

Paper 3.5

Review of FSA's Food and You Survey

Report by Professor George Gaskell

ACSS member & Food and You Working Group Chair

SUMMARY

The FSA's Advisory Committee for Social Science (ACSS) established a Food and You Working Group to provide recommendations to the ACSS and the FSA Board on the future of the Food and You (F&Y) survey by March 2019. The Working Group's procedure included (i) consultation with FSA staff and external stakeholders on the Agency's portfolio of consumer research, with particular reference to the F&Y survey, (ii) an assessment of the alignment of the different strands of consumer research with the Agency's strategic objectives, (iii) a review of the F&Y topics and concepts, and (iv) lessons from contemporary survey research methodology practice. The Working Group makes the following recommendations on survey methodology, data linkages and impact in response to the questions outlined in the Terms of Reference:

Survey Methodology

1. Set up task force with the following terms of reference:
 - a. In line with the Government's Data Collection Transformation Programme, to plan to move F&Y from face to face interviewing to online employing the methodology of Web-push mixed-mode surveying (WPM)
 - b. To ensure necessary investment is made in piloting and testing to investigate any differences in response profiles between the current and new methodology.
 - c. To assess current F&Y modules for desirable frequency of fielding; every 2 or 4 years.
 - d. With F&Y in WPM increase sample sizes in Wales and Northern Ireland to 1000.
 - e. To ensure the F&Y and the Public Attitudes Tracker continue to address FSA strategic objectives without unnecessary overlap of content.
 - f. To ensure F&Y continues to be an Official Statistic.

Linking F&Y with other sources of data

2. Establish a role in the Social Science team for the monitoring of other pertinent data sources to complement F&Y and other Agency research.
3. Seek to cultivate links with the research community working in areas that overlap with FSA concerns.

On maximising impact of the Agency's consumer and social research

4. Bring the statistical analysis and reporting of F&Y in-house to facilitate more breadth and depth of analysis and achieve greater potential impact.
5. Work with the FSA's existing communications team to develop a comprehensive communications strategy with clear actions and timelines designed to maximise the

impact of F&Y, the Public Attitudes Tracker and other studies commissioned by the Agency.

INTRODUCTION

1. The FSA's Advisory Committee for Social Science (ACSS) established a Food and You Working Group to provide recommendations to the ACSS and the FSA Board on the future direction of the Food and You (hereafter F&Y) survey by the end of March 2019.

BACKGROUND

Terms of Reference

2. The Working Group's Terms of Reference¹ posed three questions.
 - i. What are the pros and cons of different methodologies and what would be the optimum approach to meet the objectives of F&Y in the future?
 - ii. Would linking F&Y with other datasets provide richer insights and/or better value for money?
 - iii. How can the impact of the F&Y survey be maximised to internal FSA stakeholders and to external audiences?

Approach to the Review

3. To martial evidence on these questions the following enquiries were undertaken:
 - Assessing the extent to which the F&Y survey meets its stated objectives and the strategic objectives of the FSA.
 - Conducting a review of the F&Y survey in the context of the FSA's portfolio of consumer focussed social research.
 - Investigating how stakeholders contributed to the development and use of the F&Y survey.
 - Determining the extent to which different methods in the portfolio meet the requirements of stakeholders.
 - Assessing the pros, cons and value for money of different methodological approaches to consumer research, specifically the F&Y Survey.

Procedure for the Review

4. Throughout the review, the Working Group worked closely with members of the FSA Social Science Team responsible for managing F&Y and on several occasions, Robin Clifford of the FSA Statistics Branch who advises the Social Scientists on statistical matters. In October and November, the Working Group embarked on a consultation exercise with the following groups:

¹ The Terms of Reference of the Working Group can be found here: <https://acss.food.gov.uk/acss-subgroups>

