

Second Meeting of the Advisory Committee for Social Science (4 December 2018): Minutes

Location

110 Rochester Row, Victoria, London, SW1P 1JP

Attendees

Advisory Committee for Social Science

- Professor Susan Michie (SM), Chair - s.michie@ucl.ac.uk
- Ms Julie Hill (JH), Deputy Chair - julie@juliehill.org.uk
- Dr Seda Erdem (SE) - seda.erdem@stir.ac.uk
- Professor Dan Rigby (DR) - dan.rigby@manchester.ac.uk
- Professor Julie Barnett (JB) - j.c.barnett@bath.ac.uk
- Professor George Gaskell (GG) - G.Gaskell@lse.ac.uk

Food Standards Agency

- Steve Wearne (SW), Director of Science
- Rick Mumford (RM), Deputy Director of Science, Evidence & Research
- Michelle Patel (MP), Head of Social Science
- Vanna Aldin (VA), Head of Analytics
- Helen Atkinson (HA), ACSS Secretary
- Sarah Kovacs (SK), ACSS Secretariat
- Lucy King (LK), ACSS Secretariat
- Nuria Casadevall (NC), ACSS Secretariat

Apologies

- Professor Spencer Henson (SP) - shenson@uoguelph.ca
- Mr John McTernan (JM) - jmternan@ps-b.com

Agenda

See Annex A (page 9).

Materials

Agenda, slide pack and papers 1.1, 1.2 & 1.3¹.

¹ Papers can be found on the ACSS website: <https://acss.food.gov.uk/acss-meetings/acss-meetings/acss-meeting-4-december-2018/acss-meeting-4-december-2018>

Summary of Actions

No.	Action	Owner
1	Circulate IPCC report and slide on behavioural aspects to Committee members/FSA for further consideration at a 2019 meeting.	SM & Sec
2	Committee to consider the relevance of the IPCC report to work of the FSA at the next ACSS meeting.	ACSS & Sec
3	Consider how best to interact with other SACs at the next meeting.	ACSS & Sec
4	Circulate paper by Hamlyn, Fitzpatrick and Williams on moving from face-to-face to online survey methods.	LK
5	Share details of/data from chlorinated chicken research with FSA.	DR
6	Circulate BASIC workshops report when available.	Behavioural Science WG & Sec
7	Circulate previously agreed work protocols templates.	Sec
8	Provide members with background information on the journey of social science before the current Committee (e.g. previous work and how it has been used to shape decisions).	FSA
9	Provide members with background information on each of the FSA Board's social science priorities.	MP
10	Put together proposition paper for horizon scanning and circulate for discussion at the next meeting.	FSA & Sec
11	Circulate meeting minutes and papers from the Science Council and other SAC meetings and any relevant FSA Board papers.	Sec
12	Collate information from other SACs (meeting agendas, minutes, papers etc.) for future meetings.	Sec
13	Review format of agendas, papers etc. ensuring they are clearly labelled and numbered.	Sec
14	Find a suitable date for the next ACSS meeting.	Sec
15	Share with AM background information on the FSA social science priorities.	MP

Minutes

Item 1: Welcome

1. JH chaired the meeting and welcomed attendees. Apologies were given for SH and JM. The group was informed that SM and RM would be arriving late.

Item 2: FSA update 1

2. SW described his vision for the ACSS, explaining that himself, RM and/or Guy Poppy, the FSA's Chief Scientific Advisor, would endeavour to attend all ACSS meetings and provide feedback to the Committee on how its advice and recommendations are being used across the FSA.

3. SW thanked Committee members for their work to date. He noted that social science is gaining more momentum across the FSA and that a paper on social science will be presented at the FSA Board meeting on 5 Dec.

4. SW explained that EU exit is currently a preoccupation for the Agency as the FSA must ensure proper governance is in place when we leave the EU. There will be increased scrutiny as some functions will move from EU competence to the FSA, and it is important for the FSA to maintain trustworthiness. He highlighted the importance of being open and transparent, in line with the FSA's longstanding code of practice, through publishing the advice and evidence behind decision-making.

5. SW concluded by emphasising that the Committee's advice and support will be critical to the FSA's success.

6. The Committee very much agreed with the importance of openness and transparency, in demonstrating the trustworthiness of the FSA. The role of civil society and consumer interests and precisely what they mean for FSA were discussed. The use of the term 'consumer' was queried and it was suggested by the Committee that the term 'public' or 'citizens' may be more appropriate.

Item 3: Chairs update

7. SM drew attention to the International Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC) report and its relevance to the food and drinks sector. The Committee agreed to reflect on its relevance in a later discussion.

