

Recommendation 2: The scope for increasing the range of demographic variables collected and/or analysed should be explored.

The bespoke panel survey approach collects data on a wider range of demographic variables each month, such as ethnicity and index of multiple deprivation (IMD). In our new outputs, we now include one slide that analyses up to three relevant demographic variables for one question in each report. We vary the questions analysed in this way, allowing a new focus in each report. We will also explore demographic variables in more depth in the end of year report.

Respondents are now excluded from taking the survey again for 6 months (an increase from 2 months). This means we can combine up to 6 survey waves to increase the sample size, therefore improving the reliability of the data and providing greater opportunities for between country or sub-group analysis, especially on demographics with a smaller number of respondents each month. Additionally, the sub-sample size for Northern Ireland has been boosted from 60 to 100. This will allow us to make between country comparisons.

Recommendation 3: The ACSS WCI Working Group should be consulted by the FSA team when new questions are proposed.

We have established a Consumer Insights Tracker working group, which includes one member of the ACSS WCI working group. We are consulting with the ACSS WCI working group primarily through this member. One of the core responsibilities of the Tracker working group is to contribute to the development of the questionnaire by reviewing new and existing questions. The full ACSS WCI working group will still be asked to regularly feed into the Tracker regarding new topics of interest.

Recommendation 4: Greater prominence should be given to the fact that the Consumer Insights Tracker does not include Scotland when communicating the results to stakeholders.

We have made it clear throughout the new slide deck that the Tracker only collects data on consumers in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This is reiterated in email communications to stakeholders and on the survey webpage. We will continue to look for opportunities to explain to stakeholders why the Tracker does not include Scotland, for example in any presentations given.

Recommendation 5: Greater coordination between the Consumer Insights Tracker and F&Y2 should be explored.

The F&Y2 and Tracker teams have started to meet monthly and have quarterly away days. We have prepared a paper that looks at how we could reduce duplication between F&Y2 and the Tracker and have discussed some potential changes with our respective working groups. We are also developing a combined strategy for consumer monitoring in the FSA, including our combined vision for F&Y2 and the Tracker. The senior lead for F&Y2 has been leading the Tracker throughout the recommissioning process and delivery of new outputs. They will remain as the senior lead for both F&Y2 and the Tracker moving forward, which will support the development of a combined strategy.

Representatives from the F&Y2 team are members of the new Tracker working group, and a member of the Tracker team has joined the F&Y2 working group. We have also developed a decision tree for new questions, which explains similarities and differences between the two surveys and helps identify whether F&Y2 or the Tracker is the most appropriate survey for new questions.

The F&Y2 team and the Consumer Insights Tracker team reviewed the Tracker questionnaire in detail together when recommissioning the Tracker. This was to understand the similarities and differences between the two surveys (in terms of topics, question wording, and frequency). An internal paper has been produced on the differences between the two surveys, and the key differences are also explained on the Consumer Insights Tracker website.

Recommendation 6: A more explicit and coherent process of identifying new issues and testing these out with the Consumer Insights Tracker to maintain its relevance is needed.

We have established a Consumer Insights Tracker working group which includes members from Policy, Strategy, Communications, Strategic Insights, Wales, Northern Ireland and the ACSS WCI working group. One of the key functions of the working group is to develop the Tracker questionnaire, which includes identifying emerging issues or topics that we should begin monitoring and identifying questions/topics that are no longer relevant. The working group meets on a regular (bi-monthly) basis to do this. We will also continue to consult with the ACSS WCI working group through our member on the Consumer Insights Tracker working group.

Alongside the working group, the Tracker team will continue to refer to any strategic assessments produced by the Strategic Insights team to ensure that any emerging issues of relevance are incorporated into the questionnaire. We have recently expanded the aims of the Tracker to facilitate more ad-hoc questions and urgent data requirements. For instance, we have recently asked consumers about precision breeding and about expanding the use of a specific food additive. We will continue to work closely with policy teams to identify data needs and include ad-hoc questions in the Tracker.