- FSA Stakeholders:
 - Policy - Food Hygiene Policy; Novel Foods; Food Allergy and Intolerance; Foodborne Disease.
 - Science - Microbiological Risk; Exposure Assessment (Toxicology); Operational Research.
 - Northern Ireland - Standards and Dietary Health.
 - Wales - Policy / Communications.
 - FSA Advisory Committees and Groups
 - Anne Murcott, Joy Dobbs and David Nuttall of the 'Food and You' Working Group which was established at the survey's inception to provide ongoing expert advice and to assure continuity.
 - Social researchers in other government departments
 - Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
 - Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)²
 - Researchers in private sector agencies:
 - NatCen³
 - Kantar Public⁴
 - Ipsos Mori
5. Those who contributed to the design of the survey and users of the findings (FSA Stakeholders) were asked to comment on the following:
- Topics in F&Y of interest
 - Uses of F&Y
 - How the F&Y report, tables and data are used
 - Views on the F&Y timings (data are published every 2 years)
 - Views on the F&Y methodology (robustness)
 - Why F&Y is used over other tools (such as the Public Attitudes Tracker and/or bespoke studies)
 - One-off studies commissioned within the FSA to investigate issues of contemporary significance (so-called Bespoke research)
 - Use of the F&Y secondary analysis
 - Gaps in F&Y
 - Limitations of F&Y / areas to improve
6. Discussions with researchers from external companies concentrated on the different methodologies used in social/consumer research. Specifically, the ACSS Working Group sought the researchers' views on the pros and cons of face-to-face

² DCMS commission the Community Life Survey, a household survey of adults aged 16+ in England which recently moved away from face to face data collection towards a fully online / paper self-completion methodology.

³ NatCen is the current contractor for F&Y survey.

⁴ Kantar Public (formerly TNS BMRB) were contracted to conduct waves 1-3 of F&Y. They are also the current contractor for the FSA's Public Attitudes Tracker and the DCMS Community Life Survey.

interviewing and self-completion questionnaires both on paper and online. In parallel members of the FSA participating in the Review gathered together details of the development of F&Y Wave 5 (currently in the field) and documented the linkages between the survey's aims and objectives, the content areas covered, the concepts behind content areas, and questions in the survey questionnaire.

FSA's Consumer Research Portfolio

Main elements of consumer research portfolio

7. The main elements of FSA's consumer/social research are: the F&Y survey (main report and secondary analyses); the Public Attitudes Tracker (PAT); Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) Tracker, which specifically monitors the public's awareness and attitudes towards the FHRS; and a number of highly focussed and varied bespoke studies. The key features of these different methods are set out in **Table 1**. The Community Life Survey of DCMS is included for comparative purposes. As will be described, this is a major survey and an official Government Statistic. In line with the Digital Transformation Initiative it departs from the traditional face to face survey methodology to on-line with self-completion follow-up, so-called web push. This will be described in more detail in the 'Strategic Consideration' section of the report.

Strategic priorities and F&Y objectives

8. Two sections of FSA's strategic review illustrate the centrality of consumers and the importance of social research in FSA's plans for the years to 2020. In the chapter on '*Gathering and using science, evidence and information*' a goal includes "Use our assessment of behavioural change models and robust evidence on consumer attitudes and practices, to frame, plot and evaluate our approaches to effective interventions, including flexible or segmented approaches for different groups of people". In the following chapter '*Empowering Consumers*' a goal involves "make better use of information we and others hold on consumers and their views on food issues." These goals can be seen to inform the objectives of F&Y, stated as:
 - To explore public understanding of, and engagement with, the FSA's aim of improving food safety.
 - To identify specific target groups for future interventions (e.g. those most at risk or those among whom FSA policies and initiatives are likely to have the greatest impact).
 - To describe the public attitudes towards food production and the food system.
 - To monitor changes over time (compared with data from Waves 1-3 or from other sources) of reported attitudes and behaviour.
 - To broaden the evidence base and develop indicators to assess progress in fulfilling the FSA's strategic plans, aims and targets.
9. **Annex A** sets out the processes in the development for F&Y Wave 5 and, in particular, features the extensive and detailed stakeholder consultation with FSA's

various scientific committees. **Annex B** maps the links between F&Y objectives, stakeholders, concepts and questions. The concepts and questions included in the Public Attitudes Tracker are provided at **Annex C**.

