

Code of Practice

Introduction

- In line with the central government guidance and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) policy, each independent advisory committee that advises the FSA operates to a published Code of Practice that sets out the key principles and procedures that govern the work of the Committee.
- The CoP is subject to periodic reviews by the Committee and Secretariat, considering any updated guidance from Central Government, Parliament and the FSA; and changes to reflect experience and usage.

Purpose and Terms of Reference for the ACSS

- The role of the Advisory Committee for Social Science (ACSS) is to provide expert strategic advice to the FSA on its use of the social sciences including new and emerging methods, processes and systems to interrogate data, to deliver FSA's objectives. Its purpose is to help FSA utilise these social sciences and approaches to shape and deliver its strategic objectives and understand its impact.

This includes advising FSA on how it can use and bring together the different types of evidence, approaches and information across the diverse social science disciplines and fields, to address and evaluate strategic problems or interests, in an effective, appropriate and timely way.

The Committee is constituted to work at a strategic level bringing together insights from across a different and broader range of areas to those which FSA has previously accessed. It forms a core yet agile group of social science experts which is able to identify and to draw in wider inputs across relevant disciplines and perspectives to address the issues at hand.

Its members are experts who work within and across relevant disciplines, think strategically and understand how the social sciences and new and emerging data methods, processes and systems can be applied at disciplinary, multi and interdisciplinary levels to shape, inform and test policies and to achieve concrete

impacts to benefit people.

Specifically, it will:

- provide advice on how FSA gathers, uses and brings together social science evidence and relevant approaches and outputs to support delivery of the FSA's strategic objectives. This includes:
 - how FSA frames the problem or question
 - the work it commissions to meet its strategic aims
 - how the FSA uses and combines different social science, including data science, approaches, sources and types of evidence to achieve its objectives
 - how FSA assures the quality and rigour of its social and data science evidence
 - how the FSA assures the quality of its advice and outputs based on these sources
- help assure impact from FSA's application of these disciplines and approaches that is both timely and relevant to its priorities and objectives
- review and advise on FSA's current social and data science investments
- add value by advising on opportunities and best practice in bringing together these different disciplines and approaches to address strategic problems identified by or relevant to the work of the FSA
- advise on new and emerging opportunities for interrogating FSA and wider data, scoping new opportunities and innovations emerging across social science disciplines and fields and help FSA to understand how these approaches and systems may in turn impact on people and what they do
- provide evaluation advice to ensure successful delivery and impact of policy, considering best use of existing and new social science methods and data interrogation
- in an agile way and help to identify and access wider relevant networks, experts and evidence in these and related fields to provide effective advice to the FSA
- keep the FSA in touch with current and future developments in social science and data approaches and capabilities both in the UK and internationally
- maintain a programme of continuous development to assure successful multi and interdisciplinary working within the social science field.
- work collaboratively with other SACs which provide independent, subject specific expert advice in key areas and the FSA Science Council which provides independent expert advice on FSA's use of science at a strategic

level.

Quorum

- A quorum would be half of the total number of the appointed members including the Chair, plus one (rounded up to the nearest whole number).

Public Service Values

- All members must:
 - Follow [the Seven Principles of Public Life](#)
 - Observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the advice they provide and the management of this Committee
 - Be accountable, through the Board of the Food Standards Agency and Health Ministers, to Parliament and the public for its activities and for the standard of advice it provides. The Board of the FSA and Health Ministers are answerable to Parliament for the policies and performance of this Committee, including the policy framework within which it operates.
 - Comply with this Code, and ensure they understand their duties, rights and responsibilities, and that they are familiar with the function and role of this Committee and any relevant statements of Government policy. If necessary, members should consider undertaking relevant training to assist them in carrying out their role;
 - Not misuse information gained in the course of their public service for personal gain or for political purpose, nor seek to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interests or those of connected persons, firms, businesses or other organisations; and
 - Not hold any paid or high-profile unpaid posts in a political party, and not engage in specific political activities on matters directly affecting the work of this Committee. When engaging in other political activities, Committee members should be conscious of their public role and exercise proper discretion. These restrictions do not apply to MPs (in those cases where MPs are eligible to be appointed), to councillors, or to Peers in relation to their conduct in the House of Lords.