Action 1: SM to circulate IPCC report and slide on behavioural aspects to Committee members/FSA for further consideration at a 2019 meeting.

Action 2: Committee to consider the relevance of the IPPC report to work of the FSA at the next ACSS meeting.

8. Discussion moved to the importance of engaging with other SACs and the FSA leadership. JH noted that she and SM were attending the FSA Board dinner that evening.

Action 3: Committee and Secretariat to consider how best to interact with other SACs at the next meeting.

9. It was announced that HA is leaving the Secretariat and will be replaced by LK from the FSA Social Science Team. The Committee thanked HA for her work.

Item 4: Review of Food and You

10. Food and You Working Group Chair, GG, provided an update on the Working Group's progress.

11. GG explained that the Working Group is considering recommending that the FSA move from a face-to-face to a web-push methodology. This would offer better value for money and would allow for a considerable increase in sample size, particularly in Wales and Northern Ireland. This method has many benefits, for instance removing social desirability bias, where people give the answers they think are expected of them. The Working Group judged that 2 years was an appropriate time interval for the survey but would consider the value of question 'modules' (e.g. food technology) running at different time intervals (e.g. 4 years) depending on stakeholder/policy needs.

12. Whilst there was some concern around the time series being lost due to changes in data collection methods (from face-to-face to online) and data not being directly comparable, the frequency of data points do not allow for anything but very simple time series analyses and the view was that the biannual Public Attitudes Tracker would be able to provide information about long-term trends.

13. It was noted that the views of the proportion of the population who are not online also need to be captured.

14. It was agreed that F&Y stakeholders need to understand how the survey is used and what it can and cannot do. It was agreed that we should not keep questions in the survey if they are not used in analyses to inform FSA policy or activity and that it is important to carefully consider how questions that are included are framed.

15. The Working Group is considering recommending that survey analysis and reporting, which is currently contracted out, is brought in house.

Action 4: Secretariat to circulate paper by Hamlyn, Fitzpatrick and Williams on moving from face-to-face to online survey methods.

Item 5: Risk Communication

16. Risk Communication Working Group Chair, JB, provided an update of the working group's progress. The brief was to provide a gap analysis of the Science Council principles and review existing risk communication frameworks, and comment on the FSA's draft risk communication framework.

17. JB highlighted: the importance of citizen engagement in problem formulation; the need to characterise the risks the FSA is seeking to assess, manage and communicate (i.e. are they urgent? emerging? slow burning?); the need to recognise and pull together work that has already been done on communicating risk and uncertainty; the need to consider what is meant by 'proportionate'; the fact that behaviour change is not always the intended outcome of risk communications; and the need for the FSA to be 'trustworthy' rather than necessarily 'trusted'.

18. MP informed the Committee that the new risk analysis framework will be presented to the FSA Board on 5 Dec and that the draft guidance accompanying the framework will be shared with Committee members.

19. There was discussion about risk and uncertainty and the recognition of politics in the risk communication framework including the roles of different interest groups (government, scientific, industry). It was noted that openness is crucial, for instance being transparent about who has had an input, in whose interest things are being done and publishing the evidence being used to inform decision-making. The group will conduct further discussions about the role of public engagement as part of FSA's risk communication strategy.

Action 5: DR to share details of/data from chlorinated chicken research.

Item 6: Application of Behavioural Science

20. Application of Behavioural Science Group Chair, JH, provided an update on the Working Group's progress.

21. The Working Group has been asked to review relevant behavioural science frameworks in relation to usefulness in supporting the development and evaluation of FSA policy, priorities and practice. Kris Patel, the FSA research fellow who is conducting the review, gave a brief update on his progress.

22. The Working Group will work with the FSA to prioritise issues arising from workshops being run by the FSA's Social Science Team with staff across the

agency. HA gave an update on the workshops explaining that they are designed to identify possible priorities for work that behavioural science could contribute to. The Working Group are developing criteria to support the prioritisation process.

Action 6: Behavioural Science Working group to circulate BASIC workshops report when available.

Item 7: Future Priorities

23. MP presented the FSA Board's priorities for the ACSS and for Social Science overall, and asked the Committee for views. RM joined the meeting and contributed to the discussion.

24. Committee members considered that some of the priorities were unclear and awkwardly phrased (e.g. the meaning of consumers, wider consumers, non-consumers, attitudes/ perceptions). It was suggested that the Committee advise on the terminology used. The Committee emphasised the need for clarity about how evidence is weighted.

