

Assurance Working Group - Update (January 2022) Paper 8.2

1. 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.
- The Assurance Working Group has met quarterly since its inception (supplemented by additional ad hoc task focused meetings).

2. Members

The Working Group is comprised of the following members:

- Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford (Chair)
- Ms Julie Hill (Deputy Chair)
- Professor Julie Barnett
- Professor Susan Michie

3. Terms of reference

The Terms of Reference agreed for the Working Group in June 2019 are as follows:

1. Develop a method for evaluating:

- processes by which social science projects are developed, prioritised and commissioned
- how social science projects are quality assured
- when and how social science evidence is used appropriately in FSA decision-making
- the implementation of social science evidence
- Social Science capability and networks (sufficiency, appropriateness and effectiveness).

2. Oversee the evaluation of (ia-e) above. To include:

- reviewing plans and documents, starting from the 2017 Review of Social Science and FSA response[\[4\]](#);
- interviewing key stakeholders;
- tracing selected projects from inception to delivery (the package of behaviour change projects were identified as key candidates).

3. Provide advice and recommendations relating to

- how FSA practices relating to each of (ia-e) above might be enhanced to ensure best practice and
- identification of the parameters by which they might best be presented in the annual report to the FSA Board

4. Key activities to date

Since its inception the Assurance working group has undertaken work in three main areas:

- Scoping of core processes and policies surrounding social science research, procurement and implementation (September-December 2019)
- More detailed work focused on consolidating assurance work across the FSA, research project evaluation and impact, and quality assurance in research procurement (January – February 2020)

- Production of a guiding principles note, to inform the FSAs approach to the assessment of other legitimate factors in the risk analysis process^[5] (November 2020 – March 2021)

Current activities:

- The work of the group is currently focused on the development of a ‘good science’ quality assurance checklist/toolkit to support the commissioning of high-quality research across our sciences. The group developed a procurement specification, assessed tender applications and awarded the checklist work to UCL in November. The working group, and Social Science colleagues, are meeting with UCL in January to talk about requirements for the work. The final checklist is expected in May 2022 and draft outputs available for review around March.
- The group is also facilitating expert advice on research methods and data interpretation (from the Working Group itself or of experts they nominate), to support the FSA’s new workstream on behavioural insights.
- Going forward, the group will advise on a brief for an independent evaluation looking at the social research output against the GSR standards and making recommendations on any areas of improvement.
- The next working group meeting is planned for the 17th January, when the group will meet with UCL to discuss requirements for development of the ‘good science’ quality assurance checklist/toolkit.

Hannah Lambie-Mumford, ACSS Assurance Working Group Chair

Jo Disson, Rebecca Gillespie, FSA

^[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] <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/research-projects/review-of-social-science>

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