

# Review of the FSA's Consumer Insights Tracker

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## 2. The Consumer Insights Tracker

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The Consumer Insights Tracker is a regular data collection instrument that has historically collected data on the following issues:

- Food affordability and other aspects of food security.
- Food availability.
- Consumer concerns in relation to food.
- Confidence in the food supply chain.
- Confidence in the FSA as a regulator.
- Food safety-related behaviour, and in particular consumption of food beyond the use-by date (UBD).

The Consumer Insights Tracker is undertaken through a monthly survey of individuals aged 16 to 75 years in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The sample size is around 2,000 individuals each month. Demographic quotas for age, sex, region, working status and social grade are applied, such that the sample is broadly representative of the population of these three countries.

The Consumer Insights Tracker has its origin in tracker surveys undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic that commenced in April 2020. From November 2021 to January 2022, the Consumer Insights Tracker was implemented approximately every two weeks, but since has run monthly.

The Consumer Insights Tracker is implemented as part of an online omnibus survey managed by an external agency, namely Ipsos UK. The omnibus survey is in the field for three full days over a weekend each month (usually the second weekend), according to the current contract. Participants are drawn from a panel of individuals (Ipsos iSay). Respondents are incentivised through a points system, with points being redeemable for rewards that include gift cards, virtual prepaid cards, merchandise, and charitable donations. Panel members are excluded from participation in the Consumer Insights Tracker if they have completed the survey in the previous month. Various standard checks are employed to detect and exclude panel members that are inattentive in completing the survey.[\[1\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) For example, based on the speed with which respondents complete a survey and/or the number of answers provided. Panel members are assessed in this regard not only with respect to a single survey, but also multiple surveys.

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## **3. Evaluation of the Consumer Insights Tracker**

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The fundamental question for the review is whether the Consumer Insights Tracker should be continued in its present form; that is as a monthly omnibus survey. From the outset, it is important to highlight that there is widespread support for its continuation both within the FSA and in wider government. On the one hand, the frequency and quick delivery of data provided by the Tracker is highly valued. On the other, there are concerns that the time trends provided by the Consumer Insights Tracker, most notably with respect to affordability and food security, would be disrupted if the tracker were to be curtailed or reduced in frequency. Of course, this later concern only holds if concerns about affordability and food security are maintained. This highlights the need for the Consumer Insights Tracker to adapt and change over time as new issues emerge (see below). This is one of the most critical issues needing attention looking to the future of the Tracker.

The central recommendation of the review, therefore, is that:

**The Consumer Insights Tracker be continued substantively unchanged for a minimum of three years.**

Beyond the continuation of the Consumer Insights Tracker, it is considered important that the longer-term sustainability of the Tracker is established. On the one hand, the Consumer Insights Tracker is clearly valued by many stakeholders, both within the FSA and in Other Government Departments (OGDs). On the other hand, extending the Consumer Insights Tracker for a more limited period (say, one year) and/or making decisions on its continuation on an ongoing basis (say, annually) would degrade its utility and impede effective strategic planning around the focus of the Tracker and how the data are utilised. Many stakeholders value the Consumer Insights Tracker because they 'know it is there' when they need consumer data and are interested in extending their use of the Tracker as its subject coverage evolves and expands. At least initially, a three-year time horizon for the continuation of the Consumer Insights Tracker seems appropriate.

While recommending the continuation of the Consumer Insights Tracker, it is evident that certain elements of the Tracker need attention. These are outlined below:

### **3.1 Appropriateness of methodology**

The current methodology of the Consumer Insights Tracker brings several advantages, some of which are realised and others that could be more fully

exploited.

Each monthly survey can be undertaken quickly, such that the time between first going into field and the results being ready to be distributed to stakeholders is minimal. Thus, slides with the survey results (produced by the contractor) are distributed within the FSA and selective OGDs two to three weeks after initial fieldwork. A monthly bulletin (produced internally by the FSA's Social Science Team) is published on the FSA website, around one month after fieldwork, which allows the data to be quoted publicly and used by stakeholders outside of government. This rapidity is a product of both the use of an omnibus panel and the fact that the external contractor undertakes most of the data handling and production of the slide deck that is a key component of the package that is distributed to stakeholders monthly. While this speed of delivery is not essential for all stakeholders, it is widely valued by data users. For example, one interviewee commented:

“The Tracker is really the only source I have for real time data. This means it is a go to for me when I am looking for the current situation when it comes to the struggles that consumers are having with food affordability.”

Evidently, the rapidity of the availability of survey results enhances the value of the Consumer Insights Tracker for many users of the data. Notably, they can quickly disseminate results to senior officials and/or the media, and can also respond to questions from senior officials, Members of Parliament, etc. with survey data that is seen as ‘current’.

The monthly frequency of the Consumer Insights Tracker provides a regular snapshot of key metrics, for example relating to food security and/or consumer concerns about food. This enables short-term and cyclical changes to be monitored and/or the impacts of specific food or other-related incidents, policy, and programme interventions to be captured. For example, one interviewee commented:

“The Tracker enabled us to capture the impacts of the government’s Cost of Living Payments. We could actually see the impact on the next month’s data on affordability and food security.”