Roles

The Role of the ACSS Chair

- The Chairman is responsible for:
 - Providing effective leadership on the issues within the Committee's terms of reference.
 - Ensuring that the Committee meets at appropriate intervals and that the minutes of meetings and any reports to the Board of the Food Standards Agency accurately record the decisions taken and, where appropriate, the views of individual members;
 - Representing the views of the Committee to the general public ensuring that new members are briefed and providing an assessment of their performance, on request, when members are considered for re-appointment to the Committee or for appointment to the board of some other public body.
 - Ensure that every member of the Committee is heard and that no view is ignored or overlooked;
 - Ensure unorthodox and contrary scientific views are given a fair hearing;
 - Ensure that any significant diversity of opinion among the members of the Committee is accurately reflected in the report and in any other communications with the FSA;
 - Advise on matters relating to FSA science as required by the FSA on an ad hoc basis or in emergencies
 - Engage with the wider networks of relevant experts including with the Chairs of SACs relevant to the FSA's work;

The Role of the Members

- Members have collective responsibility for the operation of this Committee. They must:
 - engage fully in collective consideration of the issues, taking account of the full range of relevant factors, including any guidance issued by the Food Standards Agency or Health Ministers;
 - in accordance with Government policy on openness, ensure that they adhere to the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (including prompt responses to public requests for information); agree an Annual Report; and, where practicable and appropriate, provide suitable opportunities to open the work of the Committee to public scrutiny;

- Not divulge any information which is provided to the Committee in confidence;
- Ensure that an appropriate response is provided to complaints and other correspondence, if necessary, with reference to the sponsor department; and
- Ensure that the Committee does not exceed its powers or functions.
- Individual members should inform the Chair (or the Secretariat on his or her behalf) if they are invited to speak in public in their capacity as a Committee member.
- Individual Members can be removed from office by the Board of the Food Standards Agency, if they fail to perform the duties required of them in line with the standards expected in public office.

The Role of the Secretariats

- The role of the Secretariat is to:
 - Support the Committee in developing and delivering its work programme;
 - Advise the Committee on process and procedure;
 - Draw attention of the members to emerging issues of concern;
 - Ensure that the proceedings of the Committee are properly documented so that there is a clear audit trail showing how the Committee reached its decisions;
 - Keep an accurate public record of the work of the Committee;
 - Ensure that the Committee's conclusions and advice are clearly reported to applicants, the FSA and where applicable the Board.

Communications and collaboration

Communications with the FSA Board, Chief Scientific Adviser and Executive

- The ACSS works in collaboration with the FSAs Science Council, and other Committees, where the topics under consideration would benefit from social science expert advice.

- Communications between the Committee and the Board of the Food Standards Agency will generally be through the Chair except where the Committee has agreed that an individual member should act on its behalf. Nevertheless, any Member has the right of access to the Board of the Food Standards Agency on any matter that he or she believes raises important issues relating to his or her duties as a Committee Member. In such cases the agreement of the rest of the Committee should normally be sought.

Departmental Representatives

- Meetings of the ACSS and its Groups are attended by Departmental Representatives.
- The Representatives are currently nominated by, and are drawn from, those with relevant policy interests and responsibilities in the Food Standards Agency, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and devolved agricultural departments.
- Representatives are not members of the ACSS and do not participate in Committee business in the manner of members.
- The role of the Representatives includes sharing with the secretariat the responsibility of ensuring that information is not unnecessarily withheld from the Committee.
- Representatives should make the Committee aware of the existence of any information that has been withheld from the Committee on the basis that it is exempt from disclosure under Freedom of Information legislation unless that legislation provides a basis for not doing so.
- Representatives keep their parent Departments informed about the Committee's work, and act as a conduit for the exchange of information.
- They can advise the Committee on relevant policy developments and the implications of ACSS proposals. They can assist ACSS through the provision of information; and they can be updated by the Committee on matters of mutual interest.
- Representatives are charged with ensuring that their parent Departments are promptly informed of any matters which may require a response from Government.

Collaboration with other committees/engagement with FSA SAC Chairs

- The Committee will provide challenge on how the sponsor departments or the responsible Ministers identifies, gathers and uses social science evidence

and advice (including FSA's use of Scientific Advisory Committees and other expert advisers).