Research Methods in Brief

Food and You Survey

10. In brief, F&Y is a key point of contact between the FSA and the public. It is designed to map the contours of UK consumers' attitudes and reported behaviours in relation to: recommended practice for the 4Cs (cleaning, cooking, chilling and cross-contamination); food insecurity; shopping, eating out and allergies. On a selective basis questions have been repeated in the biennial waves of the survey providing informative time series insights (the charting over time of changing trends in reported behaviours and attitudes). The methodology of random probability sampling yields reliable, high-quality data; sampling errors can be calculated to check which differences over time or between sub-groups are statistically significant and not due to chance. Since 2014 the survey has qualified as an 'official' (Government) statistic, enhancing its credibility and reputation within and outside Government and also internationally.

Public Attitudes Tracker (PAT)

11. From 2001 the FSA has placed questions on a TNS Kantar face-to-face omnibus survey; this is known as the Public Attitudes Tracker (PAT). After a review in 2010, the PAT was redeveloped and employed on a biannual basis, and in 2014 the survey qualified as an official statistic. The PAT is used to monitor a variety of issues of interest to the FSA including policy initiatives; communication campaigns; consumer concerns, as well as the awareness of and trust in the FSA. Recent examples of a focus on emerging issues include gauging public confidence in the safety and authenticity of UK meat products, to feed into a review of meat cutting plants. Another example followed an outbreak of listeria in frozen sweetcorn. This led to an exploration of consumers' awareness of potential risks in the use of frozen fruit and vegetables if preparation instructions were not followed correctly.

Bespoke research

12. Issues periodically emerge that call for a prompt FSA response. Recent examples include raw drinking milk and 'rare' cooked burgers. To investigate such matters small scale studies have been commissioned. These may involve quantitative surveys or qualitative studies using depth interviews or focus groups, often focussing on particular sub-groups of the public, such as pregnant women or those with an allergy.

Table 1: Overview of FSA's portfolio of Consumer and Social Research

Funding organisation & contractor	Research tool	Objectives and content areas	Method	Sample	Official Statistic?	Time to complete survey	Frequency	Fieldwork period	Time taken to analyse/report
FSA / NatCen	F&Y (main report) ⁵	F&Y collects information about the public's self-reported behaviours, attitudes and knowledge relating to food safety and other food issues, including eating patterns, shopping, food insecurity, trust and healthy eating.	Cross-sectional survey of adults, administered via face to face interviews.	Approx. 3,000 adults (16+) across England, Wales and Northern Ireland (NI) (samples are boosted to 500 in NI and Wales). Selected using random probability sampling.	✓	40 mins (England/Wales) 55 mins (NI)	24 months	5 months	6 months for the main report (contractor)
FSA / NatCen	F&Y (secondary analysis) ⁶	Following the publication of the main F&Y report, specific policy areas in the FSA often commission secondary papers looking at specific topics (e.g. food security) or groups of interest (e.g. those with an allergy) in greater detail. Recent examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Security in Wales (Mar 18) • Engagement with Labelling: Informing the Calorie Wise Scheme (Nov 17) • Profiles and Practices of People with Food Hyper-sensitivities (May 17) 	Secondary analysis on data collected from the Food and You survey.	N/A	N/A	N/A	Roughly every 24 months, following publication of main data	N/A	3 months (contractor)
FSA / Kantar TNS	Public Attitudes Tracker ⁷ (PAT)	The Public Attitudes Tracker is a biannual survey designed to monitor changes in consumer attitudes towards the FSA (awareness and trust), food-related concerns and the awareness of hygiene standards in eating establishments.	Cross-sectional survey of adults incorporated into the TNS Omnibus survey, administered using face to face interviews.	Approx. 2,000 adults (16+) in England, Wales and NI (the NI sample is boosted to 100). Selected using random location quota sampling.	✓		6 months	2 weeks	3 months (in house)
	Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) Tracker	The FHRS Tracker was introduced in 2014 to gather more detailed information on consumer's awareness of and attitudes towards the FHRS.	Cross-sectional survey of adults incorporated into the TNS Omnibus survey, administered using face to face interviews.	Approx. 2,000 adults (16+) in England, Wales and NI. Selected using random location quota sampling.			12 months	2 weeks	3 months (in house)

