

General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS)

Guide to the information available about the GACS

This information is also available on the web at the GACS web pages at the link below:
<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/ouradvisors/gacs/>.

Like other public bodies, the GACS has adopted the model Publication Scheme produced by the Information Commissioner's Office (further information available at the link below:
http://www.ico.gov.uk/Home/what_we_cover/freedom_of_information/publication_schemes.aspx).

Who we are and what we do

The General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS) is an independent advisory committee established in December 2007 by the Food Standards Agency. It provides independent advice on the Agency's governance and use of science. The GACS was established under Section 5 Part 3 of The Food Standards Act 1999.

The Committee's work includes horizon scanning, science governance, developing good practice and informing science priorities.

The GACS comprises an independent Chair, four independent expert members, two lay members, and the Chairs of the nine existing scientific advisory committees that advise the Agency, who are members of GACS in an *ex officio* capacity.

Details of the current members are available at the GACS website – see links below.

Members are required to declare any personal or business interest that may, or may be perceived (by a reasonable member of the public) to, influence their judgement. This register is available at the GACS website – see links below.

The roles and responsibilities of Members and the Secretariat, its relationship with the Agency, and how the committee operates, are set out in the GACS Terms of Reference and Code of Practice, which are available using the links below.

All GACS reports, papers, agendas and minutes of meetings, and any press releases, are available on this website using the links below.

The GACS is supported by a Secretariat provided by the Food Standards Agency.

For further information on the GACS please contact:

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What are our priorities and how are we doing?

The GACS has agreed a work plan and it discusses progress against this plan at each of its meetings. It also performs an annual self-assessment of its performance, including an assessment against the Good Practice Guidelines developed by the Agency (see below), which is discussed at the Committee's autumn meeting. Further information is available in the papers and minutes of GACS meetings which are available on the GACS website - see links below.

The GACS Annual Report covers the Committee's activities, progress and future plans, and its annual self-assessment. Further information is available at the links below.

How we work

The GACS Code of Practice describes how the Committee will operate. GACS meetings are open to the public and papers, minutes and reports are published on this website. Agendas are published in advance of meetings.

GACS operates in accordance with the guidelines and procedures established by the Agency and to relevant guidance and rules established across Government for the operation of Advisory Committees and public bodies. These include:

The Agency's Good Practice Guidelines

(see: <http://www.food.gov.uk/science/researchpolicy/commswork/good>)

The 2002 Report of the Review of Scientific Committees

(see: <http://www.food.gov.uk/science/researchpolicy/commswork/scicomrev>)

The cross-Government Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees (CoPSAC).

(see: <http://www.berr.gov.uk/dius/science/science-in-govt/advice-policy-making/codeofpractice/page9483.html>)

Appointments to the GACS are made in accordance with the principles set out in the Nolan Report on Standards in Public Life. In making such appointments, the Agency is committed to affording equal opportunities to all those with the requisite qualifications and expertise irrespective of race, age, disability, gender, marital status, religion, sexual orientation, transgender and working patterns.

The overriding principle is that appointments are made on merit. Members are appointed for their individual qualifications and the expertise they can bring to the Committee, and not to represent any particular sectoral interest. The balance of the Committee is intended to ensure that it has a wide range of expertise on which to draw, in order to enable it to advise the Food Standards Agency effectively.

Vacancies and further information on procedures for appointments are published on this site when vacancies arise.

The GACS operates under Agency policies and procedures on records management & personal data, charging for information, and complaints.

The Agency's approach to records management and personal data is set out in its Information Charter, available at the link below:

http://www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/how_we_work/charter

Charging for information:

We will not normally charge a fee to supply copies of information or advice, unless the request is for a priced publication or data set. However, we reserve the right to make a reasonable charge to cover the costs of transcription, photocopying, packaging and postage, or where a considerable amount of staff time would be needed to identify, process and collate information for you. In some cases, there will be separate charging arrangements for the supply of information for commercial use. We will inform you of any charges that might apply before processing your request.

Complaints

Most concerns or complaints are best and most quickly resolved by talking to the person or team directly concerned – in this case, the GACS Secretariat (contact details above). If your concerns cannot be resolved informally with the person or team concerned, you can make a formal complaint, contacting the Agency's Complaints Coordinator. Details of the Agency's complaints procedure are available at this link: http://www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/how_we_work/fsacomplaintsprocedure

Financial information

The GACS has no independent budget or expenditure. The Agency covers the costs for the operation of the committee (including Secretariat support, Members' fees and expenses, and administrative costs for meetings, publications and events), and these are recorded formally in the accounts of the Agency and covered by the Agency's publication scheme. Further information at: http://www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/how_we_work/foia/

GACS Members are not employed by the Agency and they do not receive a salary for their work on GACS. They are however entitled to claim expenses and fees for attending meetings and, in some circumstances, for work between meetings. These are set out in the GACS Code of Practice, which is available at the links below. A summary of the Agency's expenditure on support for the Committee will be provided in the GACS Annual Reports – see the links below.

Other information

GACS does not hold any assets itself. Information in respect of the committee is managed by the GACS Secretariat and where relevant is recorded in the Asset and/or Information Asset Registers of the Food Standards Agency. Further information on these is available from this link: <http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/iar/index.htm>.

Hard copies of GACS reports are placed in the FSA Information Centre at Aviation House, London, which is the main information service provider for the UK Food Standards Agency and the Meat Hygiene Service (opening hours: 9am to 5pm weekdays, email: InfoCentre@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk 'Information Centre helpdesk' number for outside callers: 020 7276 8181)

Links to information available on the web:

GACS home page:

<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/ouradvisors/gacs/>

GACS Code of Practice, Terms of Reference, GACS members and register of interests

<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/ouradvisors/gacs/moregacs/>

GACS meetings – papers, minutes and agendas

<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/ouradvisors/gacs/gacsmeetings/>