

13th meeting of the Advisory Committee for Social Science (July 2024) Minutes

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9 July 2024 Minutes

Location: Clive House, London, and Remote via Microsoft Teams

Time: 10:00 - 16:30

Attendees: ACSS

- Ms Julie Hill (JH), Chair
- Professor Julie Barnett (JB), Deputy Chair
- Professor Charlotte Hardman (CH)
- Professor Spencer Henson (SH)
- Professor George Gaskell (GC)
- Professor Dan Rigby (DR)
- Professor Fiona Gillison (FG)

Attendees: Food Standards Agency

- Rebecca Gillespie (RG)
- Laura Gent (LG)
- Rebecca Wood (RW)
- Charlotte Parnell (CP)
- Helen Heard (HH)
- Joanna Disson (JD)
- Laura Broomfield (LB)
- Lucy King (LK)
- Willem Roelofs (WR)
- Michelle Patel (MP)
- Eirini Petratos (EP)
- Thomas Mills (TM)

- Thomas Turner (TT)
- Nicholas Daniel (ND)
- Tom Barker (TB)
- Thomas Hulme (TH)
- Freya Sharpe (FS)
- Sophie Watson (SW)
- Ely Mirzahosseinkhan (EM)
- Greg Wasinski (GW)
- Beth Armstrong (BA)

Other Attendees

- John O'Brien (JO), Chair, Science Council
- Matt Ensor (ME), SSEG secretariat

Apologies

- Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford (ACSS)
- Professor Seda Erdem (ACSS)

Summary of the meeting

The thirteenth meeting of the Advisory Committee for Social Science (ACSS) included updates from: the Secretariat, ACSS Chair, Working Group Chairs, the Chair of the Science Council, Deputy Director of Science, Evidence and Research Directorate (SERD), and the Heads of Analytics Unit and Social Science. Substantive discussion items included: FSA Business Tracker Survey and Kitchen Life 2 (KL2) impact strategy. See Annex A for agenda and papers.

Summary of actions:

Action 13.1: The final output from phase 1 of the Spending Review 2024/25 (SR25) work to be shared with members.

Action 13.2: The UPFs scoping review to be shared with members for comment.

Action 13.3: Secretariat to arrange a meeting with ACSS members in the early autumn to explore evidence gaps across Research and Evidence Programmes.

Action 13.4: Social Science forward look paper to be shared with members when final.

Action 13.5: Secretariat to share Science Updates to the FSA Board when published.

Action 13.6: SH to provide relevant research contacts to SS team re the learning trial for Mumbai Street Food.

Action 13.7: KL2 team to consider drafting an academic engagement output.

Minutes:

Welcome and introductions

- JH welcomed everyone to the 13th ACSS meeting.
- Brief introductions from attendees (in-person and online).

Declaration of interests

- No declarations.

Actions from the last meeting and Chairs update

- No actions were outstanding from the last plenary meeting.
- JH attended DEFRA's Social Science Expert Group (SSEG) meeting in Sheffield on 09/07/24. Particular areas of relevance included trust and food security.

Secretariat update

- RG provided an update on the ACSS skills assessment and recruitment plans. Further details in paper 13.1.

Working group updates

- JH provided an update on the **Understanding Regulatory Change (URC) Working Group** (paper 13.2), including the completion of an FSA evidence summary review around consumer views of the regulated products process. No further work currently in train for this group.
- JD provided an update on the **Assurance Working Group** (paper 13.3), including the continuing development of quality assurance tools and the

current review on reaching rarely heard groups in research.

- SH provided an update on the **Economics Working Group** (paper 13.4), where members have been supporting ongoing FSA work, to help develop a robust business case for the Spending Review 2024/25 (SR25). They have overseen the completion of the initial phase of the SR25 work, which includes a Rapid Evidence Review (RER) and compilation of a Policy Impact Matrix (PIM) based on which an economic case will be made for the impact of current and proposed FSA activities. The group will continue to expand on the RER and PIM for phase 2 of the SR25 work.

Action 13.1: The final output from phase 1 of the SR25 work to be shared with members.

- SH provided an update on the **Wider Consumer Interests Working Group** (paper 13.5), specifically focusing on findings from the ultra-processed foods (UPF) scoping review undertaken.
- The review found that literature is dominated by Latin American studies. Key findings include: a dominant theme in the research literature is nutrition and health implications of UPFs; consumption of UPFs is higher among certain groups (e.g., younger adults); consumer awareness of the term UPF is high, however consumer understanding is limited; there are negative UPF associations (e.g. health implications, 'chemicals', environmental impact) as well as positive associations (e.g. convenience, shelf-life, lower price), which are linked to barriers to reduced consumption (e.g. price, convenience, habit).

Action 13.2: Secretariat to share UPF scoping review with members for comment.

FSA Business Tracker Survey

LG provided an outline of the FSA Business Tracker Survey (paper 13.6). Subsequent discussions were focused around 3 questions.