25. There was a discussion about whether 'assurance', as in the draft priorities, was a realistic task for the Committee. It was clarified that whilst the FSA has an established internal audit function to check whether procedures are being followed, he viewed the role of the ACSS Committee as being able to offer external assurance by advising on whether the FSA is focusing its research in the right areas (i.e. assuring the direction is right rather than the precise processes). The Committee pointed out that the nature of the question being asked will be important; for instance, how the question is asked, how precise it is, why it's being asked, the availability of data, feasibility with the given resources, the method/ approach to address that question, analysis and whether outcomes are interpreted appropriately.

26. It was noted that the work of the ACSS should be documented in protocol templates which were previously agreed. It was suggested that these are circulated and agreed over email or discussed at the next ACSS meeting.

Action 7: Secretariat to circulate previously agreed work protocols.

27. The Committee requested more information on the journey social science has been on within the FSA, to build on that work and evidence.

Action 8: FSA to provide background information on the journey of social science before the current Committee (e.g. previous work and how it has been used to shape decisions).

28. It was considered that more information on where the ideas for projects and priorities had stemmed from would be helpful.

Action 9: MP to provide members with background information on each of the social science priorities (i.e. where they have come from).

29. It was agreed that a proposition paper for horizon scanning be drafted for the next meeting, capturing the wider landscape.

Action 10: FSA to put together proposition paper for horizon scanning and circulate for discussion at the next meeting.

30. Some concerns were raised by members that there were too many priorities and that expectations may need to be managed on what problems the ACSS / social science can help address. It was noted that there may also be ideas for further projects coming out of the work being carried out by the different working groups.

FSA Update 2

31. RM gave a short presentation which provided an overview of the Science, Evidence and Research Division in the FSA; including key roles and functions, the multidisciplinary nature of the division, the recent functional separation of risk assessment (science) and risk management (policy), importance of openness and transparency, the considerations that FSA is taking into account alongside food safety (e.g. costs, consumer preferences, industry concerns), the growing capacity of the division, and the FSA science and strategic priorities.

32. The Committee asked if and how the FSA works with the media, suggesting that developing good relationships with key people in the mainstream and social media would be beneficial when communicating risks. It was noted that the FSA is working closely with the Science Media Centre and working to develop closer relationships with journalists. It was suggested that the Committee could assist with framing messages (e.g. using behavioural science techniques, appropriate translation of evidence, emphasising actions to be taken, and building trust).

33. The importance of having a good presence on social media was discussed, as well as having somewhere for the public to regularly check back or visit if they have concerns, such as a website or Twitter feed. The Environment Agency and PHE were noted as good examples. Gathering a bank of questions asked on social media sites could provide valuable insights about public concerns and understanding of risk.

34. There was a short discussion on how to improve cross-communication across different groups (e.g. other scientific committees and the Science Council) for

instance through circulating minutes and papers or attending meetings to maximise the contribution of the ACSS.

Action 11: Secretariat to circulate meeting minutes and papers from the Science Council and other SAC meetings and any relevant FSA Board papers.

Action 12: Secretariat to collate information from other SACs (e.g. meeting agendas, minutes, papers) for future meetings.

Item 8: AOB

35. The Committee requested that going forward papers / agendas are clearly numbered and provided as a 'pack' to avoid confusion.

Action 13: Secretariat to review format of agendas, papers ensuring they are clearly labelled and numbered.

36. The group discussed the date for the next meeting – March 2019.

Action 14: Secretariat to find a suitable date for the next ACSS meeting.

Item 9: Questions from Observers

37. Anne Murcott (AM), who is a member of the Food and You Working Group, asked a couple of questions to clarify points. She also asked for background information on the Board's priorities for social science.

Action 15: MP to share with AM background information on the FSA social science priorities.

Item 10: Close

38. The meeting chair thanked the FSA and committee members for attending.

Annex A

Second Meeting of the Advisory Committee for Social Science: Agenda**4 December 2018 (12.00 – 16.05)**

Time	Item
12.00	Lunch
12.15	1. Welcome and housekeeping Julie Hill, ACSS Deputy Chair
12.20	2. FSA update Steve Wearne, Director of Science & Michelle Patel, Head of Social Science
12.45	3. Chairs update Julie Hill, ACSS Deputy Chair
12.50	Working group updates
12.50	4. Review of Food and You (Paper 1.1) Professor George Gaskell, working group Chair
13.20	5. Risk Communication (Paper 1.2) Julie Barnett, working group Chair
13.50	Break
14.20	6. Application of behavioural science (Paper 1.3) Julie Hill, working group Chair
14.50	7. Reflection on working group updates
15.05	8. Continuous development & future opportunities Michelle Patel, Head of Social Science
15.50	9. AOB
15.55	10. Questions from observers
16.00	11. Close