

Paper 9.3 Assurance Working Group - Update (July 2022)

Summary

This paper provides an update on progress for the Assurance Working Group. It summarises 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 Science¹ and the September 2018 Governance Review Paper² 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 science³ 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 Susan Michie
- Professor George Gaskell (as of June 2022)

Terms of reference

The Terms of Reference (TOR) for the working group have recently been updated to reflect the ongoing nature of the group (i.e. not task and finish) and new work areas. Going forward the ACSS Assurance Working Group will continue to support the quality of FSA science by:

1. overseeing the commissioning, development and piloting of a 'good science' quality assurance checklist/toolkit which will support the commissioning of high-quality research across our sciences, (August 22 delivery).
2. advising 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 (Spring 23 delivery)
3. participating in regular 'Gateway' sessions, reviewing the objectives, research questions and proposed methods of new social science projects (ongoing); and
4. feeding into shorter term ad hoc requests to support continuing improvement (ongoing).

The TORs will be refreshed following completion of A and B, to reflect any future needs identified by these activities.

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 process⁴ (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 (TOR_A). The working group supported the procurement process (developing tender specification and assessing applications) and awarded the work to UCL in November. The working group, and Social Science colleagues, are guiding the work and commenting on draft checklists. The final checklist is expected in August 2022.
- The working group participated in the first Social Science Gateway session on the 17th June (TOR_C). These will be held on a quarterly basis to review the objectives, research questions and proposed methods of new social science projects.
- 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 (TOR_B).
- The next working group meeting is planned for the 18th July, when the group will meet with UCL to discuss comments on the next iteration of the ‘good science’ quality assurance checklist/toolkit.

Hannah Lambie-Mumford, ACSS Assurance Working Group Chair

Jo Disson, Rebecca Gillespie, FSA