Application of behavioural science

Summary

This paper provides an update on progress for the working group *Applying behavioural science to the work of the FSA*. It summarises background, key activities and future action. This paper is for information and discussion.

Background

Applying behavioural science to help deliver public policy has become increasingly popular across UK Government. Centred around making public services more cost-effective, improving outcomes and assisting better choices, Departments have looked to apply this branch of the social sciences to help deliver its priorities.

A number of frameworks founded on psychological and behavioural economic research have been used across Government to help practitioners apply theory to practice. They include the Government Social Research (GSR) MINDSPACE framework, the Behavioural Insight Team (BIT) EAST framework and the framework specifically for businesses grouped under the mnemonic ORGANISER (co-funded by FSA).

Alongside this, and building on the latest advances in decision sciences research, value-based models of decision-making that blend work from judgment and decision-making research in psychology, as well as neuroeconomics and behavioural economics, are currently being implemented. They have been used as a basis for identifying key incentive schemes that could be utilised to improve compliance behaviours and a food safety culture in food businesses.

Within the FSA, applying behavioural insight to improve our impact on influencing consumers and businesses behaviours is identified as a key strategic objective in the FSA 2015-2020 Strategic Plan[1]. In the last two years we have been building internal capability and worked with others, to access relevant expertise and knowledge on how best to apply behavioural science. Now, work is underway to review the progress we've made and scope out new work in line with emerging priorities.

To inform this, we are currently running a series of workshops with policy and operational colleagues guided by the BASIC[2] framework developed by the Danish iNudgeYou unit[3]. Through these workshops we are demonstrating how FSA can use behavioural science to frame policy questions as well as optimise potential interventions - and identifying a longlist of issues that may benefit from applying a behavioural science approach.

We're also keen to develop a wider repository of knowledge that could inform interventions we design following the ACSS prioritisation exercise, so building on best practice and learning from existing work. And in the interests of openness and transparency, we are keen to investigate best ways to record the outputs from our

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[1] https://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/about-the-fsa
[2] Publication pending
[3] https://inudgeyou.com/en/

behavioural science research, so we can quickly search what has/ hasn't worked, by what approach/ in what context - in an agile way.

To support and shape this works' successful delivery, a working group (WG) was established at the first ACSS meeting[4] to help assure best practice and outcomes, comprising the following members:

- Ms Julie Hill (Chair)
- Dr Seda Erdem
- Professor Susan Michie
- Mr John McTernan
- Professor Spencer Henson
- Professor George Gaskell

Key activities

Following this meeting, the working group has since met and corresponded via email. Through which members have discussed and agreed their final terms of reference[5] and a specific work plan to achieve two of its key objectives (below):

> Provide advice on relevant, current frameworks and interventions that will be examined in a review. The review would also include published and grey literature, which could be periodically updated and would help inform FSA future programme of research.

> Work with FSA to prioritise the issues that are forthcoming from planned workshops, plus any wider initiatives, helping to identify which would benefit most from a behavioural science approach, to take forward to design/ intervention and evaluation stage.

In formalising the documents, the working group had a wide ranging discussion spanning background, terms, activity, objectives, aims specific actions and timings, reflected in meeting minutes, published on the ACSS website[6].

Since formalising these documents, an FSA fellow has begun work on a review, which – as an iterative development, will also consider how different frameworks recommend prioritising issues or questions (if at all), to shape work on a prioritisation matrix.

A full record of key actions complete and pending are provided at Annex 1 for reference.

Future action

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[4] https://acss.food.gov.uk/acss-meetings/acss-meeting-15-may-2018
[5] https://acss.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/termsofref_0.pdf
[6] https://acss.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mtgoneminutes.pdf

Looking ahead, the group plan to provide ad hoc input to the review and, based on findings and expertise, will then draw together recommendations for prioritisation in line with work plan objectives. Concurrently, a workplan for a database will be developed and taken forward and, where possible, in collaboration with other government departments.

Discussion

This paper is for information and general discussion.

Julie Hill, ACSS WG Chair

Helen Atkinson, FSA

Annex 1. ACSS WG for the Application of Behavioral Science - Progress Summary

HA – Helen Atkinson, FSA
MO – Magda Osman, FSA
JH – Julie Hill, ACSS WG Chair
SM – Susan Michie, ACSS
Group – shorthand for Working Group
FSA Fellow – Kris Patel

Task	Due?	Who?	Progress
Convene WG mtg 1	30.07.18	HA/Group	Done
Publish terms of reference	August	HA	Done
Agree work protocol for objectives 2 & 3	August	HA/JH/SM	Done
Agree work protocol for objective 1	tbc	Group	Pending
Circulate review of OECD case studies	August	HA	Done
Tasks under Objectives 2 and 3			
1. Literature review: Draft recommendations for a review and circulate to the Group for comment	August - September	FSA Fellow & Group	Draft circulated
Refine review methodology with research fellow	September - October	FSA Fellow & Group	From w/c 22 Oct
Provide ad hoc advice as work gets underway	October-December	Group	By email and at next WG meeting (depending on timings)
2. Develop a matrix/decision tree to prioritise policy issues from the FSA workshops	December - January	HA/Group?	Initial draft due [tbc]
Observe FSA behavioural science workshop	November 8th	[tbc]	Outputs from all workshops due end Dec
Work with FSA to refine, trial and apply matrix			[tbc]
3. A list of prioritised policy issues and supporting commentary	January	HA/Group	Start at third sub-group meeting
WG mtg 2 – and update to ACSS	December	HA/JH/SM	After second ACSS meeting
Complete final deliverables to publish on ACSS website	January	HA/Group	