

Minutes

Tenth meeting of the Advisory Committee for Social Science (February 2023) Minutes

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2nd February 2023 minutes

Location: Remote Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Time: 12:00 - 16:00

Attendees: ACSS

- Ms Julie Hill, (JH), Chair
- Professor Julie Barnett (JB) Deputy Chair
- Dr Charlotte Hardman (CH)
- Professor Fiona Gillison (FG)
- Dr Naomi Maynard (NM)
- Professor Dan Rigby (DR)
- Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford (HLM)
- Professor George Gaskell (GG)
- Dr Seda Erdem (SE)

Attendees: Food Standards Agency

- Rebecca Gillespie (RG)
- Anya Mohideen (AM)
- Abbie Collins (AC)
- Anna Cordes (ACO)
- Eirini Petratou (EP)
- Harriet Pickles (HP)
- Joanna Disson (JD)
- Julie Peirce (JP)
- Justine Wilson (JW)
- Laura Broomfield (LB)

- Laura Gent (LG)
- Lucy King (LK)
- Sophie Watson (SW)
- Susan Jebb (SJ)
- Willem Roelofs (WR)

Other Attendees

- Matt Ensor (ME) DEFRA
- Phoebe Hamilton-Jones (PHJ)
- Susan Bond (SB) FSS
- Susan Owens (SO) DEFRA
- Peter Gregory (PG)

Apologies

- Professor Spencer Henson
- Michelle Patel
- Professor Robin May
- Sandy Thomas

Papers:

- 10.1: Assurance Working Group update (item 7)
- 10.2: Kitchen Life 2 Working Group update (item 7)
- 10.3: Economics Working Group update (item 7)
- 10.4: Wider Consumer Interests Working Group update (item 7)
- 10.5: Secretariat update (item 8)
- 10.6: Analytics unit update (item 9)

Summary of the meeting:

The 10th Open Meeting of the Advisory Committee for Social Science (ACSS) included updates from: the Secretariat, on recruitment and the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) review; Members giving an update on their Biographies; Working Group chairs, on recent activity of current groups; and the Heads of Analytics Unit and Social Science, on key challenges

Additionally:

- Welcome from Professor Susan Jebb, Chair of Food Standards Agency

- Susan Owens and Matt Ensor introduced the DEFRA's Social Science Expert Group (SSEG)
- Professor Peter Gregory Science Council gave an update on recent Science Council activity.

Summary of actions

- **Action 10.1** – ACSS secretariat to work with JD/WR to explore what interdisciplinary working in the unit should look like, and discuss with Chair before taking it to the wider committee (April 2023)

Welcome and introductions

JH welcomed everyone to the 10th ACSS meeting and noted that the meeting is being recorded.

JH introduced Susan Owens, Chair of DEFRA's Social Science Expert Group. SO gave a quick introduction and would provide further information regarding their team later in the meeting.

JH asked all FSA staff to give a quick introduction to everyone on the call.

JH welcomed three new committee members, CH, NM, and FG who would bring additional expertise to our committee and working groups.

JH advised that ACSS and Science Council were currently undergoing a review which is being completed by two independent academics. The review is to look at how we can be more effective moving forward. The results of the review are due later in the year.

JH advised she had recently attended a meeting of DEFRA's SSEG in Cambridge along with RG and AM (Secretariat) which was useful to compare the way ACSS works, topics of interest and inter-relations with our respective departments.

JH attended the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) Chairs meeting this month and advised the meeting featured interesting debates and information on future challenges for risk assessment, risk management and policy decisions, including consideration of Other Legitimate Factors (OLFs). It also considered how SACs can work together.

Finally, JH mentioned the possibility of a networking event in May where members will be invited to bring colleagues to discuss the social science evidence base

relevant to the FSA's Areas of Research Interest (ARIs).

Declaration of interest

None

Actions from the last meeting

No outstanding actions from the previous meeting.

Welcome from Professor Susan Jebb - Chair, Food Standards Agency

SJ started by thanking everyone for the opportunity to join the meeting today. She gave a brief introduction on her background as a nutrition scientist and how a lot of the work undertaken by ACSS is of interest to her. She thanked everyone from the committee for their care, consideration, and time they give to our committee work.

SJ advised that she had met with Professor Charles Godfrey and Professor Annette Boaz who are undertaking the review of ACSS (and Science Council (SC)), and they were both impressed with the ACSS Chair and the excellent work that the committee has done so far.

SJ also said how thrilled she was that Kitchen Life 2 won the [Analysis in Government Innovation Award 2022](#).

SJ then advised that as with every other government department, the FSA will have to deliver efficiencies in the coming years and will be focused on delivering core priorities. Secretariat resources and ACSS activity should also reflect this to ensure we can meet these demands both from a resource and financial point of view. Priorities include:

Precision Breeding Bill, new systems for import controls, regulated products, and retained EU Law. SJ reiterated again, the enormous pressure to deliver these key priorities on budgets and staff. SJ stated that whilst engaging across government on food policy issues, she is keen to build on this given food is important, central, and critical to the work of many other government departments, and joined-up work is key to facilitating healthy sustainable diets.

