

Paper 11.5 Assurance Working Group - Update (July 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 Susan Michie
- Professor George Gaskell
- Professor Fiona Gillison
- Dr Naomi Maynard
- Dr Charlotte Hardman

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).

1

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/socialsciencerevrep150817.pdf>

2 https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-18-09-08-governance-report_0.pdf

3 For the purposes of this work social science will be restricted to the work of the Social Science Team which includes behavioural science but not economics (although this discipline is technically defined as a social science). If specific assurance work is required for economics, this could be done through the establishment of an Economics Working Group.

Work on the quality assurance toolkit (TOR_A) has now been completed and the final output published on the [ACSS website](#). The GSR review (TOR_B) has now been completed and is expected to be published at the end of July. The working group will review TORs when they next meet in September.

Key activities to date

Since its inception the Assurance working group has undertaken a variety of work:

- 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 process *4 (November 2020 - March 2021)
- Informing the development of a quality assurance toolkit to support the commissioning of high-quality research across FSA science (April 21-Mar 22).

*4 As set out in the [FSA Board meeting in March 2019](#)

Current/Ongoing activities:

The following activities are ongoing or planned for 2023:

- Participate in Social Science Gateway sessions, held on a quarterly basis to review the objectives, research questions and proposed methods of new social science projects (June 22 - ongoing).
- Advising on a brief for an independent evaluation looking at the social research output against the GSR standards, and review the final output and FSA response (Dec 22 - Jul 22);
- Support the development of FSA social science peer review process (June-Sep 23)
- Support the development of a template methodology section for FSA social science outputs (June-Sep 23)

Hannah Lambie-Mumford, ACSS Assurance Working Group Chair Jo Disson, Rebecca Gillespie, FSA