The frequency of surveys, combined with the fact that the current contract for the Consumer Insights Tracker enables changes to questions between surveys, permits items to be added that capture cyclical changes (for example issues that are seasonal such as at Christmas) or that address emerging or immediate

issues. An example of the latter is the use of refrigerators and concerns about the implications for food safety in the context of escalating electricity prices and the economic downturn. According to one interviewee:

“They were able to add questions on the use of fridges given reports in the media that people were turning them off to save money. The results caused quite a stir! Without the Tracker we would not have been able to get at this.”

There is also scope for the Consumer Insights Tracker to be employed to test communications strategies and/or messages. This was recognised by at least one interviewee within the FSA’s Communications Team.

The Consumer Insights Tracker also enables original questions to be tested, for example that cover new issues and/or that employ revised wording, response mechanisms, etc. While the Tracker would seem to have been under-utilised for this purpose, its potential utility in this regard was recognised, for example as a way of testing possible questions and/or areas of enquiry for Food and You 2 (F&Y2).

The use of an omnibus panel serves to reduce the cost of the Consumer Insights Tracker. By their nature, omnibus panels are a lower-cost way of gathering consumer data than, for example, population-based surveys. Also, the current contract enables the FSA to access a range of demographic variables that have been previously collected and that do not count in the monthly quota of questions. Indeed, the only socio-demographic variable that is collected specifically for the Consumer Insights Tracker is health status.

Overall, therefore, the Consumer Insights Tracker presents a cost-effective way in which to gather regular data on a range of food-related issues and to make the results available in a timely manner to stakeholders within the FSA and in OGDs, and to organisations beyond government. There is a compelling case, therefore, for the continuation of the Tracker both in the medium and long term. At the same time, however, it is important to recognise that the Consumer Insights Tracker does have certain weaknesses that limit the utility of the data and their representativeness. Many of these weaknesses relate to online panels and/or omnibus surveys as a broad approach to consumer data collection rather than the Consumer Insights Tracker specifically. Further, these weaknesses do not negate the utility of the data provided by the Tracker as a whole, but rather need to be given due consideration in interpreting the results of the patterns and trends these data reveal.

Online surveys have recognised inbuilt biases in terms of their representativeness. Such panels are biased against segments of the population with limited access to the internet, low digital literacy and/or with a lower propensity to answer online surveys, for example individuals from older age groups, those from low-income groups, etc. For this reason, for example, the Consumer Insights Tracker only includes members of the population aged 16 to 75 years. Importantly, this limitation is common to much of social science research using online surveys.

With omnibus surveys there is a lack of control and standardisation when it comes to questions that are asked prior to the Consumer Insights Tracker. These prior questions have the potential to bias responses (for example, if they also relate to food, health, etc.), whilst this bias may vary from survey-to-survey. Further, being unaware of the nature of the prior questions in any omnibus survey, it is difficult to assess the extent and/or direction of any bias.

The questions in the Consumer Insights Tracker are not routinely subject to cognitive testing. While cognitive testing would undoubtedly bring advantages in aiding responses to questions and guiding the selection of response mechanisms, this would increase costs, significantly enhance the amount of time needed to add new questions and reduce the flexibility of the Tracker. On balance, the gains from cognitive testing of the questions in the Consumer Insights Tracker appear to be limited given the wider limitations of an omnibus survey-based approach and the restrictions this would bring.

The current sample size and limited range of demographic variables limit the level of reliable disaggregation that can be achieved within and across the countries covered by the survey. For example, the ability to examine patterns in responses across regions is constrained, and to identify specific responses from population sub-groups (for example, minorities). In some cases, furthermore, there is a lack of analysis on key demographic variables that would enable the more reliable interpretation of results. For example, it has been observed that seemingly spurious differences in levels of food security by household income have been captured by the Tracker, which could conceivably result from not controlling for household size.

It is recognised that respondents to online and omnibus surveys tend to be less engaged with the subject at hand; in the case of the Consumer Insights Tracker this means that respondents are less likely to be actively engaged with issues around food than would be the case with other survey methods. While this may limit their propensity to answer the questions presented to them and/or to attend

to them less, most questions in the Tracker do not require specific subject knowledge and it is assumed that respondents do not possess a high level of subject knowledge. Further, more engaged respondents themselves could be considered a bias sub-set of the population.

Many stakeholders that are users of the Consumer Insights Tracker data highlighted the lack of data on the 'why' question. For example:

"One of the big weaknesses of the Tracker is that it does not delve into why respondents give the answers they do. I often want to know why individuals are facing problems accessing food or why they are worried about certain things about food."