⁵ <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you>

⁶ <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you/food-and-you-secondary-analysis-wave-1-4>

⁷ <https://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/biannual-public-attitudes-tracker>

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FSA / various contractors	Social Media Monitoring	FSA monitors social media content through a range of projects for various objectives. Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring conversations about allergies, to identify food activist consumer trends⁸ • Horizon scanning. 	Social media listening	Varies		N/A	Ad hoc	N/A	Varies
FSA / various contractors	Bespoke studies	F&Y and the PAT cover a broad range of food-related topics quantitatively and at a high level. Sometimes additional bespoke research is required to understand specific areas in more detail using qualitative methods or by targeting certain groups within the population (e.g. those with allergies). Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raw Drinking Milk Consumer Research (Feb 18)⁹ • Communicating with the Public on Chemical Contaminants (Mar 17)¹⁰ • Business Display of Food Hygiene Ratings (Nov 17)¹¹ • Rare Burgers Risk Communication Messaging (Jul 16)¹² • Our Food Future (Feb 16)¹³ 	A wide variety of methods depending on the project needs. Examples include qualitative (e.g. interviews, focus groups, case studies) or quantitative (e.g. online or face to face surveys, experiments).	Varies, depending on the method / requirement.	N/A	N/A	As and when required.	Varies depending on the method.	Varies depending on the study.
DCMS / Kantar Public	Community Life Survey (CLS)	The CLS provides data on behaviours and attitudes that are important to encouraging social action and empowering communities, including volunteering, giving, community engagement, well-being and loneliness.	In 2016-17 data collection moved from face to face to online/paper self-completion. All households sampled invited to complete the survey online with an option to request a paper copy. A targeted sample were sent 2 paper surveys in their 2 nd reminder letter. In 2017-18, 74% of respondents completed the survey online.	Approx. 10,000 adults (16+) across England. Selected using a random probability stratified sample, drawing addresses from the Postcode Address File (PAF).	✓	30 mins (online)	12 months	6-8 weeks	2 months (in house)

⁸ <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/research-projects/identifying-activist-consumers-of-food-march-2016>

⁹ <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/research-projects/raw-drinking-milk-consumer-insight-report-2018>

¹⁰ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180411152509/https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/chemicalscontaminants.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/research-projects/display-of-food-hygiene-ratings-in-england-wales-and-northern-ireland-2017-wave-of-research>

¹² <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/research-projects/rare-burgers-risk-communication-messaging>

¹³ <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/our-food-future-full-report.pdf>

STAKEHOLDER ASSESSMENTS

Food and You

13. The F&Y reports are widely read within FSA and in Wales and Northern Ireland. All stakeholders commented on the value of the survey. It has been used to inform FSA campaigns, for example on the 4Cs, on 'best before' and 'use by' labels, and on campylobacter, and has informed DEFRA's policy advice on food insecurity. It contributes to FSA deliberations on topics for further research, policies for review and topics to feature in future awareness campaigns. It also has a horizon scanning function flagging up cultural trends that may lead to emerging risks, for example dining out habits and venues, changing diet preferences, organic and raw foods, and self-attributed allergies. ACMSF's report on Campylobacter built on the time series of F&Y which provided quantitative evidence from 2010 onwards about how adults in the UK behave in their kitchens.

Public Attitudes Tracker

14. The PAT is used internally by FSA Wales and FSA Northern Ireland policy teams, Resource & Performance team, and the Communications Division. It is also frequently quoted by FSA's Executive Management Team at conferences and for briefings. Externally, it has been used by Defra, DH, Department of Health and Social Care, Academics and the charity WRAP (The Waste and Resources Action Programme). In the FSA, the PAT is used to monitor and track various policy initiatives/programmes (such as FHRS, Allergens, National Food Crime unit, Recalls), communication activities and to track consumer concerns, awareness and trust in the FSA and trusting the FSA to do its job. Despite being an Official Statistic, awareness of the existence of the PAT, even within the FSA, was lower than might have been anticipated. That F&Y concentrates on reported behaviours while the PAT has a greater emphasis on attitudes and opinions was not widely appreciated. To this extent, asking stakeholders and potential stakeholders which survey best met their particular concerns, often drew a blank. We will return to this in later sections of this report.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATION

