

Minutes

# **Eighth Meeting of the Advisory Committee for Social Science 26th January 2022 minutes**

**Location:**

**Remote Meeting via Microsoft Teams**

**Time: 13:00 - 16:00**

## **Attendees**

- Professor Susan Michie, (SM), Chair
- Ms Julie Hill (JH), Deputy Chair
- Professor Julie Barnett (JB)
- Dr Seda Erdem (SE)
- Professor Dan Rigby (DR)
- Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford (HLM)
- Professor George Gaskell (GG)

## **Food Standards Agency**

- Michelle Patel (MP)
- Rebecca Gillespie (RG)
- Tim Johnston (TJ)
- Nicholas Daniel (ND)
- Phil Jones (PJ)
- Ely Mirzahosseinkhan (EM)
- Lucy King (LK)
- Laura Broomfield (LB)
- Anya Mohideen (AM)
- Azuka Aghadiuno (AA)

- Ben Haden (BH)
- Sam Faulkner (SM)
- Lisa Nelson (NS)
- Maya King (MK)
- Natasha Gladstone (NG)
- Sophie Watson (SW)
- Victoria Balch (VB)

## **Other Attendees**

- Professor Sandy Thomas (ST)
- Professor Anne Murcott (AM)
- Susan Bond (SB)
- Bethan Mead (BM)

## **Apologies**

- Spencer Henson
- Jo Disson

## **Agenda:**

[Eighth Meeting of the ACSS January Agenda](#)

## **Papers:**

- [8.1: Secretariat Update](#) (item 5)
- [8.2: Assurance Working Group update](#) (item 6a)
- [8.3: Kitchen Life 2 Working Group update](#) (item 6b)
- [8.4: Climate Change and Consumer Behaviour Working Group update](#) (item 6c)
- [8.5: Wider Consumer Interests Working Group update](#) (item 6d)
- [8.6: Working Group Proposition: Economic Support](#) (item 7)
- [8.7: FSA Analytics Unit Update](#) (items 8)
- 8.8: Social Science Coverage of FSA Strategy themes (item 13)

## **Summary of actions**

Action: 8.1 To add an agenda item to the summer plenary meeting to discuss equity and inequality in the work of the Analytics unit, and how such factors are considered in the impact assessment process.

Owner: ACSS Secretariat

Delivery Date: Next plenary meeting

Action 8.2 To redraft the economics Working Group objectives, ensuring there is a clear scope, start and end date.

Owner: Nicholas Daniel

Delivery Date: April 2022

Action 8.3 ACSS secretariat to review how the FSA utilises ACSS expertise including timeframes and inputs from each Working Group, and principles for using the ad hoc request function. Findings will be reviewed by the assurance working group in the first instance.

Owner: Secretariat

Delivery date: May 2022

Action 8.4 ACSS secretariats to circulate self-assessment to ACSS members.

Owner: ACSS Secretariat

Delivery Date: w/c January 31st 2022

## **Summary of meeting**

The 8th Open Meeting of the Advisory Committee for Social Sciences (ACSS) included an update from the Secretariat on ACSS recruitment and the SAC triennial review. Additionally:

- Working group chairs updated on recent activity of current groups:
  - Assurance
  - Kitchen Life 2
  - Climate Change and Consumer Behaviour
  - Wider Consumer Interests
- The FSA chief economist, Nick Daniel, presented a proposition paper for a new working group to support economic analysis. The committee felt this was a good idea, but requested TORs be carefully drafted to ensure clear parameters and limit scope creep.
- Professor Sandy Thomas, Science Council Chair gave an update on recent Science Council activity.
- Michelle Patel and Tim Johnston provided an update on the work of the Analytics Unit. Ely Mirzahosseinkhan and Phil Jones provided an update on new work programmes; Wider consumer interests and behaviour trials.
- Ben Haden and Sam Faulkner provided an update on the emerging FSA strategy which will be published in March 2022.
- The secretariat presented initial assessment of how well key strategy themes were covered by a) FSA social science projects and b) ACSS expertise.

## **Full minutes**

### **1. Welcome and introductions**

SM welcomed everyone to the 8th ACSS meeting and noted that the meeting is being recorded.

### **2. Declaration of interests**

JH declared her role of board member of the office for Environmental protection is now live. JH also noted associations with WRAP (waste and resource action programme).

DR declared involvement in the FSA Food Hypersensitivity project.

### 3. Actions from the last meeting

One action outstanding (7.2) which will be covered in secretariat update.

### 4. Chairs update

JH (deputy chair) delivered the board update in December 2021 and reported it being well received. JH also attended the FSA and Food Standards Scotland conference on the theme of climate change and sustainability, as well as the SAC chairs meeting and the SAC lay members meeting. JH spoke in her WRAP role but referred to her work in the FSA.