Member BIO's

Each member gave an update on their biographies and areas of research: [Our members](#)

Introduction to DEFRA Social Science Expert Group (SSEG)

SO gave a brief introduction to the work of the SSEG and how they provide DEFRA with Social Science advice, including on quality assurance, risk analysis and assessment, and connect DEFRA to various networks across government.

SO advised that moving forward it would be of real benefit if both committees could work collaboratively on issues of similar interest, share ideas, and build a networking platform for cross-committee working. She mentioned food, risk assessment, and risk communication as areas of overlap, as well as processes such as quality assurance, identifying research trends, connections to networks and promoting social science within the departments.

ME further expanded that by working together across the two committees would help provide expert lead and insight and allow SSEG to identify gaps across their academic group. ME advised that the group had recently undergone some recruitment and the group will now expand to eight members so the opportunity to share skills, knowledge and expertise would be valuable.

Working Group Updates

Assurance Working Group Update (Paper 10.1) HLM updated on recent activity of the group, including:

- Providing a recap of the main objective of the Working Group
- Finalising the good science quality assurance toolkit (QAT). In addition, group members have attended Social Science Gateway sessions where so far eleven projects have been considered.
- Future plans to work with the Social Science team to develop/address recommendations arising from the Government Social Science Research Review.

Kitchen Life 2 Working Group Updated (Paper 10.2) JB updated on recent activity of the group, including:

- Shortlisted for the “best use of data technology” at the Civil Service Awards.
- The team won the Innovative methods category at the Government Analysis Function Awards.
- An overview of KL2 and how it was to understand hygiene practices in domestic and commercial kitchens across the UK (excl. Scotland).
- Future plans to review the final outputs of the report in Spring 2023.

Economics Working Group Update (Paper 10.3) ND updated the group in the absence of SH. The update included:

- An overview of the main objective of the group. An update on the quarterly meetings where the group discuss key economic projects and share insights.
- The team last met on 24 January and discussed the possibility to develop training on survey design for economists, for the FSA analytics team. This will be explored further by the Working Group Chair and Secretariat.

Wider Consumer Interest Working Group (Paper 10.4). AM updated the group in absence of SH and how this group supports the Wider Consumer Interests programme. The update included

- Terms of reference and scope of the working group have been agreed upon and contributed to the June 2022 social science report [UK Public’s Interest, Needs and Concerns Around Food](#).
- SH conducting an external review of the Consumer Insights Tracker (Item 11).
- When the tracker is recommissioned, the group will review the specification and participate in the tender evaluation panel.

Secretariat Update (Paper 10.5)

RG updated on

- Expenses – claims under a full day will now be calculated at an hourly rate, with a cap on daily meeting/reading fees for members.
- Recruitment – a campaign will take place later in the year (around September) with a view to recruiting within Wales and/or Northern Ireland to improve the representation of the devolved nations.

- 2022 Appraisal - the ACSS has maintained good standards since previous year and has improved in a number of areas.
- SAC Review – deep review of the Science Council and ACSS is underway with findings expected to be published around June 2023.

Analytics Unit Update (Paper 10.6)

JD started by providing an overview of the team and how they are structured. She introduced Willem Roelofs who started in August as **Head of the Analytics Team**. JD stated that the team have had to re-prioritise their work to support The Reform of EU Law Bill (REUL) Precision Breeding Bill, the border target operating model and increased risk assessment work; and how the different professions in Analytics Unit have collaborated to provide good quality and holistic evidence to support these and other areas.

WR then provided a forward look for the unit to ensure they could continue to deliver a good quality service, respond to uncertain changes and priorities, and protect and enhance their technical abilities. WR stressed the importance of interdisciplinary work in achieving this and asked members how the ACSS could support. Members discussed the need to have a clear view of what interdisciplinary working in the unit should result in order to support.

Action 10.1 – ACSS secretariat to work with JD/WR to explore what interdisciplinary working in the unit should result in, and discuss with Chair before taking it to the wider committee (April 2023)

Update from Science Council Chair

Peter Gregory attended on behalf of Sandy Thomas, SC Chair. PG advised that:

- Sandy had delivered a talk to the Grocery Industry on the impact of climate change on food safety.
- Discussed the work undertaken by the SC on food safety and net zero carbon. The draft final report had been circulated for comment. Further work will be required following feedback from DEFRA.
- SC held a workshop in December to look at prioritising future work around potential issues for the FSA to address.

Update on the ACSS supported review of the FSAs Consumer Insights Tracker

HH provided an update on the review of the monthly Consumer Insights Tracker (in the absence of SH) which covers topics such as: food affordability, consumer concerns, supply chain and confidence in the FSA as a regulator HH discussed:

- The Review Process (Timings)
- Consultation of Stakeholders
- Review and Interim findings
- Recommendations so far

Forward Look

JH provided an update on the planned networking and knowledge-sharing event that ACSS is hoping to host around May 2023. The aim of his event is to better utilise ACCS members' academic and research networks and to better understand the social science evidence base relevant to the FSA Areas of Research Interest. JH advised this would be a day of added value, to generate new ideas and connections and to broaden our networks. JH advised that details were being discussed and further information would follow.

AOB

None

Close

JH thanked everyone for their attendance

Appendix A