

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, eight expert members and one lay member¹. 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.

¹ ACSS member profiles can be found on the [ACSS member page](#)

- 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 four occasions (December 2018, April 2019, December 2019 and June 2020).
- 2.5 This is the second 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. Discussion/Key Updates

- 3.1 The ACSS has a good working relationship with the FSA social science team and good FSA staff representation at the ACSS meetings. Collaborative work is ongoing with the FSA incorporating advice developed in partnership with the Assurance Working Group.
- 3.2 A virtual 5th ACSS Open Meeting was held on 16th June 2020 including updates from the FSA, ACSS Working Groups, and FSA Areas of Research Interest.

Engagement with Science Council

- 3.3 Professor Sandy Thomas provided an update on the work of the Science Council and wrote a letter of proposed further co-operation to Professor Susan Michie.

Working Group Updates

3.4 There are two active Working Groups²:

- (a) Assurance – activities include scoping out the processes and policies for social science procurement, research and implementation in addition to consolidating assurance work across the FSA e.g. research project evaluation and impact.
- (b) Risk communications – work includes supporting the development of a practical risk communication toolkit by the communications directorate and social science and the peer review of the recently published [Communicating Risk literature review](#) which was well received in a presentation to the Science Council.

3.5 The EU Exit Working Group has been disbanded.

3.6 There is appetite and capacity for a new ACSS Working Group which was discussed on 15th October 2020. The secretariat agreed to two new Working Groups:

- (a) Climate change and consumer behaviour – exploring continuing and emerging trends in consumer behaviour, including perceptions and attitudes to relevant climate issues and food.
- (b) Kitchen behaviour - providing advice, steering and peer review of a large programme of social science to better understand actual kitchen behaviours.

3.7 Previous Working Groups³ are:

- (a) Applying behavioural science in the FSA;
- (b) A review of FSA's Food and You survey; and
- (c) EU Exit.

3.8 More information on Working Group updates can be found in Annex A.

Upcoming recruitment

3.9 Most ACSS member terms come to an end in March 2021. As the Committee is working well with its current membership, we will be seeking permission to extend appointments by 18 months.

3.10 Introduction between Julie Hill, Deputy Chair of the ACSS, and Chief Scientific Adviser Robin May took place on 27th October 2020. Chief Scientific Adviser Robin May also attended the ACSS meeting examining Working Group proposals (point 3.6) on 15th October 2020.

² More information about active working groups can be found on the [About Working Groups webpage](#)

³ All previous working groups and associated papers can be found on the [ACSS previous working group webpage](#)

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The ACSS has supported key pieces of work to assure best practice in how social science evidence is gathered and used, including by supporting the social science function in the adoption of new survey methods (e.g. Food and You), best practice in risk communications, commissioning processes and how to measure impact.

Annex A – ACSS Working Group Updates

2020 Current Working Groups

Working Group: Assurance

Chair: Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford

Role:

To provide assurance to the FSA Board on the quality, value and impact of social science in the FSA.

Key Activities:

- Developing a method for evaluating the quality, value and impact of social science in the FSA overseeing this evaluation.
- Providing advice and recommendations on how FSA practices might be enhanced to ensure best practice.
- Reviewing assurance criteria used by other organisations.

Working Group: Risk Communications

Chair: Professor Julie Barnett

Role:

To support the development of the risk communications aspects of the FSA's new risk analysis framework.

Key Activities:

- 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.
- Providing academic support on a review of the existing risk communications frameworks.
- Advising on a draft risk communications framework and how to make this most usable.
- Advising on the development of a risk communication toolkit.

Annex B – Previous Working Groups

Working Group: Behavioural Science

Chair: Ms Julie Hill

Role:

To help assure best practice and outcomes in the application of behavioural science to the work of the FSA.

Key Activities:

- Supporting FSA research fellow with review of 2000+ published behavioural science models and frameworks available to policy makers.
- Identifying an approach for prioritising policy issues identified through FSA workshops led by the Social Science team which used the BASIC framework.
- Developing a shortlist of policy issues to take forward as behavioural experiments/interventions.

Working Group: EU Exit

Chair: Professor Spencer Henson

Role:

To advise the FSA on key strategic priorities and methodologies to assess economic impacts associated with EU Exit.

Key Activities:

- Providing expert advice to improve the FSA's understanding of the dynamics and scope of the expected changes after exiting the EU.
- Identifying research gaps that the FSA should fill.
- Advising on methodologies to assess the likely impacts on industry and consumers and suggest approaches how the FSA can mitigate expected risks.
- Informing evidence specifications and evaluating tender responses.

Working Group: Food and You

Chair: Professor George Gaskell

Role:

To conduct a review of the FSA's [Food and You](#) survey and provide recommendations for the future direction of the survey.

Key Activities:

- Consulting with FSA staff and external stakeholders on the Agency's portfolio of consumer research, with particular reference to the Food and You survey.
- Assessing the alignment of the different strands of consumer research with FSA strategic objectives.
- Reviewing the Food and You topics and concepts.
- Identifying lessons from contemporary survey research methodology practice.
- Presenting [recommendations](#) to FSA on future direction of the survey.
- Evaluating tender responses for next wave.

Working Group: Horizon Scanning

Chair: Dr Seda Erdem

Role:

To provide advice on initial ideas and the strategic direction of the FSA's programme of work on horizon scanning and emerging technologies.

Key Activities:

- Providing advice on the FSA's future direction and research strategy undertaken on the area.
- Identifying research priorities.