### 5. Secretariat update (paper 8.1)

RG updated on

- **Recruitment:** The campaign will launch in March, with new members in post by September 2022.
- **FSA Triennial review of SACs:** The review is due to start following publication of the Cabinet Office's revised guidance to the Review of Public Bodies. The secretariat will update members when more details are available.
- **Action 7.2:** Action 7.2 from the June 21 ACSS plenary, tasked the secretariat with adding an agenda item to discuss *equity and inequalities in the work of the analytics unit*. The FSA are currently undertaking a review of the factors included in impact assessments, to ensure data on equity, inequalities and other factors, are appropriately considered. Given the relevance of this planned work, the secretariat will facilitate this discussion at a later date when the review of impact assessments is complete.

**Action 8.1: To add an agenda item to the summer plenary meeting to discuss equity and inequality in the work of the Analytics unit, and how such factors are considered in the impact assessment process.**

**Owner: ACSS Secretariat**

**Delivery date: Summer 2022 plenary meeting**

The Committee agreed to dedicate time in the upcoming plenary meeting to review and discuss:

- The FSA's D&I analysis policy
- The FSA's analysis of social and economic disparities

## **6. ACSS working group updates**

**Assurance Working Group (paper 8.2):** HLM updated on recent activity of the group, including:

- developing a specification for 'good science' quality assurance checklist and selecting a supplier.
- supporting the new behavioural insight workstream
- providing advice on a brief independent evaluation looking at the social research output against the GSR standards.

**Kitchen Life 2 Working Group (paper 8.3):** JB updated on recent activity of the group, including meetings with the FSA team to discuss data collection and secondary analysis were discussed. SM noted that the Working Group had a high-quality discussion around the project recently, but were asked to comment on a product already in use by the supplier, thereby limiting the usefulness of feedback. SM asked for future ACSS work to have a timeline in advance that is communicated to members. See action 8.3.

**Climate Change and Consumer Behaviour (paper 8.4):** JH updated on recent activity of the group, which is focused around holding a workshop on the 18th February, to build on the findings on the expert engagement workshop held in May 21.

**Wider Consumer Interests** (paper 8.5): EM updated on initial discussions around this new working group, including:

Following circulation of a proposition paper in November 21, interested ASS members have met twice to discuss the programme of work and possible scope of a working group.

SH has agreed to Chair the group and will meet with EM to define the scope of the Working Group and develop TORs for group comment.

## **7. ACSS support to Economic Analysis (paper 8.6)**

- ND presented on a proposed new working group with the aim of engendering an interdisciplinary approach to ensure economics is applied to improve the understanding of the complex decision making in FSA research activities and support FSA economists by keeping them up to date with empirical approaches that can be applied in the area of food. The proposed new working group developed a following consultation with the secretariat and economists within the committee (SE, SH, DR)
- The committee discussed the current economics approach in the FSA, and economic expertise in the ACSS.
- JB noted the risk of a large objective and potential creeping scope for this group. It was agreed that TORs would need careful framing but that the proposed working group would be a useful and impactful resource for the FSA .

**Action 8.2 To redraft the economics Working Group objectives, ensuring there is a clear scope, start and end date.**

**Owner: Nick Daniel**

**Delivery date: April 2022**

The committee went on to discuss the different models for ACSS working groups, with some being linked to specific projects and therefore having clear start/end

dates (e.g. kitchen life 2), whilst others being of more an ongoing nature (e.g. assurance group). GG suggested an advisory group for methodologies. SM noted that the FSA has an ad-hoc facility which would be good vehicle for providing methodological advice. SM suggested the principles for using the ad hoc function be reviewed to ensure the FSA are making the most of this resource. (See action 8.3)

## **8. BREAK**

## **9. Analytics Unit update (paper 8.7).**

MP acknowledged recent temporary promotions within the analytics unit.

- MP temporary promoted to Deputy Director of science, evidence and research directorate.
- TJ temporary promoted to head of Analytics Unit
- JD temporary promoted to head of Social Science

TJ updated on fellowships, projects and publications as per the update paper. DR asked if any input from the committee was sought on the survey of consumer perceptions of alternative/novel sources of proteins. LK explained that the quick turnaround nature of the work meant that timeframes did not permit consultation. DR suggested going forward, an email outlining the tight deadline and asking for input from members for those that can provide it, would be beneficial. SM linked this point to her previous comment regarding using the committee to its best ability.

**Action 8.3 ACSS secretariat to review how the FSA utilises ACSS expertise including timeframes and inputs from each Working Group, and principles for using the ad hoc request function. Findings will be reviewed by the assurance working group in the first instance.**

**Owner: Secretariat**

**Delivery date: May 2022**

## **10. Update from Science Council Chair**

- SM welcomed ST. ST attended the Broad meeting to present Working Group 5 final report and recommendations. This particular report looked at the research activities and policies in the FSA around food hypersensitivity. The final report complemented the interim report presented to the FSA Board at the September 2020 Board meeting. The two reports are available online.
- ST noted the critical review of the appraisal of third party evidence has been shared with the FSA executive management team.
- ST outlined the Food Safety and Net Zero Carbon review, Working Group 6. This work started in June 2021, Chair by Claire Nicholson and Jonathan Wastling as Deputy Chair. Terms of reference for the review has been published on the Science Council website. The review looks at the food safety implications of changes being made to the food system over the next decade to achieve net zero carbon.
- ST noted the science council are recruiting 3 new members. Looking for expertise in risk assessment/modelling, food manufacturing technology or infection epidemiology and zoonoses. ST noted Sarah O'Brien will be leaving the science council in March 2022.
- Future works includes an interim report of Working Group 6, Food Safety and Net Zero Carbon, that will be published in Spring and prioritising the outputs from the workshop and commissioning literature reviews to deep dive on the net zero climate change work.

