

Summary of discussions at the FSA Science Council 12 December 2018

Chair of the committee, Professor Sandy Thomas, provided an update following the committee's reports to the FSA Board at the start of December on [science capability and assurance](#) and [risk and uncertainty](#). The Council's recommendations were warmly welcomed and accepted by the FSA Board. The FSA will report back to the council about how their recommendations are being implemented for review within the next 12 months.

There was some discussion by members on how to ensure that the Council provides the right level of strategic advice to the FSA. It was agreed that the right balance can be struck by continuing detailed discussions with FSA officials. This approach has the added benefit of building a sense of joint ownership, which is vital to embedding recommendations and establishing genuine buy-in.

Professor John O'Brien gave an [update on Working Group Three](#), advising the FSA on global food systems risks and horizon scanning capability. A workshop on global food insights was held in September, to help capture and understand the complexity of the food system. Due to the success of this event, and the Council proposed this could be held annually. The group will be drawing on findings from a report on horizon scanning, developed by [RAND](#) (a not for profit research institute), that will inform a paper and recommendations to be submitted to the FSA Board. They also discussed the need to develop a metric to assign priorities to topics.

The group was encouraged to consider a wider range of consumer behaviours than are drawn out in the RAND report. It was also noted there should be a clear distinction made between early detection and horizon scanning of risks and trends in food, as well as strict and consistent oversight of priority issues for the FSA.

Professor Patrick Wolfe presented an [update on Working Group Four](#), advising the FSA on data usage. This is a crucial area for the FSA and underpins much of the work going on across the organisation. The group is looking at the benefits of digital technologies to the FSA's mission to serve consumers as well as considering the ethical use of data. The aim is to help the organisation to move from a reactive to proactive approach by using best practice in this area. The [minutes from the inaugural meeting](#) and [terms of reference](#) for the group were updated and approved.

Guy Poppy, FSA Chief Scientific Advisor, and Rick Mumford, Head of Science, also attended the meeting to update the committee on priorities in FSA science, evidence and research. They stressed the increased importance of and reliance on science and evidence in FSA decision making. This was underlined by the creation of a separate science directorate and significant increase in resources prior to EU-Exit.

The papers discussed at the open meeting are available to read on the [Science Council website](#) and minutes will be published in the new year.