

Paper 3.6

12-month review of the Advisory Committee for Social Science (2018/19)

SUMMARY

This paper provides a summary of the activities and outputs of the ACSS over the past 12 months. It also sets out priorities for 2019/20. The Committee is invited to discuss whether all Committee activities and outputs are accurately captured and to agree the proposed priorities for 2019/20.

INTRODUCTION

1. In April 2018 a new Advisory Committee for Social Science (ACSS) was established to provide independent expertise and strategic advice to the FSA on social science issues.
2. One year on, this paper will reflect on the activities of the ACSS over the past 12 months, highlighting where the ACSS has added value across the FSA. It will also look forward to the next financial year setting out future priorities for the Committee.

BACKGROUND

3. Science and evidence is crucial to achieving the FSA's strategic objectives set out in the 2015-2020 Food We Can Trust Strategic Plan¹. The Science, Evidence and Information 2015-2020 Delivery Plan² describes how science, evidence and information will be used to tackle the challenges of today but also to identify and contribute to addressing emerging risks for the future.
4. A key component of the FSA's approach to science is the use of independent scientific advisory committees³ (SACs) who can provide independent expert advice and challenge on scientific matters and ensure that the work of the FSA is backed up by the best and most recent scientific evidence.
5. In 2008 the FSA established the Social Science Research Committee (SSRC) to help the Agency strengthen its capacity for social science research and to provide advice to the Agency about how it gathers and uses social science evidence. In 2016 the FSA's Triennial Review of its Scientific

¹ <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/FSA-Strategic-plan-2015-2020.pdf>

² <https://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/our-approach-to-science>

³ <https://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/scientific-advisory-committees>

Advisory Committees⁴ recommended that the future work programme and membership of the SSRC was reviewed to reflect the new priorities of the FSA as outlined in the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan; and in April 2018 a new Advisory Committee for Social Science (ACSS) was appointed, superseding the former SSRC.

ABOUT THE ACSS

6. The ACSS is an independent expert committee of the FSA comprising of an independent Chair, seven expert members and one lay member.⁵ The Committee is supported by a secretariat drawn from the Agency's Social Science and Economics Teams.

7. The role of the ACSS is to provide expert strategic advice to the FSA on its use of social sciences to deliver FSA's strategic objectives. Specifically, the Committee was set up to:
 - a. Advise on how FSA gathers, uses and brings together social science evidence to support delivery of the FSA's strategic objectives.
 - b. Help assure impact from FSA's application of social science that is timely and relevant to its priorities and objectives.
 - c. Review and advise on FSA's current social and data science investment.
 - d. Advise on opportunities and best practice in bringing together different disciplines and approaches to address strategic problems identified by or relevant to the work of the FSA.
 - e. Advise on new and emerging opportunities for interrogating FSA and wider data.
 - f. Provide evaluation advice to ensure successful delivery and impact of policy.
 - g. Help to identify and access wider relevant networks, experts and evidence in these and related fields to provide effective advice to the FSA.
 - h. Keep the FSA in touch with current and future developments in social science both in the UK and internationally.
 - i. Maintain a programme of continuous development to assure successful multi- and inter-disciplinary working.
 - j. Work collaboratively with other FSA SACs and the FSA's Science Council.

⁴ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-03-24/HCW5651/>

⁵ <https://acss.food.gov.uk/acss-members>

8. The ACSS works alongside the FSA’s Science Council⁶ and other scientific advisory committees⁷.

REFLECTING ON 2018/19

Appointing the new Committee

9. On 3 April 2019 FSA Chair, Heather Hancock, announced the appointment of the new Advisory Committee for Social Science, following a successful recruitment exercise. Professor Susan Michie was appointed as the Committee Chair and Ms Julie Hill was appointed as Deputy Chair. Appointed expert members include Professor George Gaskell, Professor Spencer Henson, Mr John McTernan, Professor Julie Barnett, Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Professor Dan Rigby, and Dr Seda Erdem. Members have various backgrounds and interests including health psychology and behaviour change; social psychology and research methodology; environmental policy; political strategy; and economics.

