

Report

ACSS 2022 Annual Report

Report by Julie Hill, ACSS Chair.

This paper summarises the activities of the Advisory Committee for Social Science (ACSS) in 2022.

Introduction

The ACSS is an independent expert committee of the FSA comprising of an independent Chair and nine expert members¹. The Committee was appointed in 2018 and has just completed its fourth year.

The role of the ACSS is to provide expert strategic advice to the FSA on its use of the social sciences to deliver the FSA's objectives, including new and emerging methods, processes and systems to interrogate data. Its purpose is to help FSA utilise the social sciences and these emerging approaches to shape and deliver its strategic objectives and understand its impact.

The majority of work in the ACSS is delivered through Working Groups, although members often undertake additional activities, providing expert input on specific pieces of work.

ACSS member updates

An ACSS recruitment campaign was launched in the Spring of 2022. The campaign aimed to appoint up to 3 new members and a new chair, following the decision of Professor Susan Michie to step down from the role. The campaign was a success with 21 member applications and 5 applications for the role of chair.

In October 2022, Julie Hill (previously Deputy Chair) was appointed Chair, with Professor Julie Barnett taking the role of Deputy chair. Additionally, three new members joined the Committee following an in-person induction event. The new ACSS members are:

- Dr Naomi Maynard: Good Food Programme Director at Feeding Liverpool, leading Liverpool's food alliance and Good Food Plan.

- Professor Fiona Gillison: a Professor of Health Psychology and Deputy Director of the Centre for Motivation and Health Behaviour Change at the University of Bath.
- Dr Charlotte Hardman: a Senior Lecturer in Psychology and co-director of the Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Food Systems (CESFS) at the University of Liverpool.

In 2022, ACSS members, Chair and Secretariat completed their annual appraisal of the ACSS including the effectiveness of the SAC, Secretariat support, Chair's facilitation of plenary meetings and application of leadership expertise and judgment. The 2022 appraisal shows that the ACSS has maintained good standards since the 2021 appraisal and improved in a number of areas including 'effectiveness of the SAC', 'secretariat support' and 'admin hub support'.

ACSS 2022 Activity

Since the 2021 annual report, two new Working Groups have been set up to support the FSA Science team to deliver high-quality research within its Areas of Research Interest. The Wider Consumer Interest Working Group supports the development and delivery of a wide programme of work to explore consumer interests in relation to food. The Economics Working Group, which provides advice and guidance on economic analysis and activities taking place under the management of the FSA Analytics Unit. Impacts of all Working Groups (past and present) are outlined in Annex A, with key impacts from 2022 Working Group Activity outlined below:

In February 2022, the Climate Change and Consumer Behaviour Working Group held a second workshop to build on the expert elicitation workshop in 2021 (held with leading external researchers). The second workshop invited representatives from relevant FSA teams (such as Chemical Safety Policy and National Food Crime Unit), to consider findings from the expert elicitation workshop to explore which areas of behavioural change should be considered further by the FSA. The final report 'The impact of climate change on consumer food behaviours: Identification of potential trends and impacts' was published on the [ACSS website](#) in July.

The ACSS Assurance Working Group has worked closely with University College London to develop and deliver a 'good science' quality assurance checklist/toolkit to support the commissioning of high-quality research across FSA sciences. The Social Science team piloted the checklist throughout the project cycle from October 2022 (the checklist was published on the [ACSS website](#) in March 2023).

In July 2022, to best utilise members' knowledge and expertise, FSA Social Science team and ACSS Assurance Working Group developed a "Gateway" process, whereby all new projects are presented to the Committee, with some expectations such as rapid turnaround work, to inform project development and provide input into research methods. Annex B details the 13 projects considered through the Gateway since the process started.

In September 2022, the Wider Consumer Interests Working Group members were asked to support FSA Social Science leads to carry out an independent review of the FSA's Consumer Insights Tracker which has been running since April 2020. The Chair of the Working Group, Professor Spencer Henson, is leading the review and interim findings from the review were received in November 2022 with full findings due in March 2023.