- The relationship between the Committee and the FSA SAC Chairs will be developed. This may include meetings (for example, annual or biannual meetings) and referral of issues for consideration (for example, the SACs could identify their top five issues to feed into the Council).

Interaction with stakeholders and the media

- Questions or approaches from the media should normally be directed to either the Chair who will act as official ACSS spokesman or the Food Standards Agency press office. Although members are encouraged to promote the role of the Committee in general terms, if asked for views on subjects that have been or are being considered by ACSS members should always give the line agreed by the Committee.

Interests and liabilities

Declaration of interests and management of conflicts

- Members of the Committee should inform the Secretariat in writing of their current personal and non-personal interests, when they are appointed, including the principal position(s) held. Only the name of the organisation and the nature of the interest are required; the amount of any salary etc. need not be disclosed.
- Members are asked to inform the Secretariat at any time of any change of their personal interests and will be invited to complete a declaration form once a year. It is enough if changes in non-personal interests are reported in the annual declaration form following the change. (Non-personal interests involving less than £1,000 from a company in the previous year need not be declared to the Secretariat).
- The register of interests should be kept up-to-date and be open to the public.
- Members of the Committee are required to declare any direct interests relating to salaried employment or consultancies, or those of close family members, in matters under discussion at each meeting.
- Having fully explained the nature of their interest the Chairman will, having consulted the other members present, decide whether and to what extent the member should participate in the discussion and determination of the

issue. If it is decided that the member should leave the meeting, the Chairman may first allow them to make a statement on the item under discussion.

- See the current members of the ACSS declaration of interests on the [Our Members](#) page to find up to date information.

Personal Liability of Committee Members

- A Committee member may be personally liable if he or she makes a fraudulent or negligent statement which results in a loss to a third party; or may commit a breach of confidence under common law or a criminal offence under insider dealing legislation, if he or she misuses information gained through their position.
- However, the Government has indicated that individual members who have acted honestly, reasonably, in good faith and without negligence will not have to meet out of their own personal resources any personal civil liability which is incurred in execution or purported execution of their Committee functions save where the person has acted recklessly. To this effect, a formal statement of indemnity has been drawn up.
- See the [Statement of Indemnity](#) for Science Council and FSA SAC members for further guidance.

Openness and publication of documents - general principles

- The Committee operates to the standards of openness and transparency. It will work in accordance with guidelines by the FSA and relevant guidance and rules established across Government. These include:
 - The cross-Government Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees (CoPSAC), 5 which includes the Principles of Scientific Advice to Government
 - The FSA's [Good Practice Guidelines for SACs](#)
 - The provisions under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act).
 - Committee meeting agendas, papers, minutes and reports are published. While meetings are not open to the public as standard, open events are held regularly to provide public input into the work of the Committee
 - The Committee publishes an annual report.

Meetings

Agendas

- Published agendas should contain enough background information to allow a reader to understand why the item is being discussed;
- Dates of meetings and agendas should be published in advance on the committee website.

Circulation of papers

- Papers should be provided to the Committee or the Secretariat two weeks prior to the meeting at which they are to be discussed. Where papers are circulated for comment by correspondence between meetings, the aim is to allow members 14 days to comment, where possible.

Minutes

- Minutes must reflect the proceedings and discussions that take place;
- Minutes will be recorded on a nonattributable basis except where the views of one or more members need recording, for example when declaring an interest.
- Minutes of meetings of the ACSS will be made available via the FSA's website.
- They will be written by the Secretariat as soon as possible after the meeting to which they refer and circulated to the Chair for comment within 14 days.
- The Secretariat will amend the draft minutes in the light of Members' comments and ensure that the amended draft is placed on the FSA's website.
- Any further corrections will be made at the following meeting when the minutes will be formally adopted. The final version of the minutes will then be placed on the FSA's website.

Working papers

- To ensure openness and transparency the Committee must seek to keep the public and stakeholders informed as it develops advice;
- The Secretariat will publish discussion papers on the FSA website in advance of meetings to allow interested parties to comment.

Unpublished research

- Where the Committee's disclosure of information would involve bringing into the public domain previously unpublished research, it should consider whether this could hinder the process of formal publication elsewhere and, if so, explore arrangements that avoid the problem (such as parallel publication).

