

Review of FSA Social Science - Summary Conclusions

Results available: Results available

Area of research interest: [Capabilities](#)

Research topics: [Social science](#)

Authors: Dr Philip Davies, Oxford Evidentia Ltd

Conducted by: Dr Philip Davies, Oxford Evidentia Ltd

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46756/sci.fsa.qfy428>

Planned completion: 3 April 2023

Project status: Completed

Date published: 16 August 2023

Summary Conclusions

This review has attempted to assess the contribution that the FSA social science team makes to the FSA and its mission, and to identify what it does well, where there may be need for improvement, and what might be the direction of future learning and professional development.

What does the social science team do well?

1. The FSA's social science team is a confident group that is well-regarded by most internal and external stakeholders and provides a robust social science evidence base for the FSA.
2. The social science team was described by stakeholders as having "a huge amount of in-house expertise" and providing a "variety of really interesting high-quality research" for the FSA.
3. The team's qualitative analysis and their evaluation of the equality issues surrounding food policy and food insecurity were highly valued, as were its exploration of consumers' attitudes and perceptions on food products. The 'lived experience' research of the team was also highly valued.
4. The team's ability to identify and clarify the problems to be researched or evaluated, and to articulate the business needs for research or evaluation, is also highly valued.
5. The research outputs reviewed for this report were found to be generally of a high standard in terms of the methodologies used, their design, execution and reporting.
6. Project management by the FSA social science team is generally good and is appreciated by policy colleagues and contractors alike.
7. The social science team meets most of the GSR Code for Products and People well.

Where is there room for improvement?

The data and analysis presented in this review has identified areas where there is room for improvement.

1. Engaging with policy colleagues earlier would help to clarify research objectives, questions and methodological approaches, thereby enhancing the quality and appropriateness of social research.
2. Research procurement processes should be reviewed with the aim of making them fit for purpose for commissioning social research and other types of analysis.
3. Identifying the impacts of social research outputs is something the social science team would like to improve. This requires not only monitoring the uptake of the FSA social research team's outputs, but also identifying and assessing their effects on dietary and hygiene-promoting behaviour.
4. Providing more information consistently about the technical details of research projects would provide more transparency and enhance confidence in the quality of the FSA's social research.
5. External peer reviewing and quality assurance of research outputs should be common practice in order to ensure the scientific validity and quality of social research.
6. There is some need for professional development of some members of the social science team. This includes professional development in methodology, leadership and coaching.
7. The balance of in-house versus contracted-out social research should be reviewed to ensure that all members of the team have the opportunity to maintain and improve their social research skills.
8. The GSR Self-Assessment tool, based on the GSR Code for Products and People, was found to operate at a high level of generality and fails to assess methodology or the quality of analysis at a sufficiently granular level.
9. The FSA's Quality assessment Toolkit should be used as the main means of assessing the quality of social science research at FSA and in other government departments.

FSA Response

[FSA GSR Review: FSA Response](#)