

Introduction to Evaluation Action Plan

This is the introduction to the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) first Evaluation Action Plan, which sets out the broad principles by which we will monitor and evaluate our work.

The FSA is the independent government department responsible for protecting public health and consumers' wider interests in relation to food in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. [Our core mission](#) is to ensure that people can trust food. We undertake a range of activities to ensure [food is safe](#), [what it says it is](#) and, is [healthier and more sustainable](#).

We invest significant resources in delivering against our mission. While providing value for money has always been an organisational priority, it is critical that our investments and interventions deliver as intended, are appropriately targeted and provide the greatest possible economic and social return. This is even more important in times of constrained resources, and with many of our partner organisations and stakeholders (for example, Local Authorities, Food Business Operators) working to recover from the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Generating good quality monitoring and evaluation evidence is vital to the FSA's ability to do this. This evidence ensures we are continually learning and accountable to our funders and those we serve. It also allows us to design and deliver policies, programmes, communications and regulations effectively. We can also use information and data gathered through monitoring and evaluation activities to avoid unnecessary burdens being placed on businesses, while ensuring consumers can have confidence in the food system.

1.1 Monitoring and evaluation in the policy cycle

Monitoring and evaluation form a key part of the policy development and delivery lifecycle at the FSA and reflects best practice policy development guidance from both HM Treasury and the National Audit Office (NAO). Examples of current and forthcoming evaluations and how we have used evaluation evidence to inform actions are included in Annexes C and D respectively.

[HM Treasury's Green Book](#) states that each level of policy development, be that setting policies, portfolios, programmes or projects, follows broadly the same policy development and review pattern: the ROAMEF cycle (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 The ROAMEF Cycle



Circular diagram showing a series of arrows formed into a circle. In each circle a single word is shown with each arrow pointing into the next word. The words are Rationale, Objectives, Appraisal, Monitoring, Evaluation and Feedback.

ROAMEF – standing for Rationale, Objectives, Appraisal, Monitoring, Evaluation and Feedback – places the generation and application of evidence throughout the policy development lifecycle. Evidence can be generated through evaluation and monitoring as well as other activities, such as primary research. It should support options appraisal and inform changes to (or continuations of) organisational activities. Evidence demonstrates whether activities are having the intended impact, shows progress on delivery and identifies barriers and facilitators to implementation and impact.

[The NAO similarly highlights](#) that evidence generated through evaluation and monitoring, and through other organisational activities, are critical for effective regulation. The collection and analysis of data and information and the monitoring of compliance with regulations can help identify problems that need intervention and can enable the prioritising and targeting of activities and resources. Likewise, developing theories of change and evaluating the impact and outcomes of regulation on an ongoing basis help evidence value for money, provide insight into unintended outcomes and refine regulatory interventions to improve outcomes.

Appraisal, monitoring and evaluation are core ways evidence is generated during policy making. While deployed at different points, they typically use similar approaches (for example, quantitative and qualitative research) and tools (for example, Logic Models/Theories of Change). [The Magenta Book](#) provides comprehensive advice and guidance on how to design evaluations and appropriate approaches.

For brevity, in this document the term 'evaluation' will be used as shorthand to refer to the FSA's use of appraisal, monitoring and evaluations. [The HM Treasury Green Book](#) provides the following definitions of these terms:

- **Appraisal:** the process of assessing the costs, benefits and risks of alternative ways to meet government objectives. It helps decision makers to understand the potential effects, trade-offs and overall impact of options by providing an objective evidence base for decision making.
- **Monitoring:** the collection of data, both during and after implementation. This can form a baseline against which any changes to implementation can be measured.
- **Evaluation:** the systematic assessment of an intervention's design, implementation and outcomes. It tests how far an intervention is working or has worked against expected, if the costs and benefits were as anticipated, whether there were significant unexpected consequences, how it was implemented and, if changes were made, why.

1.2 This document: the FSA's Evaluation Action Plan

This Action Plan is an opportunity to strengthen the work the FSA already does to evaluate its work. Chapter 2 describes our vision for evaluation. Chapter 3 focuses on the practical steps we will take to deliver this vision.

This is a living document. We plan to periodically review the Evaluation Action Plan, and the FSA's implementation of it, to ensure the Plan is having the intended impact. We anticipate the first review of the Evaluation Action Plan will occur in 2025, in line with the development of a Benefits Management Action Plan (BMAP). The BMAP will focus on how the FSA can systematically measure and realise the benefit of its work.

1.3 Scope

The FSA's remit is broad with the FSA carrying out different roles in the food system to help ensure food is safe, what it says it is, and healthier and more sustainable. The FSA shares responsibility for food policy in the United Kingdom: [Food Standards Scotland](#) is responsible for food policy and implementation in Scotland; the FSA has different responsibilities within [England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#), and partners with different bodies to deliver its work accordingly; and, [responsibility for food policy](#) is itself split across different government departments.

This Action Plan applies to work directly undertaken by the FSA to deliver its [Strategy](#). As outlined in Annex C, this includes FSA programmes (for example, Achieving Business Compliance (ABC) and the Operational Transformation Programme (OTP)), activities undertaken as part of our business as usual (for example, measuring the effectiveness of our official control interventions and the difference our support and guidance make to our stakeholders) and activities commissioned by the FSA to facilitate delivery (for example, non-routine surveillance activities, special projects). Policies, projects and initiatives outside of the direct control of the Agency (for example, decisions made by other government departments) or where we do not contribute data are outside this Action Plan's scope.

The cross-government, multi-agency nature of much of the FSA's work means the FSA will need to collaborate with other government departments and delivery partners to conduct effective evaluations. It will also need to reflect variations in activities or implementation approaches in different nations in its evaluations and provide proportionate support to other government departments when requested to do so.