## **11. New work programmes in Analytics Unit (paper 8.7).**

### **11.1 Behavioural trials**

PJ outlined the new programme of work on behavioural trials, and 5 current projects: sustainable diets shift in work place canteens, allergen communication in Food Business Operators, handwashing behaviour in Food Business Operators, sustainable consumer choices during online food shopping, improving adherence to use-by dates amongst vulnerable groups.

- PJ noted that all trials have an external peer reviewer and that all trials will go through a university ethics board, and protocols will be published before

trials. Rolling publication starts in May 2022.

- In order to build capability, the social science team will be receiving training from NatCen on RCTs. PJ is keen to widen the FSA behavioural science and what works tool kit through products (e.g. evidence maps and systematic reviews) and approaches (e.g. building networks).
- ST asked for clarity on how 'sustainable diets' in this space is defined. PJ explained that in the sustainable diet shift trial it is defined as 'plant based/vegetarian' meal. In the sustainable consumer choices during online shopping trial, it is defined as carbon emission.
- The importance of peer review of trials, university ethic boards, pre-publication of protocols, external peer review, and evaluation were discussed. SM flagged the [MRC's framework for process evaluation](#) and the need for programme theory/logical model.
- MP confirmed all reports will be peer reviewed and published on the FSA website as common practise. The ambition is to publish each trial as an academic journal article.

## **11.2. Wider Consumer Interests**

EM explained the rapid change in the food system; hence the FSA is stepping into a new space. EM outlined that the work in this programme will help join up UK food policy and other government departments such as DHSC, DEFRA, DH and the Welsh government.

EM outlined the current work in the Wider Consumer Interest space including, Our Food Future, Food in a Pandemic, behaviour reviews. EM thanked HLM for reviewing Food in a Pandemic.

EM explained that this programme aims to broaden the scope of the FSA evidence gathering to include consumers wider interest, areas such as sustainability, food insecurity, healthy eating. From April 2022, various primary and secondary research will be carried out to inform the strategy.

## **12. The Emerging FSA Strategy**

- BH provided an update of the emerging strategy, noting still in draft form, however a long way into the processes. Historically the FSA published a new strategy every 5 years, last strategy was published in 2015.
- The strategy starts with the mission and vision of the FSA including 'food is safe' and 'food is what it says it is' food you can trust food is safe. The first new element of the strategy is a broader statement, 'food is healthier and more sustainable'. This will not be an equal to the initial scope of our vision but will play a large role.
- Another amendment to the strategy is around guiding principles to reflect both the strengths of the organisation that we want to maintain and the need to modernise and evolve our approach in the light of rapid change in the food system.
- In March 2022, the strategy will be launched. BH explained that despite publication, conversations around the strategy will be ongoing.
- JH asked if the term health and sustainable referred to specific foods or a specific diet. BH confirmed both are appropriate and there will not be a distinction in the strategy. SM suggested the use of a glossary when in multi-disciplinary workstreams.
- SM noted the word 'more healthy' raised questions. BH explained this word has been used deliberately to show a journey compared to an absolute.
- GG noted that 'food is what it says it is' is strangely framed. BH explained this statement has been tested with consumers and they understand.
- HLM acknowledged the expansion of the strategy and noted it was beneficial.
- DR asked for clarification on how the FSA plays a role in accessing food. SF explained the role of the FSA is to play a part in government and alongside other players in the food system. SF noted these issues are bigger than government can manage on its own, the FSA role is to bring the voice of consumers, industry and government together. SF gave an example of pilot work with the Department of Education and DEFRA's white paper.

## **13. Social Science Coverage of FSA Strategy themes**

- RG outlined that the secretariats carried out an assessment of how social science research covered the FSA research themes. Majority of themes had good coverage. The initial assessment suggests more work is needed on

models of consumption and organisational behaviours and motivations. RG noted this work will be continued when the strategy is published.

- RG outlined the initial assessment around ACSS expertise. RG noted good coverage across most topics. Very little coverage on organisational behaviours and motivations with moderate coverage on new models of consumption. RG explained that knowing the gaps in expertise will aid recruitment.
- Member's will be asked to do a self-assessment to rate their expertise and knowledge against the six strategic themes, discipline and research methods. Survey will be circulated at the end of next week with a deadline of end of February for response.
- JH asked for guidance on how to grade their expertise on the survey. SM clarified this is not a competence checking assessment, but a skills and knowledge gap assessment.

**Action 8.4 ACSS secretariat to circulate self-assessment to ACSS members.**

**Owner: ACSS Secretariat**

**Delivery Date: W/c January 31st 2022**

## **14. AOB**

No AOB's. SM thanked members for joining the 8th plenary meeting.