Annual report

- The ACSS will publish an Annual Report on its work.

Procedures for arriving at conclusions

- The Committee should attempt to reach a consensus on the advice it gives, recognising that this might not always be possible. In cases where decisions are particularly significant the Committee should aim to reach a preliminary view which is then offered for comment either through public consultation or to stakeholder groups.

Dissenting views

- The Committee should not seek unanimity at the risk of failing to recognise different views on a subject. Any significant diversity of opinion among the members of the Committee which cannot be resolved should be accurately reflected in the minutes or report.

Appointment, Reappointment and Termination

Process of Appointment

- FSA has 6 Science Advisory Committees within its remit and 3 Joint Expert Groups. The appointment process varies between the Committees.
- Consulting appropriate authorities for appointments to FSA's committees is required under [Schedule 2 of the Food Standards Act 1999](#). This is specified in Section 5 within the Act.
- Appointments to ACSS are made by the FSA Chairman and do not require any consultation with Ministers as they are a DEC.

Terms and conditions of appointment

- Independent members of the Committee are initially appointed for a period of 1 to 3 years. Members may be asked to serve a second term but longer service is only considered under exceptional circumstances. Appointments to the Committee are made in accordance with the principles set out in the Nolan Report on Standards in Public Life.
- The overriding principle is appointment on merit. Members are appointed for their individual qualifications and the expertise they can bring to the Committee and not to represent any sectoral interests. The balance of the Committee is intended to ensure that it has a wide range of expertise to draw on to enable it to advise the Board of the Food Standards Agency effectively.
- Although several appointments may expire in any one year, the range of possible candidates will be limited by the needs of the Committee. As far as possible, retiring members are replaced with people who have similar expertise, unless a need to change the balance of the membership is identified.
- The ACSS is expected to hold 2 formal meetings a year. Meetings will normally run for around 4 hours and lunch will be provided. Members are expected to attend meetings of the committee and give timely apologies if absence is unavoidable.
- The Committee may also need to provide advice to the Agency on social science issues that arise between meetings.
- ACSS Members will need to attend meetings and devote some time to reading and preparation.
- It is expected that the Committee Chair will need to spend around 8-12 days and Committee members around 6-10 days per year on Committee business including contributing to working/ ad hoc groups.

Termination of appointment

- Appointments can be terminated early by either party, by giving 3 months' notice, in writing;
- Should the Committee be disbanded before the end of the period of appointment, appointments will terminate on dissolution;
- If a member is found guilty of grave misconduct their appointment will be terminated immediately;
- Appointments are held subject to compliance with the Public Standards Committee Seven Principles of Public Life;
- Members are expected to attend meetings regularly. The appointment may be terminated, without notice, if attendance becomes so erratic as to

interfere with the good running of the Committee.

Fees and Expenses

Committee fees and expenses

- Members may claim the following attendance fees for ACSS meetings and for meetings of Working Groups and Sub-groups:
 - ACSS Chair £400/day;
 - ACSS Member £300/day;
- Members may make a cumulative claim for work between meetings if a significant amount of time is spent on a single piece of work or on a series of short pieces of work. Review of fee rates;
- Participation in working groups or other groups is voluntary, however it is expected that as part of their tenure members will be willing to take part in relevant groups as their availability allows;
- Members are entitled to reimbursement of reasonable travel and subsistence expenses necessarily incurred on official Committee business;
- Members must seek value for money and are encouraged to use the most cost effective and environmentally sustainable options for travel and accommodation;
- Members must follow the guidance on the types and rates of expenditure that can be claimed for specific expenses and how to claim outlined in [Guidance on Committee Fees and Expenses](#);
- See the SAC Guidance on Committee Fees and Expenses for further guidance.

Review of fee rates

- These rates are set by the FSA with the aim of ensuring consistent approaches across the different Committees that advise the FSA. The FSA reviews these rates every 2 years with the aim that any revisions will reflect the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Board with regard to pay in the Senior Civil Service. The FSA will also take into account comparisons with rates paid in similar advisory bodies in the UK.

Feedback on performance

- The ACSS Chair and all members will be asked to provide brief feedback on their experience on the Committee each year to help the FSA ensure that the Committee operates effectively and identify any areas for improvement.