
**Further items relating to FSA 16/05/04 FSA Triennial Review of six Scientific
Advisory Committees: Publication of Final Report**

1. Sarah O'Brien's email message of 30 March to Tim Bennett
2. Heather Hancock's letter of 5 April to Colin Blakemore
3. Colin Blakemore's letter of 12 May to Heather Hancock
4. GACS minutes published 13 May:
<http://gacs.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gacs-17-mins.pdf>

From: Sarah O'Brien
Sent: Wednesday, 30 March 2016 at 07:40
To: Tim Bennett

Dear Tim

Colin Blakemore was kind enough to copy me in to his letter to you concerning the triennial review of SACs. As you know I was unable to attend the GACs meeting on March 24th but I am enclosing (below) my response to Colin supporting his letter.

Kind regards

Sarah

From: Sarah O'Brien
Sent: 29 March 2016 17:12
To: Colin Blakemore; Janet Bainbridge; Leen Petré; Pamela Goldberg; Anne Murcott; Duncan Maskell; Colin Dennis; David Phillips; David Lovell; Alan Boobis; Peter Gregory; Peter Jackson; Ian Brown; Ann Prentice
Subject: RE: Letter to Tim Bennett

Dear Colin

Thank you very much for your e-mail and attachment. I am sorry that I missed the discussion and, for what it's worth, I also endorse the content of your letter even though I was not present at the meeting. I agree that the evidence underpinning the various recommendations from the review is opaque and, whilst I am, indeed, relieved that the status of the ACMSF as an aNDPB remains unchanged, I can understand fully why colleagues feel that their committee roles are somehow being demoted by this process. I would feel the same in their shoes. I think that bringing so many SAC functions in-house, so to speak, including the proposed Science Council, gives the impression that the FSA might be rowing back on openness and transparency, even if this is not the intention. My relief that the ACMSF remains an aNDPB is inextricably linked with the perception of transparency and openness. Like others, I am also curious to know how the cross-committee working, which has developed so successfully under the umbrella of the GACS, will be maintained in future.

With best wishes

Sarah

From: Colin Blakemore
Sent: 28 March 2016 23:31
To: Janet Bainbridge; Leen Petré; Pamela Goldberg; Anne Murcott; Duncan Maskell; Colin Dennis; Sarah O'Brien; David Phillips; David Lovell; Alan Boobis; Peter Gregory; Peter Jackson; Ian Brown; Ann Prentice
Subject: Letter to Tim Bennett

Dear Colleagues,

I was very surprised by the strength of feeling that emerged during the discussion at GACS about the Triennial Review. As you will remember, it was agreed that Patrick will record in the Minutes the unanimous concern of members of GACS about several aspects of the Review, especially about the lack of evidence and rationale to support the more significant proposals.

On reflection, I thought that it was important that Tim Bennett, Catherine Brown and Steve Wearne should know about our discussion as quickly as possible, rather than waiting until the Minutes are written, circulated and approved. So, I took the liberty of sending the attached letter to Tim with copies to Catherine and Steve, as well as to Guy and Penny. I hope that I have summarized the discussion fairly and accurately. Please let me know if you see any errors and I shall report them to Tim.

I imagine that the process is too far advanced for major reconsideration, but Guy gave the impression that the details of implementation are still open for discussion. I hope that the opinion of GACS will count for something in that process.

Sarah: You will see that I have recorded your absence from the meeting of GACS. It would have been good to have had your input to the discussion about the proposed Science Council, but I presume that you are at least content to know that no major change has been recommended for ACMSF.

Best wishes,

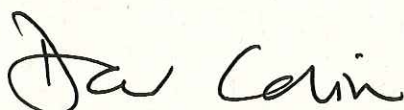
Colin

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5 April 2016

Our ref: BC1327



Thank you for your letter to Tim Bennett dated 27 March, expressing the concerns of GACS about the outcome of the triennial review. I have spoken to Tim about the issues you raise, and we have agreed that I should respond, given that I have taken over as Chair with effect from the 1st of April.

