

Paper 11.4 Wider Consumer Interests Working Group - Update (July 2023)

Summary

This paper provides an update on progress for the Wider Consumer Interests Working Group. It summarises background, key activities, and future action. This paper is for information and discussion.

Background

The FSA is working on a programme of work drawing on our understanding of consumers' wider interests in relation to food as we develop our new strategy and approach for the coming years. We are expanding the scope of our evidence gathering to include wider interests of consumers in relation to food, giving perspective into wider food policy and provide evidence on some of the big challenges in the food system such as diet and nutrition, sustainability of food, food insecurity, provision, and choice.

The main aim of this Programme is to amplify the consumer voice in food policy in the FSA and across Government and broaden the scope of our evidence gathering to include wider interests of consumers, helping to join up food policy.

A number of projects have been delivered under this Programme of work, with many of the workstreams now complete. The steer from the FSA board at the June 2020 Board meeting was to continue to explore and progress with the future work programme focused on household food insecurity, which will be completed under the Wider Consumer Interests Areas of Research Interest.

The ACSS was asked to consider how best to support the FSA's research to evidence the wider interest of consumers and agreed that the creation of a Working Group will help support and assure the quality of this workstream.

Members

The Working Group is comprised of the following members:

- Professor Spencer Henson (chair)
- Professor Julie Barnett
- Dr Seda Erdem
- Professor George Gaskell
- Dr Charlotte Hardman
- Ms Julie Hill
- Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford
- Dr Naomi Maynard

Terms of reference

The main objective of the Working Group is to provide impartial, ad-hoc advice, peer review the research and support broadening the scope of our evidence gathering to include wider interest of consumers and to help provide timely, relevant to robust evidence to join up food policy.

Key activities to date

Since its inception, the Wider Consumer Interest Working Group has undertaken the following:

- Formally agreed on members and Chair of the Working Group, developed terms of references and defined the scope of the Working Group.
- Keeping abreast of other external sources of information that could inform, improve and guide the Programme (ongoing).
- Discussing and advising on the direction of work for the Programme for 2022/23 by providing a steer on evidence gaps that we may want to address, in line with our Strategy and board discussions around Household Food Insecurity.
- Exploring if we need/want to investigate and explore specific issues with certain groups of the population/consumer groups with protected characteristics.
- In July 2022, members discussed The UK Public's Interests, Needs and Concerns Around Food publication and the steer from the Board in terms of a priority focus on Household Food Insecurity under this programme of work.

In September 2022, FSA Social Science leads requested ad-hoc support from the WCI Working Group to carry out an external review of the Consumer Insights Tracker which has been running since April 2020. Professor Spencer Henson led the review, which included a variety of internal and external stakeholder interviews. The review will be published late summer 2023 and makes the following recommendations, which have, and will continue to, inform the CIT as an established product.

- The Consumer Insights Tracker be continued, substantively unchanged, for a minimum of three years.
- The scope for increasing the range of demographic variables collected and/or analysed should be explored.
- The ACSS WCI Working Group should be consulted by the FSA team when new questions are proposed.
- Greater prominence should be given to the fact that the Consumer Insights Tracker does not include Scotland when communicating the results to stakeholders.
- Greater coordination between the Consumer Insights Tracker and F&Y2 should be explored.
- A more explicit and coherent process of identifying new issues and testing these out with the Consumer Insights Tracker to maintain its relevance is needed.
- More extensive statistical analysis of the Consumer Insights Tracker data should be undertaken.
- Consider how the slide deck could be improved to communicate better key results to stakeholders.
- Consider separating out the Consumer Insights Tracker, social media listening and food price tracking into distinct slide decks.
- Continue publication of the monthly bulletin.
- Review continuation of the annual report on the Consumer Insights Tracker and/or the scope and format of the report.
- Explore new ways of making data from the Consumer Insights Tracker available to stakeholders and that highlight key findings of each survey and trends over time.

Future Activities

The WCI Working Group has completed substantive activity and made a useful, impactful contribution to the WCI programme. The FSA would be keen to keep the Working Group going, providing expert support to the project leads on an ad-hoc

basis and guide the programme as and when needed.

Spencer Henson, ACSS Wider Consumer Interest Working Group Chair

Ely Mirzahosseinkhan, Sophie Watson, Helen Heard, Alex Moore, Abbie Collins, Anya Mohideen FSA