

## Advisory Committee For Social Science (ACSS) annual report

### Report by Professor Susan Michie, ACSS Chair, and Ms Julie Hill ACSS Deputy Chair

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#### 1. Summary

##### 1.1 The Board is invited to:

- discuss the work of the ACSS; and
- discuss with the Committee Chair areas where the ACSS has or could add value.

#### 2. Introduction

2.1 In 2008 the FSA established the Social Science Research Committee (SSRC) to help the Agency strengthen its capacity for social science research and to provide advice to the Agency about how it gathers and uses social science evidence. In 2016, the FSA's [Triennial Review of its Scientific Advisory Committees](#) recommended that the future work programme and membership of the SSRC was reviewed to reflect the new priorities of the FSA as outlined in the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan; and in April 2018 a new [Advisory Committee for Social Science \(ACSS\)](#) was appointed, superseding the former SSRC.

2.2 The ACSS is an independent expert committee of the FSA comprising of an independent Chair, seven expert members and one lay member. The Committee provides expert strategic advice to the FSA on its use of social sciences to deliver FSA's strategic objectives.

2.3 Specifically, the Committee was set up to:

- a) Advise on how FSA gathers, uses and brings together social science evidence to support delivery of the FSA's strategic objectives.
- b) Help assure impact from FSA's application of social science that is timely and relevant to its priorities and objectives.
- c) Review and advise on FSA's current social and data science investment.
- d) Advise on opportunities and best practice in bringing together different disciplines and approaches to address strategic problems identified by or relevant to the work of the FSA.

- e) Advise on new and emerging opportunities for interrogating FSA and wider data.
- f) Provide evaluation advice to ensure successful delivery and impact of policy.
- g) Help to identify and access wider relevant networks, experts and evidence in these and related fields to provide effective advice to the FSA.
- h) Keep the FSA in touch with current and future developments in social science both in the UK and internationally.
- i) Maintain a programme of continuous development to assure successful multi- and inter-disciplinary working.
- j) Work collaboratively with other FSA Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs) and the FSA's Science Council.

2.4 The ACSS held its inaugural meeting in May 2018 and since then the Committee has met on three occasions (December 2018, April 2019 and December 2019).

2.5 This is the first annual report of the ACSS to be presented to the FSA Board. It provides updates on each of the ACSS Working Groups and outlines the Committee's proposed approach to providing assurance to the FSA Board on social science in the FSA.

### **3. Working group updates**

3.1 During the Committee's inaugural meeting the ACSS established three [working groups](#) to advise on:

- a) Applying behavioural science in the FSA
- b) Risk communications
- c) A review of FSA's [Food and You](#) survey

3.2 These working groups were formally disbanded in April 2019 when three new working groups were established to advise on:

- d) Assurance
- e) EU exit
- f) Horizon Scanning

3.3 An update on each of the Working Groups is provided in **Annex A**.

### **4. Providing assurance to the FSA Board**

4.1 The September 2018 Governance Review Paper stated, *"The Board will also require assurance about the quality, value and impact of the science we commission and rely upon... Some of the assurance will also come from our*

*Chief Scientific Adviser, the Science Council, and our scientific advisory committees (SACs)*". In March 2019, the FSA Board was presented with the [Risk Analysis Paper](#) which further highlighted the role of the FSA's Scientific Advisory Committees in assisting the Chief Scientific Adviser to provide assurance to the Board on the FSA's risk analysis process.

- 4.2 In April 2019, the ACSS agreed that an Assurance Working Group should be established to consider how the ACSS might provide assurance to the FSA Board on the quality, value and impact of social science in the FSA.
- 4.3 The Terms of Reference and planned approach for this Working Group are outlined in **Annex B**.

## **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 The Board is asked to:
  - discuss the work of the ACSS; and
  - discuss with the Committee Chair areas where the ACSS has or could add value.