Linking F&Y with Other Datasets

15. Looking at findings and insights obtained from other data sources to complement F&Y, the PAT and other research commissioned by the Agency should be routine practice. Such 'other data' sources might include PHE's 'National Diet and Nutrition Survey'¹⁴ on the topic of allergies, studies by the European Food Safety Authority on food risk perception¹⁵, and NATCEN's British Social Attitudes Survey¹⁶ for the broader picture of social change and studies funded by the Economic and Social

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-diet-and-nutrition-survey>

¹⁵ For example the 2010 Eurobarometer: <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/corporate/pub/eurobarometer10>

¹⁶ <http://natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/british-social-attitudes/>

Research Council¹⁷ and other funding agencies. The rationale for the pursuit of informative links with other data sources might be (i) horizon scanning, what are the emerging issues of concern and which issues are declining in salience, and (ii) what policy/research questions cannot currently be answered by F&Y and the PAT but might be answered by combining insights from other sources of research and data. Other potentially useful linkages might arise from the cultivation of relations with researchers in academia, think tanks and consultancies on issues of mutual interest. For example, the Food and You data on food insecurity might be of interest to those in social policy, food and health might interest the many researchers studying public health, and changing patterns and preferences of food and eating habits might be of interest to sociologist and anthropologists.

Communications to Maximise Impact

16. Although it is understood that dissemination and communication of the results of the F&Y has grown with each subsequent wave, more could be done to maximise its impact. This is equally true for the PAT. While there are various elements of communications included in the F&Y project timeline (e.g. social media activity) a detailed communication plan should be developed in collaboration with the FSA's existing communications team. This should include peak action at the time of publication of reports and ongoing activities (social media, blogs, user groups etc) and should be designed to reach different audiences (e.g. academics, general public, internal policy stakeholders). Of note, the recent ESRC social science festival which promoted social science across the FSA was well attended and greatly appreciated, particularly by colleagues in Wales and Northern Ireland.
17. The current reports of F&Y and the PAT should be treated as base materials for shorter targeted reports on specific issues, beyond the current reports on Wales and Northern Ireland. Whilst some secondary analyses of the F&Y survey data are currently conducted by the contractor, there are many opportunities to exploit the data further. An ambition for ongoing communication would be a series of short pieces, some undertaken within the Agency and some outside, some in partnership with relevant organisations (Researchers, ESRC, DEFRA and WRAP). These could be published and blogged/tweeted at regular intervals, demonstrating impact and keeping FSA's social and consumer research in the public domain. Opportunities to speak at relevant conferences and seminars should be proactively sought and time for doing so prioritised.
18. One option for facilitating greater impact, stronger links with the scientific committees and wider communication opportunities would be to bring the statistical analysis and reporting of F&Y in-house. This would call for additional resources, one or possibly two posts. With a reasonable background in social research and quantitative analysis, the incumbent(s) would join the two members of the FSA's social science team who currently oversee the project management of the survey. They would

¹⁷ <https://esrc.ukri.org/research/our-research/>

participate in the development of the survey, conduct the basic descriptive analyses and draft reports. Additional responsibilities would include exploiting the data as issues arise, monitoring other data sources and providing the social science team, the communications team and the Agency with pertinent information from the surveys and other research as circumstances demand.

