

Paper 13.3 Assurance Working Group - Update (July 2024)

Summary

This paper provides an update on progress for the Assurance Working Group. It summarises the background, key activities, and future action. This paper is for information and discussion.

Background

The ACSS Assurance Working Group was set up in 2019 following discussions around the 2017 Review of Social Science[\[1\]](#) and the September 2018 Governance Review Paper[\[2\]](#) which stated, “The Board will also require assurance about the quality, value, and impact of the science we commission and rely upon... Some of the assurance will also come from our Chief Scientific Adviser, the Science Council, and our scientific advisory committees (SACs)”.

The aim of the group is to explore how best to facilitate assurance of the quality, value, and impact of social science[\[3\]](#) in the FSA.

Members

The Working Group is comprised of the following members:

- Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford (Chair)
- Ms. Julie Hill (Deputy Chair)
- Professor Julie Barnett
- Professor George Gaskell
- Professor Fiona Gillison
- Dr Charlotte Hardman

Terms of reference

The Terms of Reference (TOR) for the working group were refreshed in January 2024 to reflect the ongoing nature of the group and new work areas.

The ACSS Assurance Working Group will continue to support the quality of FSA science by:

1. Participating in regular 'Gateway' sessions, reviewing the objectives, research questions and proposed methods of new social science projects;
2. Supporting the FSA social science team to review approaches to:
 - Reaching rarely heard consumer groups in research
 - Engaging with the academic community;
3. Feeding into shorter term ad hoc requests to support continuing improvement

Key activities to date

Since its inception the Assurance Working Group has undertaken a variety of work:

1. Scoping of core processes and policies surrounding social science research, procurement, and implementation (September-December 2019);
2. More detailed work focused on consolidating assurance work across the FSA, research project evaluation and impact, and quality assurance in research procurement (January - October 2020);
3. Production of a guiding principles note, to inform the FSAs approach to the assessment of other legitimate factors in the risk analysis process[\[4\]](#) (November 2020 - March 2021);
4. Overseeing the commissioning, development, and piloting of a 'good science' quality assurance checklist/toolkit to support the commissioning of high-quality research across our sciences (April 21 - Jan 2023). The toolkit was published on the [ACSS website](#) in March 2023;
5. Advising on a brief for an independent evaluation looking at the social research output against the GSR standards, and reviewing the final output and FSA response (December 22 - July 23);
6. Supporting the development of FSA social science peer review processes (June 23 - Sep 23);

7. Supporting the development of a template methodology section for FSA social science outputs (June 23 – September 23)

Current/Planned activities:

The following activities are ongoing or planned for 2024:

1. Participate in Social Science Gateway sessions, held on a quarterly basis (or as required) to review the objectives, research questions and proposed methods of new social science projects (June 22 – ongoing)
2. Support the FSA social science team to review approaches to reaching rarely heard consumer groups in research (December 23 – ongoing);
3. Support the FSA social science team review approaches to engagement with the academic community (ongoing);
4. Contribute to shorter term ad hoc requests to support continuing improvement (ongoing);
5. Reflecting on the impact of the working group

The group last met on 6th June to discuss methods decision trees. The group will next meet on 5th September to discuss how FSA can engage hard to reach groups in research.

Hannah Lambie-Mumford, ACSS Assurance Working Group Chair

Jo Disson, FSA Working Group lead

[1]

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/socialsciencerevrep150817.pdf>

[2] https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-18-09-08-governance-report_0.pdf

[3] For the purposes of this work social science will be restricted to the work of the Social Science Team which includes behavioural science but not economics (although this discipline is technically defined as a social science). If specific assurance work is required for economics, this could be done through the establishment of an Economics Working Group.

[4] As set out in the [FSA Board meeting in March 2019](#)