## Annex A – ACSS Working Group Updates

2018/2019

Working Group	Chair	Role	Key Activities
Behavioural Science	Ms Julie Hill	To help assure best practice and outcomes in the application of behavioural science to the work of the FSA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting FSA research fellow with review of 2000+ published behavioural science models and frameworks available to policy makers</li> <li>• Identifying an approach for prioritising policy issues identified through FSA workshops led by the Social Science team which used the BASIC framework</li> <li>• Developing a shortlist of policy issues to take forward as behavioural experiments/interventions</li> <li>• Evaluating tender responses for behavioural intervention pilots</li> </ul>
Risk Communications	Professor Julie Barnett	To support the development of the risk communications aspects of the FSA's new risk analysis framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting a gap analysis of the Science Council's principles on communicating risk and uncertainty and advising on how best to turn them into a workable framework</li> <li>• Providing academic support on a review of the existing risk communications frameworks</li> <li>• Advising on a draft risk communications framework and how to make this most usable</li> <li>• Advising on the development of a risk communication toolkit</li> </ul>
Food and You	Professor George Gaskell	To conduct a review of the FSA's <a href="#">Food and You Survey</a> and provide recommendations for the future direction of the survey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consulting with FSA staff and external stakeholders on the Agency's portfolio of consumer research, with particular reference to the Food and You survey</li> <li>• Assessing the alignment of the different strands of consumer research with FSA strategic objectives</li> <li>• Reviewing the Food and You topics and concepts</li> <li>• Identifying lessons from contemporary survey research methodology practice</li> <li>• Presenting <a href="#">recommendations</a> to FSA on future direction of the survey</li> <li>• Evaluating tender responses for next wave</li> </ul>

2019/2020

<b>Working Group</b>	<b>Chair</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Key Activities</b>
Assurance	Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford	To provide assurance to the FSA Board on the quality, value and impact of social science in the FSA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Developing a method for evaluating the quality, value and impact of social science in the FSA</li><li>• Overseeing this evaluation</li><li>• Providing advice and recommendations on how FSA practices might be enhanced to ensure best practice</li><li>• Reviewing assurance criteria used by other organisations</li></ul>
EU Exit	Professor Spencer Henson	To advise the FSA on key strategic priorities and methodologies to assess economic impacts associated with EU Exit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Providing expert advice to improve the FSA's understanding of the dynamics and scope of the expected changes after exiting the EU</li><li>• Identifying research gaps that the FSA should fill</li><li>• Advising on methodologies to assess the likely impacts on industry and consumers and suggest approaches how the FSA can mitigate expected risks</li><li>• Informing evidence specifications and evaluating tender responses</li></ul>
Horizon Scanning	Dr Seda Erdem	To provide advice on initial ideas and the strategic direction of the FSA's programme of work on horizon scanning and emerging technologies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Providing advice on the FSA's future direction and research strategy undertaken on the area.</li><li>• Identifying research priorities</li></ul>

## Annex B – Providing Assurance to the FSA Board

### Introduction

The [Advisory Committee for Social Science \(ACSS\)](#) is an independent expert committee of the FSA providing expert strategic advice to the FSA on its use of the social sciences.

At the [ACSS meeting in April 2019](#) members discussed how they might provide assurance to the FSA Board on the quality, value and impact of social science<sup>1</sup> in the FSA. This follows the [2017 Review of Social Science](#) which noted that the Advisory Committee should be *“an expert departmental committee that focuses on strategic advice and challenge which will help the FSA to apply the latest social science insights effectively to deliver its strategic objectives and understand their impact”*.

This also follows the [September 2018 Governance Review Paper](#) which stated, *“The Board will also require assurance about the quality, value and impact of the science we commission and rely upon... Some of the assurance will also come from our Chief Scientific Adviser, the Science Council, and our scientific advisory committees (SACs)”*. The [Risk Analysis Paper](#) presented to the Board in March 2019 further highlighted the role of the FSA’s Scientific Advisory Committees in assisting the Chief Scientific Advisory to provide assurance to the Board on the FSA’s risk analysis process.