Committee meetings

10. On 15 May 2018 the Committee held its inaugural meeting.⁸ The purpose of the meeting was to provide Committee members with an overview of the FSA’s role, what the FSA’s strategic priorities are and how the ACSS will help contribute to these. The meeting also gave members the opportunity to be introduced to the FSA’s Chief Scientific Advisor, Head of Analytics, Head of Social Science and Secretariat. During this meeting three ACSS working groups⁹ were formed, each with a specific set of objectives (see ‘Priorities for 2018/19’).
11. On 4 December 2018 the ACSS held its second open meeting during which the Chairs of each working group gave an update on their progress.¹⁰ The group also started to consider priorities for 2019/20.
12. The third open meeting of the ACSS will be held on 2 April 2019. At this meeting the ACSS will conduct a review of the last 12 months and agree its priorities for 2019/20 (see ‘Looking Forward’).

⁶: <https://science-council.food.gov.uk/>

⁷ <https://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/scientific-advisory-committees>

⁸ <https://acss.food.gov.uk/acss-meetings/acss-meeting-15-may-2018>

⁹ <https://acss.food.gov.uk/acss-subgroups>

¹⁰ <https://acss.food.gov.uk/acss-meetings/acss-meetings/acss-meeting-4-december-2018/acss-meeting-4-december-2018>

Priorities for 2018/19

Behavioural Science

13. Applying behavioural science to help deliver public policy has become increasingly popular across UK Government, prompting the development of a number of cross-Government frameworks to help practitioners apply theory to practice (e.g. MINDSPACE, the Behavioural Insight Team's EAST framework and ORGANISER, which was co-funded by FSA).
14. The Behavioural Science (BS) Working Group, chaired by Julie Hill, was set up to help assure best practice and outcomes in the application of behavioural science to the work of the FSA. To achieve this, the working group was specifically asked to:
 - a. Advise on the best approach to record outputs from the FSA's behavioural science research.
 - b. Advise on the methodology and scope of a review of relevant frameworks.
 - c. Identify an approach for prioritising policy issues identified through FSA workshops led by the FSA's social science team.
 - d. Develop a recommended shortlist of policy issues to take forward as behavioural experiments/interventions.

Risk Communications

15. As the FSA's role changes after EU Exit, the Agency will assume more responsibility for risk assessment and risk management. As such, the FSA has developed a new overarching framework to show how risk analysis will be undertaken post EU-exit.
16. The Risk Communications (RC) Working Group, chaired by Julie Barnett, was established to support the development of the risk communications aspects of the new risk analysis framework. Specifically, the group was asked to:
 - a. Conduct a gap analysis of the Science Council principles, and advice on how best to turn them into a workable framework.
 - b. Provide academic support on a review of the existing risk communications frameworks.
 - c. Advise on a draft risk communications framework and how we can make this most usable.

Food and You

17. Food and You is one of the FSA's main sources of robust and representative evidence regarding UK consumers' self-reported behaviours, attitudes and knowledge relating to food safety as well as other food issues. The survey, which is administered face to face, is conducted biennially with approximately 3,000 adults (over 16 years old) across England, Wales and Northern Ireland taking part in each wave. The survey has been running since 2010.
18. The Food and You (FY) Working Group, chaired by George Gaskell, was asked to conduct a wholesale review of the FSA's Food and You survey and provide recommendations for the future direction of the survey. The Food and You Working Group was specifically asked to consider:
 - a. The survey's methodology.
 - b. Whether Food and You could be linked with other datasets.
 - c. How to communicate the results to maximise impact.

Outputs

19. By March 2019, each working group had achieved what it was set out to do and delivered several key outputs for the FSA. Some of these outputs have already contributed to FSA decision-making, thus demonstrating the value of the ACSS and the expertise of its members. For instance, the gap analysis on the Science Council's *Principles for Communicating Risk and Uncertainty* conducted by the RC Working Group fed into the FSA Board's discussion on the proposed risk analysis frameworks for the FSA post-EU Exit (December 2018).¹¹ In addition, the prioritisation exercise of policy issues conducted by the BS Working Group directly informed which areas the FSA will be conducting behavioural experiments on in 2019/20.
20. Table 1 overleaf presents the outputs delivered by the three working groups and how these have, or will be, used by the FSA. Table 2 considers the activities and outputs of the ACSS more broadly, mapping these against the Committee's terms of reference.