I am of course disappointed to hear that there was strong and unanimous concern addressed about the direction of travel, particularly as the chairs of the committees who had been consulted had been much less vigorous in their opposition when Guy had discussed the emerging findings of the exercise with them, and had expressed a willingness to engage with the transition to the new arrangements.

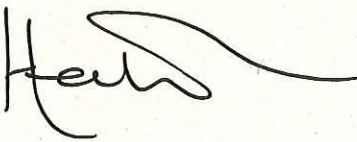
As you reflect in your letter, discussions with committee chairs had helped to form the outcome of the review - the helpful suggestion that a forum for the chairs of the specific advisory committees to come together would remain useful was taken on board by the reviewers and will offer the opportunity for the chair of SACN to continue to contribute and be appropriately involved.

As you will be aware, triennial reviews are jointly sponsored by the Cabinet Office and there is a limit to how much open discussion there can be of their findings before they have been approved by ministers. I welcome the element of independence from the FSA and its scientific advisors that this external involvement brings, and the opportunity to learn from good practice in other departments and across government, and I was pleased that Guy and the reviewers engaged with other Chief Scientific Advisors' and departments, as well as key internal stakeholders and yourselves as part of the review process.

However, as you suggest in your letter, it is also right for the Board to be clearly aware of the view of GACS taken as a whole, as well as the inputs of individuals taken into account to varying degrees in the outcome of the final report. So I would like to invite you to attend the next Board meeting to share those views with the Board on behalf of the Committee (I shall of course also circulate your letter, Duncan's, and any others I may receive, which will also make up part of the published papers of the meeting). The Board meeting is taking place in Belfast on Wednesday 18 May and I do hope you will be able to join us.

Finally, may I assure you that there is no intention at all to in any way reduce the transparency with which the FSA does its business, including taking scientific advice and ensuring that we are open to high quality independent challenge. It is our view that this will be best achieved by a smaller and fully independent Science Council, which will of course meet in the open, and ongoing engagement with the scientific and academic community much more widely – a desire to ensure which I understand was a driver of the change from a Chief Scientist to a Chief Scientific Advisor model. In addition to the invitation to attend the Board, I would be keen to meet you as part of my induction to understand your wider perspective on the Agency and its scientific activities and underpinnings. I will ask the team to seek a time when we can get together.

Thank you for your letter, for the commitment and energy that you have brought and clearly continue to bring to your role, and for your support to the FSA over the years. I look forward to meeting you.

Yours ever,


Mrs H. J. Hancock LVO



Sir Colin Blakemore

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Mrs Heather Hancock
Chair of the Board
Food Standards Agency
Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London WC2B 6NH

12 May 2016

Dear Heather,

I presume that you will have received a copy of an email message that I sent earlier today to Gwen Aherne, on behalf of all the members of GACS, together with a final draft of the Minutes of the meeting of GACS on 24 March.

Unfortunately, the draft Minutes were not circulated until 4 May, six weeks after the meeting (rather than the normal maximum of two weeks recommended in paragraph 121 of the Code of Practice on Scientific Advisory Committees – CoPSAC <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scientific-advisory-committees-code-of-practice>). The Committee is anxious that the strength and unanimity of its concerns, and the urgency of its advice, are not diluted or lost by delay in their exposure, including to the public and ministers.

The entire Committee worked on the Minutes by email correspondence. Additions and small corrections were added by many members of the Committee, and this final version has been approved by all. If the recommendation of the Triennial Review that GACS be replaced by a smaller Science Council is implemented, GACS will not meet again, and therefore will not be able to give formal approval to these Minutes at a meeting. We assume, then, that the Minutes will be accepted at this stage as a full and approved record of our discussion.

We ask that the Minutes are circulated to members of the Board in advance of the meeting next Wednesday, so that they have time to read them and to digest the views, which are offered in fulfilment of the remit of GACS to advise and challenge the Agency in its use of science. We also ask that other relevant communications, attached to my email message to Gwen, are circulated to the Board:

- 1 My letter of 27 March to Tim Bennett
- 2 Sarah O'Brien's email message of 30 March to Tim Bennett
- 3 Peter Jackson and Anne Murcott's email of 30 March to Tim Bennett
- 4 Duncan Maskell's letter of 31 March to Tim Bennett, on behalf of the 4 independent members of GACS
- 5 Your letter of 5 April to me

I should also like this present letter to be circulated to the Board.