Does the current CATI methodology work to address the research aims? Would an alternative approach, such as a push to web / CATI model, achieve these research aims? Discussion themes included:

- The use of participant panels as a sounding board to facilitate more in-depth discussions.
- Appropriateness of monetary incentives.

Are there additional considerations that should be borne in mind when considering moving to an online survey method? Discussion themes included:

- Including only essential open-ended questions.
- Methods to identify false participants (e.g. captcha, attention checking questions (e.g. have you been to Mars?), and “invisible to humans” questions which only bots can detect).

How else might we increase response rates? Discussion themes included:

- Survey length (keeping survey to 10 minutes or less).
- Incentives e.g., feeding back findings to participants or emphasising the value of participants’ responses.
- linking with local authorities who could help to recruit small businesses.

FSA Research and Evidence Programmes

- MP updated on changes to the FSA Research and Evidence Programmes (REPs). Eleven 11 REPs are being consolidated into 4, with each programme led by a SERD Deputy Director, to enable better prioritisation.
- The 4 REPs are: 1. Foodborne Disease and Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), 2. Chemical Radiological and Food Hypersensitivity risks, 3. Regulated Products and 4. Regulating the Changing Food System.
- FSA are keen to engage with ACSS to inform the REPs, support the identification of evidence gaps and consider means of improving the evidence base. Members felt that this was something they could contribute to.

Action 13.3: Secretariat to arrange a meeting with ACSS members in the early autumn to explore evidence gaps across REPs.

Analytics Unit update

- WR provided an update on the development of the Analytics Unit strategy. Key themes include: value for money, how best to achieve impact (e.g. translating evidence in an accessible way and improving our reputation as trusted advisors), integration (e.g. using a variety of skills from across disciplines), early engagement (e.g. delivering evidence in a timely manner), and publications (e.g. Annual Food Standards Report expected in autumn).

- JD provided an update on the Social Science Forward look, outlining plans for: retaining capacity for more proactive (rather than reactive) research, maximising the value from the data we collect (e.g. FY2) via secondary analysis and more utilisation of theory and frameworks in SS projects.

Action 13.4: Secretariat to share Social Science forward look paper with members when final.

- Members were asked about what sort of information they found useful to receive as part of the AU update. Rather than detailing publications and projects updates, a focus on strategic issues and contextual information was discussed. It was agreed that going forward, the secretariat would utilise existing internal papers, such as the [Annual Science Update](#)), rather than creating separate papers for the ACSS.

Action 13.5: Secretariat to share the Science Updates to the FSA board when published.

Science Council Update

JO reported that Science Council (SC) have revised their Terms of Reference and recruited 4 new members. There are now 11 members in total with complimentary skill sets and independent networks of scientists.

JO provided an update on key areas of work for the SC:

- Research question prioritisation: In March the SC held a workshop with external experts to discuss key research questions for the FSA. A total of 274 questions were considered, of which 51 were prioritised by the group. SC are currently drafting an output outlining the outcomes of the day and the methodology used.
- Wider impacts: In April the SC held a workshop to discuss 3 scenarios (around aspartame, seaweed, and nitrates) to inform their work around consideration of wider impacts in the risk assessment process. A report outlining the outcomes and recommendations from this work is currently being drafted.

KL2 Impact Strategy

- TM provided an outline of the Kitchen Life 2 (KL2) impact strategy (paper 13.9). Key discussion themes included:

- Quantifying the risks associated with behaviours identified in KL2. DR shared two relevant articles. [Restaurant Cooking Trends and Increased Risk for Campylobacter Infection](#) and [Evaluation of Hygiene Practice for Reducing Campylobacter Contamination on Cutting Boards and Risks Associated with Chicken Handling in Kitchen Environment](#) and SH offered to connect the KL2 team with a research group running a machine learning trial for Mumbai street food.
- Special edition journal articles. Members discussed the process for publishing a special edition journal article, and the substantive resource required to do so. Members felt a special section in a journal might be more feasible, but may still exceed the available resource in the KL2 team.
- **Action 13.6: SH to provide relevant research contacts to SS team re the learning trial for Mumbai Street Food .**
- Promoting the data source to the academic research community. Members felt that, if they were to engage with other academics, they would need an 'off the shelf presentation on KL2. In addition they felt the best approach would be to have an output that clearly identified potential future research questions, based on KL2 insight, to present ideas to academics on future work they could do. if they were to engage with other academics.
- **Action 13.7: KL2 team to consider drafting an academic engagement output.**

Reflections on ACSS plenary format and AOB

- JH sought members views on ACSS plenary format, noting that in recent meetings we have had a higher number of substantive/discussion items. Members were happy with the plenary format but suggested that breakout groups might be beneficial for some discussion items.

Annex A - Agenda

Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions
- Declaration of Interests
- Actions from the last meeting and Chairs update

- Secretariat Update
- Working Group Updates
- FSA Business Tracker Survey
- FSA Research and Evidence Programme
- Analytics Unit Update
- Science Council Update
- KL3 Impact strategy
- Reflections on ACSS Plenary format
- AOB