¹¹ <https://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/fsa-board-meeting-december-2018>

Table 1 – ACSS working group objectives, outputs and how these have been used

Group	Objectives	Activities and Outputs	Utilisation of Outputs
BS	1 Advise on best approaches to record outputs from the FSA's behavioural science research, so we can quickly search what has/ hasn't worked, by what approach/ in what context in an agile way, with the option to share with OGDs.		
	2 Advise on relevant, current frameworks and interventions that will be examined in a review.	Scoping review of behavioural relevant, current frameworks of behaviour change (conducted by FSA research fellow). [Survey to be implemented to collect data to assess the usefulness of the identified frameworks within the policy stages. The surveys will be sent to the cross-government behavioural insights network, in addition to experts of behaviour change. The responses will help to clarify what users and experts both value in a framework.]	
	3 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.	Prioritisation exercise in which 3 key issues were agreed: (1) Business registration and engagement; (2) Allergies; and (3) Display of calorie information in Northern Ireland.	The FSA has appointed a specialist supplier to refine these three issues and design behavioural interventions to pilot and test in 2019/20.
RC	1 Perform a gap analysis of the Science Council principles and advise on how best to turn them into a workable framework.	Working day (24 October 2018) during which the working group provided a commentary and gap analysis on the Principles for Communicating Risk and Uncertainty	This fed into the FSA Board's discussion of the proposed risk analysis frameworks for the FSA post-EU Exit.

			that were developed by the Science Council ¹² .	
	2	Academic support on a review of the existing risk communications frameworks, understanding their evolution, how they are used, and what are the learning points one might take forward.	Working group gave a commentary on the Science Council principles, and recommended that approaches were tested with consumers. Investment Board bid agreed for this in 2019-20. [Working group to comment and approve specifications, approach and review reports in 2019-20]	Informed the development of the risk communications guidelines as part of the new risk analysis framework
	3	Advise on a draft risk communications framework and how we can make this most usable, identifying the questions and checks required to communicate risk in the best known way in a range of probable situations and the organisational practices required to do so.	[Working group to advise on plans to implement new frameworks once tested in 2019-20.]	
FY	1	To formulate a strategy for FSA's social research activities and report actionable recommendations for Food and You, to the FSA and ACSS by the end of March 2019.	Consultation exercise with internal FSA stakeholders and external research agencies and suppliers.	The recommendations presented will inform FSA decision making regarding the future direction of Food and You.
	2	Advise on the value, pros and cons of different methodologies and on how we might discover, develop, test and pilot these to find the optimum way of meeting the objectives of Food and You in the future.	Final report summarising the review findings and presenting recommendations for the future direction of Food and You.	
	3	Advise on whether linking Food and You with other datasets might provide richer insights, or better value for money, and what the options for this may be		
	4	Advise on how best to use and communicate the results of Food and You to maximise impact both internally and external to the FSA.		

¹² <https://acss.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/acsspaperriskcommunication.pdf>

