

## Paper 6.2

### Quality Assurance Working Group - Update (Dec 2020)

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#### Summary

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

#### Background

1. The ACSS assurance working group was set up in 2019 following discussions around the 2017 Review of Social Science<sup>1</sup> and the September 2018 Governance Review Paper<sup>2</sup> 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)*”.
2. The aim of the group is to explore how best to facilitate assurance of the quality, value and impact of social science<sup>3</sup> in the FSA.
3. The Assurance Working Group has meet quarterly since its inception (supplemented by additional ad hoc task focused meetings).

#### Members

4. 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

#### Terms of reference

5. The Terms of Reference agreed for the Working Group in June 2019 are as follows:
  - i. **Develop a method** for evaluating:
    - a. processes by which social science projects are developed, prioritised and commissioned
    - b. how social science projects are quality assured
    - c. when and how social science evidence is used appropriately in FSA decision-making

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/socialsciencerevrep150817.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-18-09-08-governance-report\\_0.pdf](https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-18-09-08-governance-report_0.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> 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. .

- d. the implementation of social science evidence
- e. Social Science capability and networks (sufficiency, appropriateness and effectiveness).

This work will include reviewing assurance criteria used by other organisations.

- ii. **Oversee the evaluation** of (ia-e) above. To include
  - a. reviewing plans and documents, starting from the 2017 Review of Social Science and FSA response<sup>4</sup>;
  - b. interviewing key stakeholders;
  - c. tracing selected projects from inception to delivery (the package of behaviour change projects were identified as key candidates).
- iii. **Provide advice and recommendations** relating to
  - a. how FSA practices relating to each of (ia-e) above might be enhanced to ensure best practice and
  - b. identification of the parameters by which they might best be presented in the annual report to the FSA Board

### **Key activities to date**

6. The Assurance working group has now undertaken 2 main stages of work:

- I. Scoping of core processes and policies surrounding social science research, procurement and implementation (September-December 2019) which included:
  - Looking at how social science priorities are developed at the FSA;
  - Understanding the processes surrounding the commissioning of social science research
  - Understanding existing quality assurance processes during research projects and surrounding outputs
  - Understanding how social science research is used, the social science capacity at the FSA and existing networks.
  - Examining how these processes worked in practice in relation to case study projects (at the November 2019 workshop)
- II. More detailed work focused on consolidating assurance work across the FSA, research project evaluation and impact, and quality assurance in research procurement (January – February 2020) this involved:
  - Paul Turner from the Science Council attended the February 2020 working group workshop to discuss links between the assurance work happening in the Science Council and ACSS. The ACSS working group is covering new ground so will carry on its planned activity, linking to the Science Council's activity regularly with the aim of a joint piece of assurance work rolling out in 2021.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/research-projects/review-of-social-science>

- New processes of research evaluation and impact capture were developed, revised in line with working group comments and rolled out by the social science team.
- Discussion around the existing procurement system: the working group has noted that the system is not fit for the purpose of procuring excellent social science research. Whilst changes to this system are outside the remit of the working group, the group are taking forward actions to inform the improvement of existing quality assurance processes within this procurement structure (see below).

**Current activities:**

7. A third stage of work is now under way, which considers criteria for the evaluation of what is good science, and the working group are exploring the possibility of developing a toolkit to support and enable researchers in framing and commissioning science, especially when under pressure.
8. Following the last meeting (16<sup>th</sup> November), the working group are undertaking an additional piece of work to develop some guiding principles to inform the FSAs approach to the assessment other legitimate actors in the risk analysis process.

**Hannah Lambie-Mumford, ACSS Assurance Working Group Chair**

**Michelle Patel, Rebecca Gillespie, FSA**