

ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE UPDATE 2021

Report by Susan Michie

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1. Summary

- 1.1 The objective of this paper is to update the Board on the activities of the Advisory Committee for Social Science (ACSS). The Board are asked to note this activity and provide views on future areas of work that could be considered by the ACSS.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The ACSS is an independent expert committee of the FSA comprising of an independent Chair, eight expert members and one lay member¹. Appointed in 2018, this is the fourth annual Board update the Committee has presented.
- 2.2 The role of the ACSS is to provide expert strategic advice to the FSA on its use of the social sciences to deliver the FSA's objectives, including new and emerging methods, processes and systems to interrogate data. Its purpose is to help FSA utilise the social sciences and these emerging approaches to shape and deliver its strategic objectives and understand its impact.

3. Evidence and Discussion

3.1 Current Work

- a) The ACSS meets twice yearly to discuss the portfolio of social science projects and identify evidence gaps. The majority of work in the ACSS is delivered through Working Groups, although members often undertake more ad hoc activities, providing expert input on specific pieces of work. The impacts of current and past Working Groups are outlined in Annex A.
- b) The ACSS also achieves impact through other mechanisms and uses a light-touch commissioning process to provide timely expert input/review on request. This has been utilised well over the last year, with ten requests coming to ACSS members (see Annex B).
- c) The ACSS works in collaboration with the Science Council, reviewing outputs where appropriate (e.g. [third party evidence review](#)), linking up on topics that are being explored by both the Science Council (i.e. climate change) and participating in Science Council Working Groups (such as Working Group 5: Hypersensitivity).

¹ ACSS member profiles can be found on the [ACSS member page](#)

3.2 The FSA Science team has asked the ACSS to explore the following and they will be discussed at the next plenary session in January 2022:

- a) In this session the ACSS will review the FSA's social science portfolio and discuss alignment with the emerging FSA strategy. This will help identify areas not addressed by the current portfolio. The expertise of the Committee, to advise on work in these areas will be discussed. Any identified gaps can then be taken into account in the recruitment of new Committee members in 2022. Following a review of the membership, a recruitment call will go out in early 2022, with new members appointed from October 2022.
- b) The ACSS has been asked to explore the value of a structured approach to the support and assurance provided on economic analysis. The Committee will explore whether the creation of a Working Group on key topics/projects considered by the economic analysis team, will provide a systematic way for the team to engage with the ACSS.
- c) The ACSS has been asked to consider how best to support the FSA's research to evidence the wider interest of consumers and whether the creation of a Working Group might help support and assure the quality of this workstream.

3.3 Future Working Group activity

- a) Phase 2 of the Climate Change and Consumer Behaviour Working Group will advise the FSA on the impact climate change may have on consumer behaviour, feeding into the FSA Horizon Scanning workstream. The Working Group will assess the strength of evidence for potential trends of concern, identifying potential follow up activity for the FSA and other organisations.
- b) Phase 2 of the Assurance Working Group will support the quality of FSA science by:
 - overseeing the commissioning and development of a 'good science' quality assurance checklist/toolkit which will support the commissioning of high-quality research across our sciences.
 - 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.
 - facilitating expert advice on research methods and data interpretation (from the Working Group itself or of experts they nominate), to support the FSA's new workstream on behavioural insights.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The ACSS has undertaken work in a number of areas, supporting specific research projects, aiding the development of internal assurance processes and expanding the evidence base on strategic topics as outlined in section 3.1. The Board are asked to note this activity and agree the future priorities outlined in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

Annex A: Working Groups

Current ACSS Working Groups

1. Assurance Working Group (initiated August 2019). Main aim: To provide assurance to the FSA Board on the quality, value and impact of social science in the FSA. Key impacts include:
 - a. Improving how we measure impact: The Working Group guided the development of a process for establishing the impact of our social science. This was successfully rolled out across the team and is further being developed by SSCR to develop a cross SERD approach.
 - b. Facilitating appropriate consideration of other legitimate factors in the risk management process. The group was commissioned by the CSA to produce a guiding principles note, to inform how other legitimate factors are considered in the risk management process. This has been included in the FSA Risk Analysis Playbook, providing a useful a resource to support FSA staff when responding to situations where stress (e.g., unexpected time pressures, or a lack of information) is placed on the risk analysis process.
2. Climate change and consumer behaviour (initiated December 2020). Main aim: To map emerging and potential consumer behaviour trends onto the FSA's objectives in order to inform FSA policy in the coming years. Key impacts include:
 - a. Supporting productive engagement with experts: The Working Group developed and commissioned an expert elicitation workshop, which ran in May 21. This exercise gathered expert opinion on trends (observed or considered possible) that may impact on food safety, food authenticity and/or regulation.
 - b. Providing strategic evidence: The workshop produced findings that filled a key strategic evidence gap, providing useful data to feed into the FSA strategic insights function. The report was also a key resource in FSA external engagement on this topic at the UN Climate change conference (COP26) in November.
3. Kitchen Life 2 (initiated December 2020). Main aim: to provide assurance, steering and peer review of KL2 - a large programme of social science to better understand actual kitchen behaviours (both commercial and domestic). Key impacts include:
 - a. Facilitating the appointment of suitable contractor: Working Group input into tender documentation, and participation in subsequent evaluation panel, ensured the appointed supplier had the expertise and resource to deliver this large and important programme of work.

- b. Assurance of outputs and programme development: Input into relevant evidence reviews, programme scope, and key design decisions has provided expert assurance on this work, facilitating useful and relevant findings for the FSA.

Completed ACSS Working Groups

4. Risk communications (initiated August 2019). Main aim: To ensure that the best possible evidence base supports the development of a risk communication framework for the FSA. The Working Group undertook a number of activities which ultimately led to the publication of the [FSA risk communication tool kit](#), supporting science, policy and strategy teams to communicate effectively, and facilitating better risk communications planning, which is rigorous and consistent with the latest thinking.
5. EU Exit (initiated April 2019). Main aim: To provide expert advice to support the identification of potential economic changes would impact on food businesses and consumer interests in relation to food. The Working Group worked with economists to explore the evidence, increasing the FSAs understanding of the likely impacts on industry and consumers, and informing approaches as to how the FSA can mitigate expected risks.
6. Food and You 2 (initiated September 2018). Main aim: To review approach and methodology for the flagship food and you survey and formulate actionable recommendations to improve methodology and maximise impact. Proposals in the subsequent [recommendations paper](#) have since been implemented, with Food and You 2 now taking a modular push-to web methodology, increasing the scope of the survey and frequency of outputs, producing more timely and relevant evidence on consumer attitudes and behaviours.
7. Applications of behavioural science (Initiated June 18). Main aim: to help assure best practice and outcomes in the application of behavioural science to the upcoming work of the FSA.

Annex B: Work Undertaken Outside of The Working Group Model

Requestor	Project/Output	Request Type
Social Science	Quality of Life	Review
Social Science	Food & You 2 report	Review
Science Council	Quality of third party evidence	Review
Social Science	Peer review for Food in a Pandemic report	Review
Analytics Unit	Presenting at FSA International Conference	Presentation
Social Science	What Works Centre (proof of concept)	Review
Social Science	Consumer perceptions of Genome editing	Input
Social Science	Optimising evidence for policy	Peer Review
Social Science	Consumer responses to food labelling	Peer Review
Social Science	Psychologies of food	Peer Review