The questions in the Tracker are strictly limited to quantitative, excluding any open-ended responses, and do not delve into the reasons why previous responses have been provided. Whilst this limits both the depth of data provided by the Consumer Insights Tracker and the ability to interpret the results this is arguably appropriate for a relatively short omnibus-based survey. There are also cost implications of including open-ended questions.[\[2\]](#)

The coverage of the Consumer Insights Tracker excludes Scotland. This is due to the FSA's remit covering England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, with Food Standards Scotland (FSS) being responsible for similar issues in Scotland. Whilst this is communicated to stakeholders in the methodology section of the slide deck and in the monthly bulletin, it is evident that some stakeholders are unaware of this fact and interpret the data as applying for the whole of the United Kingdom. Ways in which this characteristic of the Consumer Insights Tracker can be more prominently communicated to stakeholders need to be explored, perhaps by bolding the respective text.

Many Consumer Insights Tracker stakeholders recognise the limitations of the data and are guided by the Social Science Team at the FSA when it comes to their interpretation. Although they may not fully understand how the data are collected, they trust the Social Science Team at the FSA to provide appropriate guidance; note that brief details of how the data are collected and guidance on interpretation are included when the results are reported. Whilst this is not the purpose of the Consumer Insights Tracker, some users of the data reported frustration at the inability to get more disaggregated results and/or to draw valid inferences of causality with demographic variables. For example:

“Whilst the Tracker data are really useful, at times I need them split out more finely or to be able to make valid conclusions about how responses vary across the population. The Social Science Team have warned us about not doing this.”

These users tend to be directed to the data from the Food and You 2 (F&Y2) surveys (see below).

Looking to the future, whilst recognising the above limitations, it is not recommended that substantive changes are made to the Consumer Insights Tracker in terms of frequency and use of an omnibus panel. Overall, the current approach is considered to present an appropriate balance in terms of the quality of the data, cost, and impact, such that it presents significant value for money. The three areas where attention is potentially warranted, however, are as follows:

- **The scope for increasing the range of demographic variables collected and/or analysed should be explored.** The example of controlling for household size when examining income is given as an example above.
- Whilst it is not recommended that questions be subject to cognitive testing, it is suggested that the **ACSS WCI Working Group should be consulted by the FSA team when new questions are proposed**; this working group is a potentially valuable resource that could be more fully utilised moving forwards.
- **Greater prominence should be given to the fact that the Consumer Insights Tracker does not include Scotland** when communicating the results to stakeholders. For example, by bolding the respective text, including a footnote on each figure in the slide deck and/or monthly bulletin, etc.

## 3.2 Links with Food and You 2

Aside from the Consumer Insights Tracker, the FSA collects consumer data related to food through the Food and You 2 (F&Y2) survey.<sup>[3]</sup> The F&Y2 survey is undertaken every six months and involves a random probability sample of around 6,000 adults aged 16 years and older. The survey is recruited for via ‘push-to-web’, which means that participants are contacted via post and asked to participate online. A postal option to complete the questionnaire is also available. The size of sample and data collection method mean that more detailed and disaggregated analysis can be undertaken, including at the regional level.



The longer length of the F&Y2 surveys means that it covers a wider range of consumer issues related to food. There is some degree of overlap, however, between the Consumer Insights Tracker and F&Y2 although the data are not directly comparable. For example, both surveys cover food insecurity but use different questions and cover different time periods. Whilst this can result in differing data on the same issue, the differing approaches of the two surveys seems to be recognised amongst data users and is not the cause of appreciable confusion.

There is widespread support for the continuation of both the Consumer Insights Tracker and F&Y2, with recognition that these fulfil distinct and complimentary needs. Thus, the Tracker facilitates the regular monitoring of consumer issues and can be adapted (e.g., questions added) at short notice. Conversely, F&Y2 enables more in-depth analysis but is less regular and, given the questions are subject to cognitive testing, less amenable to change. Further, F&Y2 is modular, such that not all questions are asked in every wave of the survey.

While providing distinct data, the scope for **greater coordination between the Consumer Insights Tracker and F&Y2 should be explored**. Thus, the Consumer Insights Tracker could be used more explicitly to test out new issues and/or questions for potential inclusion in F&Y2. Further, greater comparability between the two surveys might be explored, for example in the form of questionnaire wording and/or coding, use of terminology, etc.

### **3.3 Keeping the Consumer Insights Tracker relevant**

Almost universally, the Consumer Insights Tracker is seen by data users as a metric of affordability and food security. Indeed, amongst the individuals consulted as part of this review, there was minimal use of most (or even all) of the other data provided by the tracker. For example:

“I know it covers other things, but I really only look at the questions on affordability and food security. To me, that is what the Tracker is about.”

In part, this outcome is by design. Thus, the results from the Consumer Insights Tracker are purposefully packaged with data on the tracking of food prices in the monthly slide deck for the convenience of stakeholders. However, this likely serves to draw the attention of officials with responsibility for food security to the slide deck and might dissuade the attention of others who have an interest in

other data provided by the tracker. Looking to the future, this is a critical issue for the Consumer Insights Tracker. Thus, what happens if and when affordability and food security become less of an issue in the future?