In November 2022, Kitchen Life 2 Working Group members joined FSA staff from Risk Assessment, Policy, Strategy and Comms alongside other external experts to attend the Kitchen Life 2 behavioural workshop. Members discussed the kitchen behaviours that had been captured and contributed their food hygiene and behavioural knowledge. Contributions from the workshop will be fed into the Kitchen Life 2 final output.

In addition to Working Group meetings, the ACSS meets twice yearly to discuss the work of the Committee and how it is assisting the work of the FSA's Social Science and Analytics team. At the ACSS July 2022 plenary meeting, ACSS members considered how the work of the Social Science team meets the evidence needs of the FSA 2022-2025 strategy (published January 2022) and discussed how best to meet the steer from the FSA Board to broaden the evidence base around Household Food Insecurity.

The Secretariat team run an ad hoc facility whereby ACSS members can be requested to undertake short-term work on specific projects and/or outputs. As outlined in Annex C, in 2022, there were 15 ad-hoc requests for ACSS members including reviewing specifications, protocols and reports from the Social Science team and Science Council.

In November, Julie Hill and the Secretariat team attended a plenary meeting of DEFRA's Social Science Expert Group (SSEG, a subgroup of DEFRA's Science Committee). This was an opportunity for both committees to network, share ways of working and discuss work they have undertaken.

Planned ACSS 2023 activity

The ACSS 10th plenary occurred in February 2023. Professor Susan Jebb, in her role as FSA Chair attended the meeting to welcome and thank members for their ongoing support. The 11th ACSS plenary will occur in Summer 2023. This will be the first in-person plenary since before the pandemic (December 2019).

The Secretariat team and Chairs of the ACSS and SSEG will continue to explore options for collaborative working for 2023.

Kitchen Life 2 Working Group members will review the final outputs in Spring 2023 including; a technical report, a report that demonstrates how to use the data, a deep dive report on behaviours and a presentation of key findings. The Economics Working Group are exploring options to work with the FSA economics team to develop inhouse training on economics survey design.

The Assurance Working Group will finalise the quality assurance toolkit. (This was achieved early in the year and published on the [ACSS website](#) in March).

The Wider Consumer Insights Working Group will complete the in-depth review of the Consumer Insight Tracker. (This was achieved in March 2023. The final report is being drafted and findings have informed the development of a tender for the Consumer Insight Tracker.)

An in-person ACSS networking event is scheduled for May 2023, to better utilise the networks and contacts of ACSS members. Key pieces of FSA social science will be presented in order to stimulate discussions around improved dissemination, impact and academic engagement.

Conclusion

The ACSS has undertaken work in many strategically important areas, supporting specific research projects, aiding the development of internal assurance processes and expanding the evidence base on strategic topics.

Future work will build on this, and enhance FSA connections with external social research experts, both within and outside government.

Annex A: Working Groups

Current ACSS Working Groups

Assurance Working Group (initiated August 2019).

Main aim: To provide assurance to the FSA Board on the quality, value and impact of social science in the FSA. Key impacts include:

- Improving how impact is measured. (2020): The Working Group guided the development of a process for establishing the impact of FSA social science. This was successfully rolled out across the team and is further being developed by Science Strategy Capability and Research to develop a cross Science Evidence and Research Division approach.
- Facilitating appropriate consideration of other legitimate factors in the risk management process (2021): The group was commissioned by the Chief Scientific Advisor to produce a guiding principle note, to inform how other legitimate factors are considered in the risk management process. This has been included in the FSA Risk Analysis Playbook, providing a useful resource to support FSA staff, including when responding to situations where stress (e.g., unexpected time pressures, or a lack of information) is placed on the risk analysis process.
- Developing and delivering a 'good science' quality assurance checklist/toolkit to support the commissioning of high-quality research across FSA sciences (2022-2023).
- Informing the design and implantation of social science research projects through participation in the gateway process (2022 - ongoing)

Kitchen Life 2 (initiated December 2020).

