

Paper 10.1 Assurance Working Group - Update (February 2023)

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 George Gaskell

- Professor Fiona Gillison (as of October 2022)
- Dr Naomi Maynard (as of October 2022)
- Dr Charlotte Hardman (as of October 2022)

Terms of reference

The Terms of Reference (TOR) for the working group were refreshed in June 2022 to reflect the ongoing nature of the group (i.e. not task and finish) and new work areas.

The ACSS Assurance Working Group will continue to support the quality of FSA science by:

- 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, (Early 2023 delivery);
- 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);
- participating in regular ‘Gateway’ sessions, reviewing the objectives, research questions and proposed methods of new social science projects (ongoing); and
- feeding into shorter term ad hoc requests to support continuing improvement (ongoing).

Work on the quality assurance toolkit (TOR_A) is near completion and will be published in the spring 2023. Similarly, the GSR review (TOR_B) will be complete around the same time. Following completion of A and B, the TORs will be revised 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 - October 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)
- Informing the development of a quality assurance toolkit.

Current activities:

The work of the group is currently in the final stages of developing the quality assurance 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 commented on draft iterations of the toolkit. Publication of the checklist is expected by March 2022.

The working group continues to participate in Social Science Gateway sessions (TOR_C). These are held on a quarterly basis (with bespoke meetings set up when project timeframes require) to review the objectives, research questions and proposed methods of new social science projects. Since the first gateway session in June 2022, the assurance group have had sight of all new social science projects.

The group most recently meet on the 23rd January to discuss the final version of the quality assurance toolkit.

Other updates:

The assurance group and secretariat worked closely to develop an evaluating project impact (EPI) form in 2020. Since then, the social science team embedded this as part of their commissioning process, which has proved a valuable resource when prioritising projects. Given this success the process has been rolled out across FSA science, under a new title PIF (project impact form) but with little revision.

Hannah Lambie-Mumford, ACSS Assurance Working Group Chair

Jo Disson, Rebecca Gillespie, FSA