A key question with respect to the future of the Consumer Insights Tracker, therefore, is the continued relevance of the issues it covers in the face of shifts in consumer concerns and/or policy priorities. One of the key strengths of the Tracker, due to its regularity, is the ability to add new questions to investigate emerging issues. In so doing, however, it is important not to undermine the time trends of data the tracker provides, for example with respect to affordability and food security.

It is not apparent that a clear mechanism exists for identifying new issues to be integrated into the Consumer Insights Tracker and/or to test questions. Rather, issues and/or questions seem to emerge through a rather ad hoc process within the Social Science Team at the FSA. The implication is that the success of the Tracker in its coverage of critical issues to date, most notably affordability and food security, cannot be guaranteed in the future. Rather **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.**

Through the review process, several ideas emerged for ways in which new issues might be identified by the team responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Consumer Insights Tracker. These include:

- Regular consultation with the ACSS WCI Working Group on emerging issues and the types of questions that might be integrated into the tracker to capture these.
- Inviting users of the Consumer Insights Tracker data to suggest new topic areas and/or specific issues that they would like to see integrated into the tracker, for example through periodic emails/meetings or an open invitation to submit ideas.
- Regular consultation with the Strategic Insights Team responsible for social media listening to identify issues on which consumers are engaging.
- Development of closer and more frequent interactions with the Strategic Insights Team within the FSA to identify 'higher level' issues that the Consumer Insights Tracker might incorporate.
- More systematic monitoring of the data provided by other surveys, for example those periodically undertaken by the Food Foundation and other government departments, for example the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Also, there is a need for the Consumer Insights Tracker to reflect more fully the range of issues covered by the third pillar of the FSA's strategy. Sustainability and healthier food are examples here.

### **3.4 Value of the Consumer Insights Tracker data**

From the consultation with personnel within the FSA and wider government, it is evident that the data from the Consumer Insights Tracker are valued and consulted frequently. Thus, numerous instances were given where these data had been integrated into briefings for senior colleagues within the FSA and/or government ministers (an area where the FSA was facing growing demand), in presentations to the FSA Board and/or in the preparation responses to questions from Members of Parliament, in media releases, etc. For example:

"I use the data from the Consumer Insights Tracker regularly. I am always being asked for the most recent data, for example on affordability, which the Tracker gives me. There is really no other source of these data."

Apart from these tangible instances of data from the Consumer Insights Tracker being used, the value of the data as a way of monitoring issues and/or simply 'being there when needed' was frequently cited. For example:

"It is always good to know that the Tracker is there for when I need up-to-date consumer data. I often use it to support my communications with senior colleagues or to make what I am saying more real."

The value of the Consumer Insights Tracker data very much comes from its frequency, quick delivery, and the fact that it provides longer-term time trends. Many users of the data require information that is seen as recent and relevant. Data from F&Y2 and/or the Office of National Statistics (ONS) can be seen as 'out of date' in the case of rapidly evolving issues such as food affordability. For example:

"I recognise the weaknesses of the Consumer Tracker, for example compared to Food and You 2, and the two really are complementary, but its big benefit is how often and how quickly it provides data. On things that are fast moving, it is the only data round."

In contrast to F&Y2, where data are available six or more months following completion of the survey, the Consumer Insights Tracker provides data that relates to only two or three weeks previously. At the same time, because

monthly data are available on many issues since mid-2020, it is possible to see longer-term trends and/or to discern the impacts of policy initiatives.

Another recognised utility of the Consumer Insights Tracker is the ability to adapt questions over time, for example by season, and/or to add in issues that are immediate issues. The example of refrigerator use was frequently cited, that had been motivated by media reports that consumers were turning off their refrigerator and reducing cooking times to reduce energy bills and save money in the context of rising energy costs in winter months in the height of the cost-of-living crisis. Data from the Consumer Insights Tracker suggested that these behaviours were indeed observed quite frequently. Within the FSA, this finding, in turn, provided a push for the updating of advice on the storage and cooking of food during power cuts and its application to contexts where efforts are being made to conserve power. At the same time, routine questions in the Tracker, for example relating to trust in the FSA and/or confidence in the food system, enable sudden changes to be identified in the case of an incident.

Whilst recognising the great value of the Consumer Insights Tracker data as currently made available to stakeholders within the FSA and in wider government, it is evident that the full value of these data is currently not utilised. Thus, whilst members of the Consumer Insights Tracker team do respond to *ad hoc* requests for further information and/or analysis from stakeholders, minimal additional analysis is undertaken, for example analysis by demographic or regional sub-groups is only undertaken annually. Thus, the team tend to obtain further cross-tabulations of data through the Data Liberation Tool owned by Ipsos UK rather than undertaking original analysis themselves.

Whilst the team do have the required statistical skills and access to the original survey data, they lack the time to undertake data handling, and more so in-depth data analysis, themselves. Further, for time to be spent on additional analysis, there is a need to demonstrate a real business need. To make full use of the data, ways need to be explored through which, the time of the Consumer Insights Tracker team can be freed-up to enable them to **undertake more extensive statistical analysis of the Consumer Insights Tracker data**, both in response to queries from stakeholders and on the volition of the Consumer Insights Tracker team themselves.