Main aim: to provide assurance, steering and peer review of Kitchen Life 2 - a large programme of social science to better understand actual kitchen behaviours (both commercial and domestic). Key impacts include:

- Facilitating the appointment of a suitable contractor (2021): Working Group input into tender documentation, and participation in subsequent evaluation panel, ensured the appointed supplier had the expertise and resource to deliver this large and important programme of work.
- Assurance of outputs and programme development (2021-2022): Input into relevant evidence reviews, programme scope, and key design decisions has

provided expert assurance on this work, facilitating useful and relevant findings for the FSA and attending a behavioural workshop.

- Contributed to Kitchen Life 2 behavioural workshop (November 2022) in which kitchen behaviours were discussed alongside FSA staff and external experts. Contributions from the workshop will be fed into the final outputs.

Wider Consumer Interest Working Group (initiated December 2021).

Main aim: is to provide impartial, ad-hoc advice, peer review the research and support broadening the scope of evidence gathering to include the wider interest of consumers and to help provide timely, relevant robust evidence to join up food policy. Key impacts include:

- Advising on the direction of work for the Wider Consumer Interest Programme for 2022/23 by providing a steer on evidence gaps that the FSA may want to address, in line with FSA Strategy and Board discussions around Household Food Insecurity (2022).
- Providing ad hoc support to the FSA Lead, e.g. peer review research material and final report, reviewing and providing advice on research specifications and conducting an external review on the Consumer Insight Tracker (2022).

Economics Working Group (initiated December 2021).

Main aim: Providing ad hoc support to the FSA Lead, e.g., peer review research material and final report, review and provide advice on research specifications, and providing Board with updates. Since its inception, the Economics Working Group has reviewed the Economics work plan for the current and next financial year, attended quarterly review meetings and reviewed monthly updates on substantive economics projects.

Completed ACSS Working Groups

- Climate Change and Consumer Behaviour (initiated December 2020). Main aim: To map emerging and potential consumer behaviour trends onto the FSA's objectives in order to inform FSA policy in the coming years. The Working Group developed and commissioned an expert elicitation workshop,

which ran in May 21. This exercise gathered expert opinions on trends (observed or considered possible) that may impact food safety, food authenticity and/or regulation. A second event was to help key FSA policy officials in FSA to consider. The final report 'The impact of climate change on consumer food behaviours: Identification of potential trends and impacts' is published [here](#).

- Risk communications (initiated August 2019). Main aim: To ensure that the best possible evidence base supports the development of a risk communication framework for the FSA. The Working Group undertook a number of activities leading to the publication of the [FSA risk communication tool kit](#), supporting science, policy and strategy teams to communicate effectively, and facilitating better risk communications planning.
- EU Exit (initiated April 2019). Main aim: To provide expert advice to support the identification of potential economic changes that would impact food businesses and consumer interests in relation to food. The Working Group worked with economists to explore the evidence, increasing the FSA's understanding of the likely impacts on industry and consumers, and informing approaches as to how the FSA can mitigate expected risks.
- Food and You 2 (initiated September 2018). Main aim: To review the approach and methodology for the flagship Food and You survey and formulate actionable recommendations to improve methodology and maximise impact. Proposals in the subsequent [recommendations paper](#) have since been implemented, with Food and You 2 now taking a modular push-to web methodology, increasing the scope of the survey and frequency of outputs, producing more timely and relevant evidence on consumer attitudes and behaviours.
- Applications of behavioural science (initiated June 2018). Main aim: to help assure best practice and outcomes in the application of behavioural science to the upcoming work of the FSA's engagement with consumers to ensure food is safe and is what it says it is and regulators of food businesses who are responsible for complying with food safety regulation. This group was set up to review the progress the FSA Social Science team had made within the behavioural science remit and scope out new work in line with emerging

priorities.