F&Y Going Digital: Lessons from the Community Life Survey

19. The Government's Data Collection Transformation Programme¹⁸ has recommended moving survey data collection online, changing existing processes so that survey data are predominantly collected using online methods rather than existing use of paper, telephone and face-to-face interviews. Non-online methods would only be used where there is an exceptional reason to do so. This recommendation builds on the pioneering work in the USA on web-push mixed-mode survey methodology by Dillman and colleagues¹⁹, hereafter referred to in shorthand as WPM. Another term in use for mixed mode surveys is Address bases online sampling (ABOS).
20. The push to the web has been prompted by increasing online coverage – now at circa 90% in the UK, increasing public expectation of online contact, and a much lower cost relative to face-to-face interviewing. Survey methodologists now consider that that low response rates, typical of online surveys are less damaging than feared²⁰. Push-to-web surveys are burgeoning worldwide, for example the American Community Survey; 2015 Japanese Census, and the 2016 Canadian and Australian Censuses. Examples in the UK include the European Social Survey web experiment in 2012; the Community Life web experiments 2012-15 (now replacing face to face), and the Active Lives Survey since 2015 (replacing random digit dialling).
21. Hamlyn, Fitzpatrick and Williams (2015) report on a programme of methodological work conducted between 2012 and 2015 on the development of a mixed online and self-completion methodology for the Community Life Survey (see **Annex D**). This work involved the following: testing and refining an initial field model for online/postal survey delivery; a larger scale online/postal pilot conducted alongside the face-to-face survey; testing the feasibility of sampling all adults in the household instead of one selected at random, assessing respondent behaviour and determining whether the two methods lead to similar response profiles.
22. On a number of criteria of response quality including effort, primacy effects and satisficing no differences were observed between face to face and the online/postal modes. Respondents in the latter mode were, however, less likely to be willing to be contacted by the sponsoring government department in the future. In addition, differences in response profiles were found when the same respondents answered

¹⁸<https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/programmesandprojects/datacollectiontransformationprogramme/edctp>

¹⁹ Dillman, D., A. (2017). The promise and challenge of pushing respondents to the Web in mixed-mode surveys. *Survey Methodology*, 43, 1, 3-30.

²⁰ Groves, R.M. and Peytcheva, E (2008). The impact of nonresponse rates on nonresponse bias: a meta analysis. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72,2,167-189

the same questions in the face to face and online/postal modes. Whether these differences were due to sample effects, for example the online/postal mode giving a poorer representation of the wider population, or due to mode effects, for example the presence of the interviewer's pacing the respondent through the questionnaire was investigated.

23. The authors report that the observed differences in responses between face-to-face and on-line/postal modes are mainly attributable to the way the questionnaire is administered rather than to the achieved sample of respondents. In particular, the largest differences in responses were found to occur on questions concerning values or behaviours that could be evaluated as more or less acceptable. This is likely to be the outcome of the 'social desirability bias'. In a 'conversation' with the interviewer, respondents seek to present or curate a positive image of themselves.
24. It must be noted however, that in any assessment of the ability of different survey modes to accurately capture 'reality', all methods have limitations. None can be held up as the ultimate benchmark against which others can be compared for reliability or validity.
25. Hamlyn, Fitzpatrick and Williams (2015) conclude their report with the following recommendations for best practice in address based online surveys:
 - i. A random probability stratified sample of addresses drawn from the Postcode Address File (PAF)
 - ii. Survey invitations issued by letter; at each address all adults (up to a maximum of four) invited to take part
 - iii. Up to four mailings sent to each address to maximise response
 - iv. Postal survey available as an alternative to ensure inclusion where the household lacks internet access - postal survey to be made available on demand and also sent physically in the post to a targeted subset in second reminder packs
 - v. Questionnaire designed to reflect the face-to-face survey construction as far as possible to maximise compatibility
 - vi. A £10 incentive to each person completing the survey to maximise response

What benefits and downsides might accrue from a web push F&Y survey?

26. First of all, F&Y should not lose its status as an official statistic. As shown in **Table 2**, and reflecting industry standards, the cost of face to face interviews per respondent are in the region of £130 while for WPM as described above the cost is about £30 per respondent including the incentive. Such lower costs convert into the opportunity to have larger sample sizes allowing for more extensive and statistically valid sub-group analyses and comparisons. It would release funds to allow for an increase in the samples for Wales and Northern Ireland – currently 500 and precluding a range of potentially relevant sub-group analyses – see **Table 2** – and possibly increased resources for enhanced communication activities. Also, as noted in **Table 1** is the

shorter duration of field work for WPM, 6-8 weeks compared to 20 weeks for traditional face to face.