### **3.5 Wider benefits to the FSA and the Social Science Team**

Beyond the value of the Consumer Insights Tracker data itself, it is evident that the tracker serves to promote the work of the FSA within wider government. Thus, because of the regular data outputs provided by the Tracker, there are more regular interactions between personnel within the FSA and other government departments. Furthermore, the work of the FSA is cited more frequently and in different ways than would be the case in the absence of the Consumer Insights Tracker. For example, some personnel in other government departments highlighted how the Tracker served to raise awareness and interest in the work of the FSA. For example:

“Because of the Tracker I have become more aware of the work that the FSA does. Without the Tracker I would have much less need to interact with the FSA. It has massively increased their profile amongst my colleagues.”

There were several specific instances, indeed, of interactions and/or collaborations with the FSA that might not occur in the absence of the Consumer Insights Tracker.

Importantly, the FSA was seen as a reliable and technically robust provider of data, most specifically with respect to affordability and food security and the regular data outputs from the Consumer Insights Tracker. There were frequent references to the fact that the data currently collected are not available from elsewhere, or that alternative data are from sources considered to be less reliable.<sup>[4]</sup> Also, that the Social Science Team are responsive to requests for additional data and/or their willingness to respond to questions and concerns about the Consumer Insights Tracker data and their strengths and weaknesses.

A further potential benefit for the FSA of the Consumer Insights Tracker, is the support it provides for media engagement on topical issues. Here, for example, not only the issue of affordability was cited, but also the formulation of recommendations and messaging around refrigerator use and consumption of foods beyond the use-by date (UBD) that had been inspired, at least in part, by results from the Tracker. Also, the ability to tailor media engagement to seasonal needs. Indeed, one benefit of the Consumer Insights Tracker, recognised by several interviewees, was that it provided a regular flow of evidence through which the FSA can proactively engage with the media and/or be able to respond to media enquiries. Thus:

“The regularity of the data given by the Tracker allows us to respond to questions from the media with recent data. It also gives us a regular flow of results that we can use through social media to communicate what the FSA is doing.”

The Consumer Insights Tracker also positively impacts the visibility and reputation of the Social Science Team within the FSA itself. Thus, the regular supply of data provided by the tracker, and the ability to respond to immediate and/or emerging issues, was recognised to generate greater interactions between technical specialists and social scientists within the Agency. For example, one individual suggested that the Tracker enabled the Social Science Team to ‘punch above its weight’ and demonstrated the relevance of social science to the work more generally of the FSA:

“There is no doubt to me that the Consumer Tracker has raised the profile of the Social Science Team within the FSA and the rest of government. It is probably the most visible thing they do.”

### **3.6 Communication of results**

Currently, the results from the Consumer Insights Tracker are communicated in four ways:

- A monthly slide deck (produced by the contractor) that is distributed by email within the FSA and wider government and includes the results of social media listening and food price tracking that are provided by other analytic teams within the FSA. Note that this output is not published.
- Monthly bulletin (produced by the Social Science Team) that is published monthly (with accompanying data tables) on the FSA website. Prior to publication, a range of OGDs and third sector stakeholders (such as those in academia or the charity sector) are alerted to the upcoming publication via an email from the FSA’s Head of Social Science. Publication of the bulletins began in October 2022 and before which data from the Consumer Insights Tracker were only made available at less regular intervals (alongside the publication of longer reports such as in November 2021 and May 2022). The monthly bulletin contains the same data and information as the slides, but is a more accessible format, and is suitable for publication according to the relevant Government guidelines.
- End of year report on the Consumer Insights Tracker with long-term trends and demographic analysis.
- Included in a chapter in the annual food standards report of the FSA which provides a summary of results from the Consumer Insights Tracker for the previous year alongside other data sources.

Overall, the communication of data from the Consumer Insights Tracker was highly commended, especially with respect to the rapidity with which results were made available; as noted above, results are generally disseminated within the FSA within two to three weeks of each survey going to field. The fact that these data are received monthly means that users looked out for them and make a point of flagging the respective email for attention, even if they do not attend to it immediately on receipt.

Of all the means of dissemination, it is the monthly side deck that receives most attention. The slide deck itself is referred to routinely by very few stakeholders. Most read the executive summary (at the start of the slides) and only refer to specific slides when they identify a noteworthy result in the summary. Indeed, many individuals that were interviewed for this review found the slides to be overwhelming (there are around 55 slides in the deck), and some found it to be complicated and difficult to comprehend. There is evidently a need to **consider how the slide deck could be improved to communicate better key results to stakeholders**. Options here might include:

- Reducing the number of slides in the deck that is routinely emailed to stakeholders, with others available on request or on a dedicated internal webpage.
- Simplifying some slides in the deck, especially those that report multiple questions and with the results over time for each.
- Breaking the slide deck and executive section down into more explicit sections, and perhaps emailing each section to different stakeholders and/or at different times. It is important to recognise here, however, that this could be time consuming given the number of distinct stakeholder groups the results of the Consumer Insights Tracker are communicated to.