Annex B: Projects considered through the Gateway process, July - December 2022.

Date Project

Awareness of Antimicrobial Resistance amongst food handlers

7th July RQ: Have those employed as food handlers heard of antimicrobial resistance? Do those employed as food handlers know a) the main risks of AMR b) the main sources in terms of food types, and c) food preparation activities that limit the spread of AMR?

Methods: Food handler's online survey

Sustainable diets canteen trial (part 2)

7th July RQ: Can a combination behavioural intervention (free samples + loyalty cards) influence blue collar workers meal choice to the sustainable plant-based option in a workplace restaurant?

Methods: Field experiment using a one-armed stepped-wedge design

OTP Consumer Engagement: Regulatory Divergence

7th July Aim: Understand the consumer appetite for potential divergence in England and Wales from inherited EU regulation

Methods: Deliberative workshops

Evaluation of remote assessment for FHRs re-inspections

7th July
Aims: To understand Local Authorities experience of introducing and using remote re-assessments. To assess the reaction and perception of Food Business Operators to the change and its impact on them

Methods: In-depth interviews with representatives from local authorities and food business operators.

PPDS evaluation

7th July
Aim: To evaluate the implementation of the pre-packed for direct sale (PPDS) legislation change which took place in October 2021

Methods: Food Business Operator survey, LA survey, FHS consumer survey + qual interviews with the same

Understanding prevention strategies to reduce food fraud

7th July
Aim: Investigate strategies for the prevention of food fraud which have been successfully utilised in other territories (both within the UK and internationally).

Methods: Evidence review and expert elicitation

Precision Breeding

15th July
RQ: What are consumers' perceptions of precision breeding (PB)? What do consumers think about the FSA's regulatory approach to PB and what information do they need to maintain confidence in the food in the absence of labelling?

Methods: Nat rep. consumer survey, Citizens forums in Wales, England and NI

Raw pet food

8th Sept RQ: What are consumer perceptions of, and behaviours regarding, handling raw pet food?

Methods: Mixed methods (ethnographic study followed by survey)

Consumer Views on Regulatory Divergence

25th Oct RQ: Under what circumstances might consumers consider regulatory divergence acceptable?

Method: Deliberative workshops

Local authority capacity and capability

15th Nov Aim: To understand the current system of producing suitably qualified and experienced officers (environmental health and trading standards) across England, Wales and Northern Ireland and identify the barriers hindering the flow of potential officers into local authorities.

Method: qualitative (plus in-house quantitative modelling)

Evaluation of proof of concept for large retailers

8th Dec Aim: To understand whether it is feasible to regulate large retailers using an enterprise level approach.

Method: qualitative

8th Dec Evaluation of online aggregators charter

Method: qualitative

Annex C: Ad-hoc work undertaken outside of the Working Group Model

Requestor	Project/Output	Request Type	Date
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Social Science	Use By Dates - Behavioural Trials	Review desk summary and proposed interventions	January 2022
Social Science	Use By Dates - Behavioural Trials	Attend Workshop to prioritise intervention design	January 2022
Social Science	Use By Dates - Behavioural Trials	Attending protocol testing meeting	January 2022
Social Science	Precautionary allergen labelling	Report review	January 2022
Social Science	Use By Dates Protocol	Review and protocol	February 2022
Social Science	Quality of Life Study	Report review	February 2022
Science Council	Food Safety and Net Zero Carbon	Review a recommendation in a report	February 2022
Science Council	Food Safety and Net Zero Carbon Interim Report	Report review	May 2022
Social Science	Food and You 2 Retender	Review tender	May 2022
Comms	Food safety and food banks	Advice and input	June 2022
Social Science	Food and You 2	Review and input on survey	July 2022

Social
Science

Precision Breeding
Specification

Review and input on survey July 2022

Social
Science

Smoked Fish Survey

Review and input on survey August
2022