The Committee as a whole wishes the discussion of GACS on this matter, and the disquiet expressed by the Committee, to be put into the public domain, in line with the rights and requirements for public disclosure enshrined in CoPSAC. The Committee is anxious that its unanimous concerns should be known about and widely considered (including by ministers). In view of the urgency of the situation, the members of GACS are unhappy with the suggestion that release of documents should be delayed until publication of the Minutes of the Board meeting. We ask, then, the GACS Minutes, together with all this subsequent correspondence, be placed on the FSA website as soon as possible.

With your agreement, I should like to talk to the Agency's Press Office about how to communicate the concerns of GACS to the media, presumably in the form of a press release. Paragraph 142 of CoPSAC states: "While it is often appropriate for a SAC to use its sponsoring body's press office for advice and support, where there are issues of real or perceived independence SACs should consider access to independent press advice. When a SAC plans to engage the media independently they should ensure that they liaise with the sponsoring body in advance." GACS would prefer not to publicise its opinions independent of the Agency, not least because of the spin that might be put on this, and the possibility of unintended damage to the reputation of the Agency. So, I hope that we can work very quickly with the FSA Press Office to produce a press release and any other form of engagement with the media.

In line with paragraph 139 of CoPSAC, GACS has agreed that I should act as spokesperson for the Committee, although I would expect that any questions concerning opinions expressed in the letters and emails from others could and should be handled by them, to the extent that they draw on personal experience or expertise.

Finally, I hope that you, the Board, and the Executive of the FSA will accept that the views of GACS are offered with the best interests of the Agency at heart. Much of the correspondence between members of GACS has included comment about the way that the FSA has been a beacon of best practice in its commitment to respect for evidence and expert opinion, its transparency and the quality of its decision-making. As always, the opinion and advice of GACS are given not with any intention to harm the Agency, but to protect its high standards and special qualities.

Yours sincerely


Colin Blakemore
 Chair of GACS

cc: Catherine Brown, Chief Executive
 Dr Stephen Wearne, Director of Policy
 Professor Guy Poppy, Chief Scientific Advisor
 Dr Penny Bramwell, Director of Science, Evidence and Research
 Dr Patrick Miller, GACS Secretary
 Members of GACS and Dr Ann Prentice

GENERAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE

PAPER GACS 17 – Minutes (FINAL)

Minutes of the 17th meeting of the GACS, 24 March 2016
Food Standards Agency, Aviation House, London
(Conference Rooms 4 & 5, Fourth Floor)

ATTENDEES		
Members	Professor Sir Colin Blakemore	GACS Chair
	Professor Janet Bainbridge	
	Mrs Pamela Goldberg	
	Mrs Leen Petré	
	Professor Colin Dennis	
	Professor Duncan Maskell	
	Professor Anne Murcott	
	Professor Alan Boobis	
	Dr Ian Brown	
	Professor Peter Gregory	
	Professor Peter Jackson	
	Dr David Lovell	
	Professor David Phillips	
Others	Dr Ann Prentice	<i>Chair of SACN, invited observer</i>
	Professor Guy Poppy	<i>FSA, Chief Scientific Adviser</i>
	Dr Penny Bramwell	<i>FSA, Director of Science, Evidence and Research</i>
	Dr Paul Cook	<i>FSA, Head of Microbiological Risk Assessment (item 3)</i>
	Dr Andrew Damant	<i>FSA, acting head of the CSA Delivery and Surveillance Unit (item 6)</i>
Secretariat	Dr Patrick Miller	<i>FSA, GACS Secretary</i>
	Ms Gwen Aherne	<i>FSA, GACS Secretariat</i>
Apologies	Professor Sarah O'Brien	