Importantly, some of these changes may require adjustments to the external contract for the Consumer Insights Tracker. Also, there will likely be more tasks for the Consumer Insights Tracker team within the FSA to undertake. Resources will need to be made available to facilitate this.

The current slide deck also includes the results of social media listening and food price monitoring. Most of the individuals that were interviewed did not refer to these sections; it seems that the audience for the Consumer Insights Tracker and for these other sections is quite distinct. To reduce the length of the slide deck, make it less overwhelming and to target better the distinct constituencies for the different elements of the slide deck, **separating out the Consumer Insights Tracker, social media listening and food price tracking into distinct slide**

**decks** should be considered.<sup>[5]</sup> In the case of the Consumer Insights Tracker, this would also serve to highlight that the focus of the tracker extends beyond food security.

The individuals interviewed for this review indicated that they make little or no use of the monthly bulletin.<sup>[6]</sup> Note, however, that the scope of this review did not include engagement with stakeholders external to government, that are a key target constituency of the monthly bulletin. Further, officials within the FSA responsible for the Consumer Insights Tracker indicated that they had received positive feedback on the monthly bulletin from external stakeholders. Note that a key rationale for the bulletin is to enable officials within the FSA and OGDs to reference the Consumer Insights Tracker data publicly. This would support the **continuation of the monthly bulletin.**

There is more of a question mark, however, over the end of year report on the Consumer Insights Tracker. It is apparent that, whilst this report is labour intensive, there is a lack of evidence that it is utilised by the target stakeholders of the Tracker. Indeed, of all the individuals interviewed for this review, not one indicated that they made use of the report when it comes to the results from the Consumer Insights Tracker. While senior officials within the FSA currently require this, the **continuation of the end of year report on the Consumer Insights Tracker and/or the scope and format of the report should be reviewed, especially if demographic breakdowns of results could be provided on a regular more frequent basis.** Arguably, the resources within the Consumer Insights Tracker team could be better utilised, for example in ways outlined above.

Finally, there is scope to **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.** Options here might include infographics or an online dashboard.

<sup>[2]</sup> Note, however, that the tender for the Consumer Insights Tracker does include the possibility of including open-ended questions.

<sup>[3]</sup> Note that F&Y2 is an official statistic and so subject to more rigorous quality control procedures than the Consumer Insights Tracker.

<sup>[4]</sup> There were references to the political sensitivity of food security that would make it difficult for other parts of government, that may have more directly



responsibility for this issue, to collect data themselves.

[5] Note that these are produced by different analytical teams, such that this implies that each team might produce their own slide decks. To some extent, this is a return to the prior situation, for example where the Economics Team produced their own bulletin with data that included food prices.

[6] Note, however, that the interviews for this report were undertaken soon after the commencement of the monthly bulletin, such that awareness at the time may have been more limited than is currently the case.

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## 4. Recommendations

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To summarise, the recommendations of the review of the FSA's Consumer Insights Tracker as outlined in the report, are as follows. Overall:

**1. The Consumer Insights Tracker be continued substantively unchanged for a minimum of three years.**

This being said:

**2. The scope for increasing the range of demographic variables collected and/or analysed should be explored.**

**3. The ACSS WCI Working Group should be consulted by the FSA team when new questions are proposed.**

**4. Greater prominence should be given to the fact that the Consumer Insights Tracker does not include Scotland when communicating the results to stakeholders.**

Further recommendations with respect to the planning, implementation and management of the Consumer Insights Tracker are as follows:

**5. Greater coordination between the Consumer Insights Tracker and F&Y2 teams should be explored.**

**6. 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.**

**7. More extensive statistical analysis of the Consumer Insights Tracker data should be undertaken.**

Finally, with respect to communication of the results from the Consumer Insights Tracker, it is recommended to:

**8. Consider how the slide deck could be improved to communicate better key results to stakeholders.**

**9. Consider separating out the Consumer Insights Tracker, social media listening and food price tracking into distinct slide decks.**

**10. Continue publication of the monthly bulletin.**

**11. Review continuation of the end of year report on the Consumer Insights Tracker and/or the scope and format of the report.**

**12. 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.**

Review of the FSA's Consumer Insights Tracker

# Appendix - Consumer Insights Tracker (CIT) Review Stakeholder Interview Guide

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## Consumer Insights Tracker (CIT) Review Stakeholder Interview Guide

### Introduction

As you probably know, a review is being undertaken of the Consumer Insights Tracker that is commissioned monthly by the FSA. The review is being undertaken by the Wider Consumer Interests Working Group of the Advisory Committee for the Social Sciences (ACSS).

