

Paper 6.1 FSA Social Science Update (Dec 2020)

This paper updates the ACSS on the work of the social science team during 2020/21.

- Our swift response during the COVID-19 pandemic means that our social research data is influential at Ministerial level, in cross-government monitoring of the pandemic and has provided key and timely evidence for the National Food Strategy and the Trade and Agriculture Commission.
- We have developed the methods, processes and evidence base to support risk analysis as we take over responsibility for food risk from the EU in January.
- In support of the Hypersensitivities Programme we are delivering work to understand the burden of allergies and have led an international review of allergen labelling; the first time social science has officially fed into discussions at Codex Alimentarius.
- We are leading the evaluation of our regulatory reform programmes and the changes to how product recalls are done.
- Food and You 2 allows for more flexibility and a larger sample size, with waves now running every six months. It includes the areas covered by Food and You, the Public Attitudes Tracker and the FHRs tracker in one consolidated survey, allowing for richer analysis.
- We are tracking key consumer metrics through EU transition, reporting regularly to the Board. Our metrics on trust in food and its regulation are performance measures for the FSA and for the National Food Strategy.
- Our work influences FSA communications strategy at strategic (brand) level as well as at campaigns level, providing insight and evaluation as well as real time monitoring of public discourse.
- Our research informs our organisational development strategy, providing compelling data and evidence to improve diversity and inclusion among key groups. We are developing behavioural insights to improve negotiation skills and encourage innovation and collaboration.
- We are building our capability in modern methods – from web-push surveys to social media listening, app-based ethnography and citizen science.
- Finally, we are building capacity in foresight and real-time monitoring to support strategic decisions, drawing on multiple sources of evidence and scenario planning techniques to help leadership evaluate strategic options in an uncertain time.

Our social science is having impact, we have built a strong team, and are influencing decisions within and outside the FSA, and social science is a key part of our new programme approach to joined up interdisciplinary science and surveillance.

We continue to publish all our work and to engage proactively with the research community across the UK and internationally.

A list of this year's projects and the pathways to impact appears overleaf.

2020 Projects and the Pathways to impact

1. Understanding consumer views re: EU exit, trade deals and potential new production methods

Comments: Post EU exit/transition analysis – looking at gene editing, irradiated meat

Business area: Policy

Impact: Risk analysis decisions

2. EU exit tracker

Comments: Tracking consumer views in the transition period - later to be incorporated into F&Y2

Business area: EU exit team/ EU exit comms

Impact: Board update. The last wave of data in the transition period will mean we have trend data from the vote to leave 2016 to the end of the transition period.

3. Risk communication - consumer & stakeholders

Comments: Implementation of risk communications toolkit Use in forward campaign planning.

Business area: Comms

Impact: Publication as part of comms toolkits (including segmentation and brand guidelines). Workshops with policy teams.

4. Allergies QoL study

Comments: Quality of life study – people with hypersensitivities

Business area: Policy

Impact: Contributes to benefits as defined by the Hypersensitivities Board

5. Allergies industry study

Comments: Industry study

Business area: Policy, FSS, Defra

Impact: Evaluates if the changes in the 2014 FIR have impacted on the provision of allergen information in food businesses. Provides a baseline for allergy information in relation to PPDS

6. Allergies at a glance evidence

Comments: Evidence to help inform the decision around if an allergy at a glance scheme would be useful to consumers

Business area: Policy

Impact: Evidence review on what consumers think about at a glance schemes, and qualitative interviews with food hypersensitive consumers to get their views on the scheme and what it would need to include

7. Food and You 2

Comments: Flagship consumer survey into food attitudes and behaviours

Business area: Policy, Comms, Board

Impact: Ongoing impact. Board (partic re trust), policy and devolved stakeholders, bespoke analysis / reports / visualisations, workshops at confs, feeding into OGD priorities (DEFRA, PHE, DWP, ONS), providing metrics for National Food Strategy, highlighting research gaps (using recontact data). Developing food policy and foodborne disease strategy.

8. Renew Normal: Life after COVID

Comments: Large participative piece of work with the public, on life after Covid. The project is exploring life after COVID under the following themes including Community, Government, Tech and Online, Transport and Environment. Food, runs across all the themes.

Business area: FSA Strategy team, National Food Strategy and Trade and Agriculture Commission

Impact: Informs the National Food Strategy, provides details relevant to the Trade and Agriculture Commission and information on wider areas of consumer interest to the Agency.

9. Kitchen Life 2

Comments: Observed behavioural study to establish new evidence to inform risk assessment modelling and discover potential behavioural interventions to increase consumer and FBO food safety behaviours

Business area: Policy, Ops, Comms, Risk Assessment Unit

Impact: Provides evidence for risk assessment modelling. Identifies areas for behaviour change interventions

10. Trackers (reputation, stakeholders, MPs)

Comments: none.

Business area: Comms

Impact: Key metrics for Board corporate risk register. EMT paper with comms on perceptions of the FSA.

11. Covid horizon scanning research

Comments: Qualitative research on vulnerable groups and impact of CV19 on understanding of the food system.

- Ongoing tracking survey
- Social media listening.
- Data analysis and mapping.
- Weekly desk research report on CV19 and food/food supply.
- Expert panel engagement and reporting. Horizon Scanning with Defra. Input into future UKRI project vulnerable consumers (Sheffield Uni).