Agenda item 1: Welcome and introduction

1. The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Professor Sarah O'Brien.
2. The Chair highlighted that the report of the FSA Triennial Review of its Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs)¹ had been published that morning, and that an item was included on the meeting agenda to discuss the implementation of the review recommendations. The Chair noted that the report had been discussed and agreed in principle by the FSA Board² and signed off by the Minister for the Cabinet Office. He stated that the Board will consider the final version of the Review at its next meeting, on 18 May, and the FSA was moving to the next phase to implement the recommendations. The Chair noted that Recommendation 3 proposes that the FSA should replace the GACS with a new high-level Science Council, but emphasised that the GACS and its working groups will continue to operate within their current remit until such time as they hand over to a new FSA Science Council. The Chair said that he had asked for time to be allocated under item 4 of the Agenda so that the members of GACS could discuss the methods, conclusions and recommendations of the Triennial Review. He reminded members that they had all been consulted during the preparation of the Review and that there had been a telephone conference at which members had been able to present their views. However, not all members had been able to participate in that conference call, and the present meeting of GACS provided the first opportunity for GACS as a whole to discuss the process of the Review and its recommendations. Since GACS must continue to exercise its responsibility to advise and challenge the Agency on its use of science, the Chair thought that it was important that the Committee should have an opportunity to exchange views, face to face, and that it had the right to express its collective opinion on the Review.
3. The Chair reminded members of their duty to declare any interests that might represent a real or perceived conflict in respect of any listed agenda items.
4. The Chair noted that there would be a discussion in reserved session following the open meeting. This was to discuss issues raised in recent correspondence. As the issues were at an early stage of consideration, and discussion might involve personal information, this discussion was being held in reserved session. A note of the discussion would be put into the public domain as and when the reasons for confidentiality no longer applied.

Action 1: Inform the Secretariat of any changes in their interests (Members)

Agenda item 2: Draft minutes of the 16th meeting and matters arising (GACS 17-1)

5. The Committee formally agreed the minutes of the 16th meeting as a true record of that meeting. The final version will be published on the GACS website.
6. Dr Miller outlined the standing update on matters arising and noted that most actions are complete or picked up under other agenda items. The two new Working Groups, on skills and on risk, have been established and have each met at least once. Dr Miller

¹ <http://www.food.gov.uk/news-updates/news/2016/15022/triennial-review-of-six-fsa-scientific-advisory-committees>

² The Board discussion was held in closed session as the process for public body reviews does not allow for publication of their recommendations before they are agreed. The GACS Chair will attend the next open Board meeting on 18 May 2016 for a discussion of the Review and its recommendations.

confirmed that the development of revised guidance on interests will be picked up in the implementation of Recommendation 5 from the Triennial Review of the SACs.

7. The two outstanding actions, to develop a systematic process for reporting back to GACS on FSA response to the Committee's recommendations, and for a presentation on the Food Crime Unit, will be picked up as part of planning for the new Science Council.

Action 2: *Publish final minutes of the 16th meeting (Secretariat)*

Action 3: *Refer outstanding issues to new Science Council (FSA and Secretariat)*

Agenda item 3: Science report (GACS 17-2)

8. Dr Penny Bramwell, FSA's Director of Science, Evidence and Research, introduced the report, which highlighted progress in high-level engagement and delivery of the FSA's strategic science portfolio. Dr Bramwell reported that the FSA's Science, Evidence and Information Strategy Delivery Plan, and the Forward Evidence Plan had been published in February³. She outlined developments on strategic science including:
 - i. a workshop on the microbiome on 28 January with the Institute of Food Research and representatives from ACMSF and others,
 - ii. a joint FSA/EFSA international workshop on foodborne viruses on 23-25 February
 - iii. a joint workshop with the Science and Technology Facilities Council in January on application of sensor technologies to food sector challenges.
9. The report also included an update on the FSA calls for expressions of interest for innovative solutions to strategic science challenges; on developments in Data Science; and on the CSA quarterly reports on acrylamide and on Whole Genome Sequencing.⁴
10. GACS welcomed this regular report from Guy Poppy and Penny Bramwell, and the progress reported in the strategic science programme. The Committee made the following comments:
 - i. The stakeholder event on Our Food Future was underpinned by a strong evidence base, including consumer research and an extensive literature review, which the FSA should continue to draw on and promote. Professor Jackson noted that there had been good collaboration between the SSRC and the FSA communications team on this work.
 - ii. GACS welcomed the FSA's initiative with ACMSF and others to understand the microbiome, noting that the area had great potential and was of significant global interest but, like all emerging areas, the FSA should be careful to target the avenues and partners with genuine potential. Professor Poppy indicated that the FSA was considering a whole range of opportunities (including funding pilot studies, looking at fellowship programmes and joining bigger consortiums). Professor Boobis reported that the COT is looking at the microbiome with input from PHE, and noted the importance of a joined up strategy on this.
 - iii. Members supported the FSA taking a lead on data science.