As part of the review, we are talking to individuals in various parts of the FSA, and across Government, that make use of the data provided by the Consumer Insights Tracker. Our aim is to ascertain the value of the Consumer Insights Tracker and to identify areas, if any, where it might be changed in order better to meet the needs of FSA colleagues, and other Government stakeholders.

We are interested in obtaining the honest views and reflections of FSA, and cross-government colleagues on the Consumer Insights Tracker. Note that all responses will not be attributed to the individuals we talk to.

Before, we start, do you have any questions?

# Section 1: General thoughts on The Consumer Insights Tracker

To start, we would like your views on the overall value and importance of the Consumer Insights Tracker.

1. Overall, how valuable is the data provided by the Consumer Insights Tracker to your work?

**Probe:** What does it allow you to do that you would otherwise not be able to do?

**Probe:** What are the various ways in which you use the data?

2. What specific data provided by the Consumer Insights Tracker do you use most often?

**Probe:** Which data?

**Probe:** How often?

**Probe:** Data on food security

**Probe:** Data on food availability

**Probe:** data on consumer concerns related to food

**Probe:** Data on consumer confidence in the food supply chain and the FSA

**Probe:** data on consumer behaviour related to food safety

3. Can you think of a particular example where the information provided by the Consumer Insights Tracker was essential or important to a specific task you were undertaking?

**Probe:** What was the task?

**Probe:** What specific data did you use?

**Probe:** How were the data used?

**Probe:** What would you have done if these data not been available?

4. If the data provided by the Consumer Insights Tracker were not available, what alternative data would be available to you?

**Probe:** What other data are available?

**Probe:** What are the strengths and weaknesses of this alternative data?

**Probe:** Are there any areas where alternative data would not be available?

5. How well informed are you about how the Consumer Insights Tracker is undertaken, and the data collected?

**Probe:** Areas where well informed

**Probe:** Areas where less informed/uninformed

## Section 2: Methodology

Now we will turn to how the Consumer Insights Tracker data are collected and the issues that are covered.

6. Do you think the sample for the Consumer Insights Tracker is suitable/adequate?

**Probe:** Geographical coverage, representativeness, etc.

Would you like to see more data collected from particular population sub-groups?

**Probe:** Which groups (for example specific demographic groups, by nation, etc.)?

7. Do you think that the monthly frequency of data collection is appropriate?

**Probe:** Why?

**Probe:** What changes would you suggest?

**Probe:** What if this impacted the speed of data delivery and/or the quality of the research?

8. Are there any additional issues/questions that you would like to see included in the Consumer Insights Tracker?

**Probe:** Which issues?

**Probe:** How would data on these issues help you in your work at the FSA?

**Probe:** How do these issues align with the FSA's 3<sup>rd</sup> pillar that food is healthier and more sustainable?

9. Are there any issues/questions that are essential to your work and that should NOT be removed?

**Probe:** Which ones?

**Probe:** Why are these essential?

10. Are there any questions that you would like to be revised and/or asked differently?

**Probe:** Which ones?

**Probe:** How?

**Probe:** Would it matter that, in doing so, the ability to make comparisons with results from previous surveys would be compromised?

11. To what extent does the Consumer Insight Tracker overlap with other surveys?

**Prompt:** Which other surveys (for example, Food and You2)?

**Prompt:** Is there value to these overlaps?

**Prompt:** Could the comparability of data between these surveys be improved?

**Prompt:** Is there a case for removing these overlaps?

12. What types of data analysis are most valuable for you?

**Prompt:** Sample averages

**Prompt:** Trends over time

**Prompt:** Sub-group analysis (for example, comparisons across demographic groups, regions/nations, etc.)

13. Are there any types of data analysis that you would like to see?

## **Section 3: Outputs and reports**

We now turn to the outputs of the Consumer Insights Tracker.

14. What is your preferred way to receive the latest findings from surveys, such as the consumer Insights tracker?

**Probe:** What types of output are most useful to you (for example, slides, executive summaries, full reports, topline, etc.)?

**Probe:** What ways of getting results are most useful to you (for example, newsletters, email, Yammer, etc.)?

Currently, the social science team produces several different outputs for the Consumer Insights tracker. This includes a set of slides that is shared across Government via email each month, a new monthly bulletin report for publication on the FSA website, and full publication reports which are more detailed and are produced a few times per year. We would like to ask you about each of these outputs.

First the monthly slide decks that include Consumer Insights Tracker data, social media listening data, Ipsos polling data and Food Price Commodity tracker data.

15. Were you aware that the social science team produces a monthly slide deck?

16. How frequently do you make use of the monthly slide decks?

17. Do you typically make use of the full slide deck or just certain sections?

**Probe:** Which sections are more or less useful to you?

**Probe:** Why?

**Probe:** Do you make use of different sections according to the work you are doing and/or from month to month?

**Probe:** How does this change and why?

18. How much use do you make of the executive summary slides and the slides with charts?

19. Do you ever share the entire slide deck and/or particular parts of the slide deck with colleagues in other parts of the FSA and/or other parts of government?