Table 2 – ACSS Terms of Reference with examples of activities undertaken 2018/19

ACSS Terms of Reference		Examples of activities undertaken in 2018/19
a	Advise on how FSA gathers, uses and brings together social science evidence to support delivery of the FSA's strategic objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Food and You and how it is used to gather evidence for the FSA (FY working group).
b	Help assure impact from FSA's application of social science that is timely and relevant to its priorities and objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritisation task to inform which areas the FSA should conduct behavioural experiments/interventions on (BS working group). • Gap analysis on the Science Council's Principles for Communicating Risk and Uncertainty (RC working group). • Advice on a draft risk communications framework (RC working group).
c	Review and advise on FSA's current social and data science investment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Food and You and recommendations on the future direction of the survey (FY working group).
d	Advise on opportunities and best practice in bringing together different disciplines and approaches to address strategic problems identified by or relevant to the work of the FSA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BS working group advised on opportunities where behavioural science interventions could be used across the FSA (BS working group). • JH to attend FSA workshop on risk communications
e	Advise on new and emerging opportunities for interrogating FSA and wider data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of how Food and You data could be linked to other datasets (FY working group).
f	Provide evaluation advice to ensure successful delivery and impact of policy.	
g	Help to identify and access wider relevant networks, experts and evidence in these and related fields to provide effective advice to the FSA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee members invited to promote the FSA's Register of Experts. • Sharing of relevant research evidence and reports e.g. IPPC Climate Change Report and WRAP Report on Healthy Sustainable Eating and Food Waste.
h	Keep the FSA in touch with current and future developments in social science both in the UK and internationally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of relevant research evidence and reports e.g. IPPC Climate Change Report and WRAP Report on Healthy Sustainable Eating and Food Waste.
i	Maintain a programme of continuous development to assure successful multi- and inter-disciplinary working.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular discussions and feedback on ways of working e.g. how the FSA communicates with the Committee and engaging with the other SACs.
j	Work collaboratively with other FSA SACs and the FSA's Science Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SM/JH/GG will be attending a Science Council meeting on 6 March 2019 to give an update on ACSS work and inform discussions with the Science Council's Data Working Group.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2019/20

21. In April the ACSS will be agreeing its priorities for 2019/20. Whilst the Committee will continue to provide advisory support on Risk Communications, Behavioural Science and Food and You, the next meeting will provide an opportunity to establish new working groups to address new issues, outlined below.

Enduring priorities

Risk Communications

22. The Risk Communication working group will continue to advise on this programme of work, supporting the development and testing of an FSA risk communications framework and toolkit (See paper 3.3 for more detail).

Behavioural Science

23. The Behavioural Science working group will continue to advise on the behavioural science work to be taken forward by the Social Science Team in 2019/20 to provide robust critique as these and other possible behavioural interventions are developed and tested. In addition, members will be asked to provide feedback on other behavioural science activities within the Social Science Team such as the on-going review of behavioural frameworks (See paper 3.4 for more detail).

Food and You

24. As Food and You moves into wave six of the survey, continued ACSS support will be required to assist the social science team in delivering the recommendations presented by the FY working group (See paper 3.5 for the working group's recommendations).

New priorities

Economic impact of EU exit

25. While the exact consequences of EU Exit remain uncertain, it is possible that there may be an economic impact on Food Business Operators (FBOs). The FSA is keen to draw on the economic expertise in the Committee by setting up a new working group to provide advice and support with regards to the potential economic impact of leaving the EU (See paper 3.7 for more detail).

Emerging technologies

26. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is the current and developing environment in which disruptive technologies are changing the way we live and work, characterised by the convergence of digital, physical, and biological technologies. These technologies are influencing societies, economies and individuals; resulting in a global transformation, which is significant in terms of its size, speed, and scope.
27. It is crucial for the FSA to understand how this changing technology will impact on UK and global food systems and markets, but also consumes in terms of choice; access; preferences; quality of life; standard of living; and perceptions of risk in food (including trusted sources of information, reported purchasing behaviours, and acceptability of emerging food technologies). The FSA proposes setting up a new ACSS working group to provide academic support and advice on this workstream as it progresses (See paper 3.8 for more detail).

Assurance

28. In September 2018 the Governance Review Paper¹³ stated that, *“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)”*.
29. The Risk Analysis Paper presented to the Board in March 2019¹⁴ 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.
30. The ACSS has been invited to present a paper to the FSA Board in September 2019 assuring the quality, value and impact of social science research in the FSA. In April members will be discussing how they might be able to provide this assurance and what information the FSA will need to provide to enable Committee members to do this. The Committee will also be asked to assure that social science evidence is weighted and accounted for correctly in FSA decision-making. One way the Committee might achieve this is through designing principles and a process for ensuring social science is considered appropriately when making decisions in the FSA.

¹³ https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-18-09-08-governance-report_0.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-19-03-08-risk-analysis-assurance-final.pdf>

DISCUSSION

31. The Committee is invited to discuss:

- Whether the activities and outputs of the ACSS for 2018/19 are accurately captured in this paper.
- The proposed priorities for the ACSS for 2019/20.