³ <http://www.food.gov.uk/science/sci-gov/scistrat>

⁴ <http://www.food.gov.uk/news-updates/news/2016/15064/chief-scientific-advisor-science-report>

11. The Chair asked Dr Paul Cook, FSA head of microbiological risk assessment, to update the Committee on a recent National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) meeting on gastrointestinal infections. The NIHR funds a range of programmes addressing a broad range of health priorities: gastrointestinal infection (GI) - which covers non-food as well as foodborne GI - is one of 12 areas of study. Dr Cook reported on the second meeting of the GI research unit, held in March. The Unit is led by Professor Sarah O'Brien (University of Liverpool and Chair of the ACMSF); it has a number of PhD students and its work ranges from innovation and applied research right through to the patient interface; a notable feature is the wide use of systematic reviews. Members noted the importance of a co-ordinated approach to these issues across funders and departments with related and shared interest, including DH and PHE.

Agenda item 4: Triennial Review of the SACs

12. Professor Poppy introduced this item. He noted that the FSA had reviewed its SACs as part of the Cabinet Office programme of reviews of public bodies. The FSA review took also into account a wider, ongoing review by Cabinet Office of the classification of public bodies and specifically that part of this review which looked at Advisory Non-Departmental Public Bodies (ANDPBs) and Departmental Expert Committees (DECs). The FSA review comprised two phases, the first looking at the future needs of the FSA for external expert advice and the second looking at the functions and operation of the FSA's six existing SACs, with reference to these future needs. Dr Miller will be responsible for managing the programme of work to deliver the review recommendations. Professor Poppy was pleased that the Chairs of GACS, SSRC, ACNFP and ACAF had agreed to work with FSA as it develops detailed plans for implementation.
13. During an extensive discussion, to which every member of GACS and Dr Prentice (invited observer) contributed, the Committee raised a number of concerns about the report and its recommendations⁵, and offered several points of challenge and advice on their implementation.
14. The Committee raised a number of points which it felt to be essential for FSA to address in order to maintain the effectiveness and credibility of its use of SACs and its reputation for both commitment to the use of evidence and transparency in its business. These included:
 - i. Maintaining the independence, openness and transparency of operation of the SACs and their ability to challenge as well as advise the FSA; and ensuring this is 'hard-wired' into their establishment. GACS concerns on this point were heightened with regard to the potential real or perceived impact on independence and transparency of proposals that some SACs would be DECs.

⁵ These were subsequently related to the FSA Board, in a letter from the GACS Chair, and in separate letters from several other members of GACS. These included Professor O'Brien (Chair of ACMSF), who could not be present at the meeting but who also expressed her agreement with the criticisms raised in the GACS Chair's letter to the Chair of the FSA Board. In response, the FSA Chair invited Sir Colin to take part in the Board's discussion of the Review at the Board's open meeting on 18 May 2016. The letters were published as an Annexe to the Board Paper for this discussion at: <http://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/our-board/meetings/2016/010116/board-meeting-agenda-18-may-2016-0>