**Probe:** Who do you share these with?

**Probe:** When and how often?

20. Are there any changes to the slide deck you would like to see?

**Probe:** Changes to format

**Probe:** Missing data

**Probe:** Length of executive summary

**Probe:**

21. Are there any aspects of the slide deck would you NOT want to be changed?

**Probe:** Which ones?

**Probe:** Why?

For those contributing to the monthly slide decks only:

22. How do you find the current process by which the data in the slide decks is compiled?

**Prompt:** What works well?

**Prompt:** What improvements could be implemented?

Now we turn to the monthly bulletin that the food science team now publishes on its website. This bulletin is short and quotes key findings from the latest survey wave. It was produced so that senior stakeholders could quote the latest figures and is designed to provide top lines only.

23. Were you aware that the social science team publishes a monthly bulletin?

24. Did you read the most recent monthly bulletin published in September 2022?

**Probe:** How soon after the bulletin was published did you read it?

**Probe:** If you did not read the bulletin, why not?

25. How useful did you find the bulletin?

**Probe:** What parts were most useful?

**Probe:** How did you make use of the information in the bulletin in your work?

26. Is there any data/information you would like to be included in the monthly bulletin?

**Probe:** What information?



**Probe:** How would you use this information in your work?

27. Is there any information you would NOT want to be taken out of the monthly bulletin?

**Prompt:** What data/information is essential to you?

**Prompt:** Why?

28. Are there any changes in the format of the bulletin you would like to see?

**Prompt:** What changes would you like to see?

**Prompt:** Why?

29. How frequently would you like to see the bulletin published?

**Prompt:** Would you like to see it published more or less frequently?

**Prompt:** Why?

30. The social science team sends out its monthly bulletin by email with the slide deck as an attachment. Do you regularly receive these emails?

**Prompt:** If not, how did you get the monthly bulletin?

31. How useful are these emails?

Prompt: Does the email stand out and is the information clear?

Prompt: Is the content of the email sufficient?

**Prompt:** How could the format and/or content of the email be improved?

Now we turn to the full report on the Consumer Insights Tracker

32. Were you aware that a full report is published on the Consumer Insights Tracker?

33. Did you read the most recent Consumer Insights Tracker report published in March 2022?

**Probe:** How soon after the bulletin was published did you read it?

**Probe:** If you did not read the bulletin, why not?

34. How useful did you find the report?

**Probe:** What parts were most useful?

**Probe:** How did you make use of the information in the report in your work?

35. Is there any data/information you would like to be included in the report?

**Probe:** What information?

**Probe:** How would you use this information in your work?

36. Is there any data/information you would NOT want to be taken out of the report?

**Prompt:** What data/information is essential to you?

**Prompt:** Why?

37. Are there any changes in the format of the report you would like to see?

**Prompt:** What changes would you like to see?

**Prompt:** Why?

38. How frequently would you like the full report to be published?

**Prompt:** Would you like to see it published more or less frequently?

**Prompt:** How would you feel if it was published quarterly? What about every six months? What about annually?

**Prompt:** Why?

## **Section 4: Comms and dissemination**

We now turn to how the results of the Consumer Insights Tracker are communicated within the FSA and more widely.

39. Overall, how satisfied are you with the way in which the social science team communicates the results of the Consumer Insights Tracker?

**Prompt:** What is particularly good about the way in which the results are communicated?

**Prompt:** How might the way in which results are communicated be improved?

40. Are all the relevant people within the FSA aware of the Consumer Insights Tracker and/or receive the results.

**Prompt:** Who is not aware and/or receive results?

**Prompt:** Why are these important?

**Prompt:** How could these people be best communicated with?

41. Are all the relevant people within government outside of the FSA aware of the Consumer Insights Tracker and/or receive the results.

**Prompt:** Who is not aware and/or receive results?

**Prompt:** Why are these important?

**Prompt:** How could these people be best communicated with?

## **Section 5: Using the findings**

We now turn to how you use the results of the Consumer Insights Tracker

42. How do you use the results from the Consumer Insights Tracker? Can you provide specific recent examples?

**Probe:** Policy analysis

**Probe:** Decision-making and/or priority-setting

**Probe:** Monitoring of impacts

**Probe:** Preparing policy briefs

**Probe:** Communication with external stakeholders

**Probe:** Other?

43. Do you ever look at the raw data and/or data tables?

**Probe:** decision making, for information, monthly monitoring?

**Probe:** for specific examples

44. Have you ever requested further analysis of data from the Consumer Insights Tracker?

**Prompt:** What did you request?

**Prompt:** Why?

45. Have you ever created your own outputs based on data from the Consumer Insights Tracker?

**Prompt:** What outputs (for example, charts, slides, reports, etc.)

**Prompt:** What were these outputs for?

## **Section 6: Final thoughts**

46. If there was one change you could make to the Consumer Insights Tracker, what would it be?

**Prompt:** What change would you make?

**Prompt:** Why?

47. Do you have any other comments or suggestions for the Social Science team with regards to the Consumer Insights Tracker?

Many thanks for your time.