

Paper 4.3

Quality Assurance Working Group - Update (Dec 2019)

Summary

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

Background

1. At the ACSS meeting in April 2019¹ members discussed how they might provide assurance to the FSA Board on the quality, value and impact of social science² in the FSA. This follows the 2017 Review of Social Science³ which noted that the Advisory Committee should be “an expert departmental committee that focuses on strategic advice and challenge which will help the FSA to apply the latest social science insights effectively to deliver its strategic objectives and understand their impact”.
2. This also follows the September 2018 Governance Review Paper⁴ 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)*”. The Risk Analysis Paper⁵ presented to the Board in March 2019 further highlighted the role of the FSA’s Scientific Advisory Committees in assisting the Chief Scientific Advisory to provide assurance to the Board on the FSA’s risk analysis process.
3. The outcome of this discussion is the establishment of the ACSS Assurance Working Group.

Members

4. The Working Group is comprised of the following members:
 - Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford (Chair)

¹ <https://acss.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/minutesapril.pdf>

² 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. Currently, the two newly established Working Groups on EU Exit and Food Technologies will cover a substantial amount of economic work.

³ <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/socialsciencerevrep150817.pdf>

⁴ https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-18-09-08-governance-report_0.pdf

⁵ <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-19-03-08-risk-analysis-assurance-final.pdf>

- Ms Julie Hill (Deputy Chair)
- Professor Julie Barnett
- Professor Susan Michie

Working Group

5. The agreed Terms of Reference for the Working Group are as follows:

- Develop a method** for evaluating
 - processes by which social science projects are developed, prioritised and commissioned
 - how the portfolio of social science projects is quality assured
 - how and whether social science evidence is used appropriately in FSA decision-making
 - the implementation of social science evidence
 - Social Science capability and networks.

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

- Oversee the evaluation** of (1a-e) above. To include
 - reviewing plans and documents, starting from the 2017 Review of Social Science and FSA response⁶;
 - interviewing key stakeholders;
 - tracing projects from inception to delivery (the package of behaviour change projects have been identified as key candidates).
- Provide advice and recommendations** relating to
 - how FSA practices relating to each of (1a-e) above might be enhanced to ensure best practice and
 - identification of the parameters by which they might best be presented in the annual report to the FSA Board

Key activities

6. The WG have agreed a two-level approach:

- at the strategic level, to look across the portfolio of social science research and to look at the extent to which it meets the FSA's strategic objectives;
- this will be accompanied by 'deep dive' work on a sample of research projects. Notably two responsive mode projects and two longer terms projects, including both in house and commissioned research. One of the aspects we will explore will be how the processes look and differ between in/out of house research.

⁶ <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/research-projects/review-of-social-science>

7. A draft quality assurance list has been developed to provide a structure from which to provide a narrative for the case studies, as follows:
 1. Identification of topic
 2. Formulation of research question
 3. Translation of question into appropriate methods that can answer the question
 4. Procurement
 5. Research protocol
 6. Conduct of the research
 7. Data analysis
 8. Data interpretation
 9. Written report of study
 10. Dissemination of findings
 11. Implementation of findings
 12. Review and learning mechanisms
 13. Research manual to cover best practice re. above
 14. Internal and external engagement with appropriate bodies and people
 15. Methods of keeping up to date with relevant evidence and methods
8. Having reviewed the Social Science Business Delivery Plan the Working Group selected 4 case studies to represent the different work of the social science team. Interviews / feedback from social science customers are also proposed.
9. Initial discussion took place at a workshop with the Working Group on Monday 11th November where they talked through each area of interest (social science priorities, commissioning and oversight of research, and impact and influence), identifying actions for the FSA ahead of the next meeting.

Future Activities

10. The next steps the Working Group will take were scoped out at the workshop and Hannah Lambie-Mumford will provide an update on these at the ACSS meeting on 5th December.

Discussion

11. This paper is for information and general discussion.

Hannah Lambie-Mumford, ACSS Assurance Working Group Chair

Michelle Patel, Rebecca Gillespie, FSA