Business area: SRG

Impact: Results published regularly, including regular papers to CEO and executive team, No 10, PHE, Defra and devolved administrations. See Board paper. Ongoing monitoring serves national food strategy and PHE WICH metrics. Data inputs particularly on food insecurity informed the National Food Strategy (published in first report) and Trade and Agriculture Commission. Research identified evidence of risky behaviours re: use by dates - policy response in progress.

12. IID3 survey

Comments: As part of larger IID3 project, to understand prevalence of food borne disease

Business area: Microbiology

Impact: Improves understanding of foodborne disease and its influences

13. Eatwell

Comments: NI specific research

Business area: Northern Ireland nutrition

Impact: Improves policy on nutrition in Northern Ireland

14. AMR

Comments: Qualitative/experimental work building on lit review and survey questions

Business area: Policy

Impact: Contribution to 5-year cross-Government action plan

15. Handwashing

Comments: Quarterly quantitative tracking on handwashing and consumer behaviours.

Qualitative research on handwashing behaviours including an innovative app-based study (commissioned) and depth interviews (conducted in house).

Business area: none specific

Impact: To understand the impact of Covid-19 on handwashing behaviour and understand barriers to handwashing. Provides evidence to support work of colleagues in FSA aimed at reducing the spread of foodborne disease (Risk Assessment, Foodborne Disease Policy) and across government (PHE). Initial findings have been presented at the ESRC festival and we have engaged with the cross-government handwashing working group. Findings will be published in 2021.

16. SME FBO tracker

Comments: SME FBO tracker

Business area: Reg Strat, EU Exit & others

Impact: EMT & Board updates. Prompted comms paper on perceptions of the FSA. Each question has a policy owner - we will be asking how data is used as part of recommissioning [POSTPONED DUE TO COVID-19].

17. ABC - Food Safety Culture and Compliance

Comments: Follow-up from report publication, developing and testing a revised toolkit

Business area: Reg Strat

Impact: To provide robust evidence for ABC Programme Board to make an informed decision regarding whether or not to progress further FSC work, such that FSC forms part of official controls

18. ABC - competency framework

Comments: Identifying and learning from how other national and international regulators maintain standards

Business area: Reg Stat

Impact: To provide robust evidence for ABC Programme Board to make an informed decision regarding changes to the Food Law Code of Practice

19. ABC - evaluation

Comments: Process evaluation of 3 ROF workstreams: Digital Registration, National Inspection Strategy & Food Standards. Plus new work on remote assessments & competency assessments

Business area: Reg Stat

Impact: Statutory obligation. Work with Comms to prepare Comms plan

20. FHRS - childminders (Wales)

Comments: Exploratory research regarding possible extension of FHRS (Wales) to include childminders

Business area: LA Partnerships Team (Wales)

Impact: Statutory obligation to report to Welsh Government (February 2021)

21. Recalls - evaluation

Comments: Process evaluation of the implementation, awareness, understanding and impacts of the Efficacy of Recalls and Withdrawals products among the UK food industry, enforcement authorities, consumer support organisations and consumers. The research findings will inform future work on improving the efficacy of recalls in the UK.

Business area: Reg Strat

Impact: POSTPONED – now restarting

22. Raising compliance in meat sector - follow-up from behaviours and incentives paper

Comments: Qualitative and Quantitative research with the meat, dairy and wine industry to establish views on the FSA and official controls

Business area: Official Controls

Impact: Will provide ops colleagues information on how official controls could be improved and help with compliance. Provides a baseline how FBO's view the FSA. Also a proof of concept piece on how to engage FBO's in research, and the best methods to use, after unsuccessful online surveys with the meat industry.

23. Field Ops EU exit workforce survey

Comments: Survey to understand EU staff concerns around EU exit

Business area: Ops

Impact: Inform recruitment and retention strategy within ops over the EU exit period

24. Organisational Development

Comments: Support for organisational change with analysis and insights

Business area: Org Dev

Impact: Data analysis and qualitative research to understand diversity deficits in the FSA

Evidence reviews supporting collaboration/innovation reform agenda (CEO priority)

25. Communications insight and evaluation

Comments: Support for communication campaigns, message/creative testing

Business area: Comms

Impact: Better insight and evaluation of communications

26. Social Media monitoring

Comments: Real time monitoring of consumer interests when it comes to food

Business area: Comms, Surveillance

Impact: Monthly dashboard to internal and external stakeholders Monitoring and dashboards over Brexit period. Feeding into the Food and Ag Committee and National Food Strategy.

27. Citizen Science

Comments: Rapid evidence assessment of the applications of citizen science to food policy areas (30k), informing joint funding call with UKRI in Q4 2020 (100k).

Business area: Director WIS

Impact: Builds capability and scientific networks. Demonstrates FSA as leader in innovative citizen engagement

28. Horizon Scanning/Social Transformation

Comments: Understanding emerging drivers and trends impacting on food selling, purchasing or consumption behaviours

Business area: Surveillance/Strategy

Impact: Feeds directly into strategic assumptions and scenario planning at EMT as per Board/[EMT paper](#)

29. External Engagement

Comments:

- Widening engagement and recruiting fellows.
- Support for our programme of speaker events
- Paris Risk Group and International Social Science Liaison Group: engaging with the international food risk social science community (Quads and European counterparts)
- ESRC festival: Digital only festival - theme: social research in a digital world

Business area: Comms, Surveillance

Impact: Monthly dashboard to internal and external stakeholders Monitoring and dashboards over Brexit period. Feeding into the Food and Ag Committee and National Food Strategy.