

Paper 5.6

Code of Practise for FSA science committees (June 2020)

SUMMARY

This paper provides an update on proposed changes to the ACSS Code of Practise. Hyperlinks for published reports are provided in the footnotes. This paper is for information and discussion.

Background

In line with the central government guidance and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) policy, each independent advisory committee that advises the FSA operates to a published Code of Practice (CoP) that sets out the key principles and procedures that govern the work of the Committee. The CoP is subject to periodic reviews by the Committee and Secretariat, considering any updated guidance from Central Government, Parliament and the FSA; and changes to reflect experience and usage.

A new CoP template has been designed to facilitate consistency across the numerous FSA advisory committees. Each secretariat is considering the template and how it relates to the work/members of its committee.

The ACSS secretariat are reviewing the new template in line with the current ACSS code of practise. Largely differences are based on wording and we do not anticipate any substantive changes to our current COP. A revised COP will be circulated when available, but at this point the secretariat would like to draw members attention to the following (potential) changes:

The role of the Committee Members

Whilst no substantive change to current working practises, the new COP provides extra detail regarding the role of the committee, including:

- being accountable, through the Board of the Food Standards Agency and Health Ministers, to Parliament and the public for its activities and for the standard of advice it provides. The Board of the FSA and Health Ministers are answerable to Parliament for the policies and performance of this Committee, including the policy framework within which it operates.
- adhering to the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (including prompt responses to public requests for information) in accordance with Government policy on openness;
- where practicable and appropriate, provide suitable opportunities to open the work of the Committee to public scrutiny;
- ensuring that an appropriate response is provided to complaints and other correspondence, if necessary, with reference to the sponsor department; and
- ensuring that the Committee does not exceed its powers or functions.

The role of the Committee Chair:

The new COP widens the role of chair from “overseeing the operation and output of the Committee and conducting a brief feedback on Members’ experience of the Committee” to include:

- providing effective leadership on the issues within the Committees terms of reference”.
- ensuring that the Committee meets at appropriate intervals and that the minutes of meetings and any reports to the Board of the Food Standards Agency accurately record the decisions taken and, where appropriate, the views of individual members,
- representing the views of the Committee to the general public ensuring that new members are briefed and providing an assessment of their performance, on request, when members are considered for re-appointment to the Committee or for appointment to the board of some other public body.

The role of the Secretariat:

Whilst the ACSS secretariat has, and continues to, support the committees work programme, the new COP now makes explicit reference to this role (as per extract below):

“The secretariat will continue to support the Committee in developing and delivering its work programme by assembling information, preparing papers and taking minutes of the Committee’s meetings.”