The outcome of this discussion is the establishment of the ACSS Assurance Working Group. ACSS Working Group members are Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford (Chair), Professor Susan Michie, Professor Julie Barnett and Julie Hill. FSA Secretariat are Rebecca Gillespie and Joanna Disson.

### Terms of Reference

The proposed Terms of Reference for the Working Group are as follows:

- 1) **Develop a method** for evaluating:
  - a. processes by which social science projects are developed, prioritised and commissioned;
  - b. how the portfolio of social science projects is quality assured;

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this work social science will be restricted to the work of the Social Science Team which includes behavioural science but not economics (although this discipline is technically defined as a social science). If specific assurance work is required for economics, this could be done through the establishment of an Economics Working Group. Currently, the two newly established Working Groups on EU Exit and Food Technologies will cover a substantial amount of economic work.

- c. how and whether social science evidence is used appropriately in FSA decision-making;
- d. the implementation of social science evidence; and
- e. Social Science capability and networks.

This work will include reviewing assurance criteria used by other organisations.

- 2) **Oversee the evaluation** of (1a-e) above. This work will include:
  - a. reviewing plans and documents, starting from the 2017 Review of Social Science and FSA response;
  - b. interviewing key stakeholders; and
  - c. tracing projects from inception to delivery (the package of behaviour change projects have been identified as key candidates).
- 3) **Provide advice and recommendations** relating to:
  - a. how FSA practices relating to each of (1a-e) above might be enhanced to ensure best practice; and
  - b. identification of the parameters by which they might best be presented in the annual report to the FSA Board.

## Approach

The WG have agreed a two-level approach:

- 1. at the strategic level, to look across the portfolio of social science research and to look at the extent to which it meets the FSA's strategic objectives;
- 2. this will be accompanied by 'deep dive' work on a sample of research projects. Notably two responsive mode projects and two longer terms projects, including both in house and commissioned research. One of the aspects we will explore will be how the processes look and differ between in/out of house research.

A draft quality assurance list has been developed to provide a structure from which to provide a narrative for the case studies, as follows:

- a. Identification of topic
- b. Formulation of research question
- c. Translation of question into appropriate methods that can answer the question
- d. Procurement
- e. Research protocol
- f. Conduct of the research
- g. Data analysis
- h. Data interpretation
- i. Written report of study
- j. Dissemination of findings
- k. Implementation of findings

- l. Review and learning mechanisms
- m. Research manual to cover best practice re. above
- n. Internal and external engagement with appropriate bodies and people
- o. Methods of keeping up to date with relevant evidence and methods

Having reviewed the Social Science Business Delivery Plan the Working Group propose the 4 case studies, outlined below.

	<b>Type of study</b>	<b>Case study name</b>	<b>Rationale for inclusion</b>
1	In-house work	Analysis and reporting of the Public Attitudes Tracker	Although most social science work is externally commissioned, this regular in-house (quantitative) study is included so as to ensure complete coverage of the type of social science work
2	Strategic / horizon-scanning work	Consumer perceptions of emerging technology	This is a new study which is included to ensure quality assurance of more strategic / blue skies work
3	Responsive to a policy need	The experience of the allergy population and what the public more generally think about allergies (co-funded project with Allergies UK, project tbc)	Most research studies are in response to a specific policy need. This new study provides an opportunity to quality assure a typical study from inception to completion
4	Behavioural work	Registering a food business trial	This new study (behavioural trial) is included to reflect the increasing emphasis on behavioural science to inform policy implementation. Additionally, it also contributes to the FSA's Regulating Our Future strategic programme

### **Progress and Next steps**

A workshop was held on the 11th November where the working group talked through a) social science priorities, b) commissioning and oversight of research, and c) impact and influence. Next steps are currently being agreed across the working group.