

## Paper 3.3

### Risk Communication Update (April 2019)

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#### Summary

This paper provides an update on progress for the *Risk Communication* working group. It summarises background, key activities and future action. This paper is for information and discussion.

#### Background

It is often the role of Government bodies to seek to influence behaviour or empower choice through communicating the evidence base and its assessment of the risk associated with particular choices and behaviours.

However, to be scientifically defensible means speaking with a degree of honest uncertainty; difficult within a political and media environment that lends itself to misinterpretation and reductionism. Added to this, food is something that people are personally highly invested in; there is little that is closer to home. Once the UK leaves the EU and responsibility for risk assessment devolves to the FSA/FSS, it will be more important than ever to have a robust framework for the communication of food risk.

#### Working Group

To this end, the ACSS were asked to help ensure that the best possible evidence base supports the development of a risk communication framework for the FSA. This includes:

1. a gap analysis of the Science Council principles, and advice on how best to turn them into a workable framework,
2. academic support on a review of the existing risk communication frameworks in order to learn from an analysis of their evolution, how they have been used (or not), by whom and for what purpose, and
3. advice on a draft risk communications framework. This includes establishing how we can maximise its usefulness and usability, identifying the questions and checks required to communicate risk in the best way in a range of situations and ascertaining the organisational practices required to do so.

To support and shape the successful delivery of this work, at the first ACSS meeting<sup>1</sup> a working group (WG) was established to help assure best practice and outcomes. The risk communication WG is comprised of the following members:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://acss.food.gov.uk/acss-meetings/acss-meeting-15-may-2018>

## Members

- Chair – Prof. Julie Barnett
- Julie Hill
- Prof. George Gaskell
- John McTernan
- Dr Seda Erdem
- Prof. Spencer Henson
- Prof. Dan Rigby

## FSA

- Steven Pollock
- Michelle Patel
- Sarah Kovacs

## Key activities

The commentary on the Science Council Principles has informed the guidance on risk communication within the FSA's risk analysis framework. This was circulated to all members of the working group for comment, prior to the full guidance being circulated to all SACs.

## Future action

One of the recommendations from the Risk Communications Working Day in October was developing a toolkit and framework for risk communications in the FSA alongside robust testing of this with consumers.

The timetable for this has slipped slightly, however, funding has been secured to expand this project in Q4 2018-9. So, we propose that objectives 2 and 3 are carried over into the financial year 2019-20, and that the working group continue, if they are willing, to advise on this programme of work, providing review and advice on the development and testing of an FSA toolkit. The FSA plans to commission a literature review and the development, testing and co-creation of a message framework with a) consumers through Citizens Forums and b) FSA staff to ascertain the effects of the communications tested and the usefulness and usability of the toolkit within the FSA and its organisational practices.

## Discussion

This paper is for information and general discussion.

**Professor Julie Barnett, ACSS WG Chair**  
**Michelle Patel, FSA**