Table 2: Survey sample, cost and time to complete

Food and You	Britain	Wales	Northern Ireland	Estimated cost	Time to complete
Face to face interviewing N=	2000	500	500	£420,000	40 minutes
Increased sample sizes for Wales and Northern Ireland WPM N=	2000	1000	1000	c. £120,000	30 minutes

27. Another possible benefit is that responses in face to face interview surveys are, as noted above, prone to the social desirability bias – the tendency to answer questions in a way that is socially acceptable and would be favourably viewed by others. It is suggested that in online surveys, the implicit social pressure of the interviewer is absent and responses are more candid.

Potential downsides with a shift to WPM

28. On the downside is the risk to time series. That acknowledged the number of observations in the F&Y time series is relatively few. The methodological study on the Community Life Survey conducted by Hamlyn, Fitzpatrick and Williams (2015) included a parallel run of the old and new methodology. This found no substantial differences between the response profiles of the two methods. By contrast the Active Lives Survey accepted the break in the time series. Were there to be a change in the survey methodology and this revealed some rather large and surprising changes in response profiles for particular questions or blocks of questions, it would raise the question ‘is the change real and of potential policy significance or merely a methodological artefact?’ Placing key questions in the Public Attitudes Tracker could throw light on that question.
29. A second downside is survey length. The conventional wisdom for telephone and online surveying is that beyond 20 minutes respondents either drop out or speed through questions giving sufficient attention to the content. However, with an authoritative and ‘serious’ sponsor and an interesting or engaging topic, industry experts judge a 30 minute online survey to be acceptable to respondents. Kantar Public report that progress through a questionnaire is about the same for face to face and online. Hence, all things being equal an online version of the F&Y survey would have space for fewer questions than the current F&Y. However, it may be possible to remove some questions from F&Y as they do not appear to have much significance for the Agency.
30. A third issue is the impact of the higher frequency of non-response in MPM2 surveys. Further to the Groves and Peytcheva research cited in paragraph 20 and study by Sturgis et al. (2017) concludes that “Our findings add weight to the body of evidence

that questions the strength of the relationship between response rate and nonresponse bias”²¹.

A note on Survey Frequency

31. One purpose of F&Y is to map longer term trends in consumers’ attitudes and reported behaviours, but how much change is expected in two years? Some of the content areas in the ten modules need to be repeated every two years, however consideration should be given to determining whether some content modules might be repeated every four years, allowing for either a reduction in the size of the questionnaire or an increase in the range of topics covered.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

32. Following consultation with FSA staff and external stakeholders on the Agency's portfolio of social and consumer research, with particular reference to the F&Y survey, an assessment of the alignment of the different strands of consumer research with the Agency's strategic objectives, a review of the F&Y topics and concepts and a learning of lessons from contemporary survey research methodology practice, the Working Group makes the following recommendations:

Methodology

1. Set up task force with the following terms of reference:
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Linking F&Y with other sources of data

2. Establish a role in the Social Science team for the monitoring of other pertinent data sources to complement F&Y and other Agency research.
3. Seek to cultivate links to the research community working in areas that overlap with FSA concerns.

On maximising impact of the Agency’s consumer and social research

²¹ Sturgis, P., Williams, J., Brunton-Smith, I. and Moore, J. (2017). Fieldwork effort, response rate and the distribution of survey outcomes. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 81,2,523-542

4. Bring the statistical analysis and reporting of F&Y in-house to facilitate more breadth and depth of analysis and achieve greater potential impact.
5. Work with the FSA's existing communications team to develop a comprehensive communications strategy with clear actions and timelines designed to maximise the impact of F&Y, the Public Attitudes Tracker and other studies commissioned by the Agency.

ACSS Food & You Working Group

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Special thanks to all of those who contributed to the review and in particular to Anne Murcott, Joy Dobbs and David Nuttall who brought their knowledge and experience of Food and You to the review.

LIST OF ANNEXES (Separate Document)

Annex A – Food and You (Wave 5) Timeline; from questionnaire development to publication and secondary analysis.

Annex B – Food and You Objectives, Stakeholders, Concepts and Questions.

Annex C – Public Attitudes Tracker Concepts and Questions.

Annex D – *Community life survey: investigating the viability of moving from a face-to-face to an online/postal mode: evidence from a series of methodological studies 2012-2015.* A report by Hamlyn, Fitzpatrick & Williams. Published by the Cabinet Office (2015).