Recommendation 7: More extensive statistical analysis of the Consumer Insights Tracker data should be undertaken.

The Tracker team has access to our supplier's analytical tool which allows users to explore the data on an online platform. Additional analysis from this platform has already contributed to briefings and will be used for more extensive analysis in the future. We are also exploring whether we can undertake more extensive statistical analysis, for example regression, as part of our end of year reports. We have also expanded the volume of demographic variables analysed and will continue to work on this going forward.

Recommendation 8: Consider how the slide deck could be improved to communicate better key results to stakeholders.

We have taken the opportunity to make several improvements to the Tracker outputs. We have focused on improving the slide deck as the ACSS review recognised this receives the most attention from users. The review also found the slides were too long and overwhelming for users, so we have changed to a shorter, more visual slide deck. The slides are now published on the FSA website and available for all users to download. We have had positive feedback from stakeholders on the new slide deck and have continued to make small improvements based on feedback from the Consumer Insights Tracker working group.

Recommendation 9: Consider separating out the Consumer Insights Tracker, social media listening and food price tracking into distinct slide decks.

We have removed the social media listening and food price tracking from the Consumer Insights Tracker reports. We have developed a new slide deck for the

Tracker that only focuses on findings from the Tracker. Since October 2023 this has been published on the FSA website and circulated to stakeholders. This will continue to be the case moving forward. The Tracker team continues to monitor key economic indicators and relevant news to support our understanding of the wider context for consumers, however, this is not published as part of our regular reports. Wider context will be included in our end of year report to aid interpretation of the findings.

Recommendation 10: Continue publication of the monthly bulletin.

We have combined the monthly bulletin and slide deck into one output that is published in two formats: a PDF slide deck and a fully accessible HTML version of the slide deck as a webpage on the FSA website. From October 2023 – March 2024 this was published monthly. From April 2024 this will be published quarterly, however, monthly fieldwork will continue. This will free up resource in the Social Science and Communications team, whilst still allowing us to respond to urgent or emerging issues. In quarterly reports we will also have greater scope to combine months to give a larger sample, enabling more reliable analysis of sub-groups.

Recommendation 11: Review continuation of the annual report on the Consumer Insights Tracker and/or the scope and format of the report.

The FY 23/24 report has been commissioned as part of the new contract. We have worked with our supplier to review the scope and format of the report, with the aim of increasing the utility of the report to stakeholders. The Consumer Insights Tracker working group has been asked to input into the report, and we will seek feedback from stakeholders once the 23/24 report has been published. We will use this feedback to aid further review of the report moving forward.

Recommendation 12: Explore new ways of making data from the Consumer Insights Tracker available to stakeholders and that highlight key findings of each survey and trends over time.

We have made the Tracker slide deck more visual by including more graphics and charts. The new slide deck also includes a slide highlighting the key findings for each report. In our email communications to stakeholders, we have started to

include two or three bullets interpreting the data into the key insights and takeaways rather than solely reporting the raw numbers. As we move to quarterly reporting, we plan to expand this commentary to help stakeholders interpret the data. Additionally, the new combined consumer monitoring strategy will consider how we can increase the use and impact of our data.

We also have access to our supplier's analytical platform, which allows for a more visual exploration of the data. This is currently just for use within the Tracker team, but we will explore if this tool could be provided to select stakeholders so that they can explore the data further.

Additionally, this platform allows users to extract data into bespoke reports (for example just Wales or Northern Ireland data), that the Tracker team can then provide to stakeholders. Work is currently ongoing with Wales, Northern Ireland, and risk assessment colleagues to explore this possibility. The Tracker team also uses this platform to monitor trends for all questions, and significant findings are highlighted in the slide deck. Key insights and trends over time are also highlighted in communications to stakeholders when new findings are published.