- ii. Maintaining the FSA's commitment to lay/consumer members on its SACs. The Committee voiced significant concern that the principle of lay representation had not been included in the recommendations, noting that this did not sit with the FSA's strategy and pledge to put consumers first.
 - iii. Maintaining effective co-ordination and joint working across the SACs, and involvement of SAC chairs in advising the Agency on its use of science, if SAC Chairs are not to be members of the Science Council.
 - iv. The Committee offered strong challenge to the review's recommendation to constitute the new FSA Science Council with only 4 or 5 members. They were concerned that such a small group, especially if it includes experts in fields "related ... to FSA's priorities", will not be sufficient to represent the range of scientific disciplines covered by the Agency's own SACs. Professor Murcott asked how criteria would be established for the selection of members of the Science Council.
 - v. The Committee expressed deep concern at the lack of any evidence or rationale being presented for some of the recommendations, especially that which proposed the replacement of the GACS by an in-house Science Council. GACS made it clear that such a fundamental change in governance of science in the Agency should be supported by robust arguments and a clear rationale, which were completely absent from the Review document.
15. The Committee made the following points:
- i. Members questioned the drivers for the review, noting that the Cabinet Office review which had been used to inform some of the review recommendations had not yet been published. They also questioned the perceived need for consistency across Government in the use of ANDPBs and DECs, given the Agency's distinctive history and current status as a non-ministerial body.
 - ii. The Committee felt that, although they had the opportunity to comment on the draft report, they would have liked to see and comment on the final text before it was considered and agreed by the FSA Board. They were surprised that the FSA had not given its own high-level advisory committee a chance to discuss the final report and its recommendations. In view of the many doubts and criticisms raised during the present discussion, GACS was concerned that there appears to be no way to reverse the decision to accept the report and its recommendations.
 - iii. Members questioned whether the view referred to in the review that the presence of the SAC Chairs on GACS could be seen as a constraint on its ability to provide fully independent challenge across the FSA's use of science from its Committees (para 2.48 of the review) had been borne out by experience to date, and suggested that the reverse could also hold true. They felt that the presence of the SAC Chairs on GACS provided a valuable link between the Agency's individual SACs and the mechanism for strategic advice and challenge.
 - iv. On behalf of SSRC, Professor Jackson expressed concern about the apparent down-grading of social science signalled by the proposed conversion of the committee to a DEC. He and others pointed out the contradiction between the inward-looking role implied by DEC status and the report's recommendation that SSRC "should broaden its external focus and work, where possible, with other social science experts across Government and internationally to develop and share opinions such as the Defra social science panel" (para 2.58).

- v. Members questioned the proposed renaming of the SSRC as the Applied Strategic Science Committee, for which no rationale was given.
- vi. Professor Peter Gregory (chair of ACNFP) and Dr Ian Brown (chair of ACAF) acknowledged that, if the UK stays in the European Union and if EFSA assumes more responsibility for assessment of novel food applications, the role of ACNFP will be diminished and merger with ACAF to form a new SAC on Innovation in the Food Chain could make sense. However, they pointed out the very different areas of responsibility and styles of working of the two committees and hoped that the possibility of retaining both would remain until the future responsibility for assessment of novel food applications is fully resolved.
- vii. The two lay members of GACS, Mrs Petré and Mrs Goldberg both expressed disappointment that the report did not recommend lay membership for the Science Council. Their concern was shared by the rest of the Committee, especially in view of the Agency's commitment to transparency and the importance of consumer representation in its work.
- viii. There was a lack of rationale or underpinning evidence for the recommendation that FSA should update its approach and current guidance on conflicts of interest (COI). Members were concerned that the recommendation implied that the current approach was not fit-for-purpose, and they felt that this was not the case. On this point, Professor Poppy said that it was motivated by a need to ensure the approach is future proof, not by any perception of issues with the approach or practice to date.

16. The Committee offered advice to the FSA on implementation of the recommendations:

- i. The mechanism for identifying criteria for membership of the new Science Council, including the ranges of disciplines and types of expertise to be covered, should be transparent.
- ii. The Science Council should be large enough to include expertise in the full range of disciplines represented in SACs that report to FSA, including social science expertise.
- iii. The Chairs of SACN, COT, COM and COC appreciated the interaction and cross-Committee working that GACS had fostered and asked that mechanisms be put in place to preserve and support this in the new model, which should maintain clear channels of communication for SAC Chairs to the FSA senior executive and Board and a clear collective voice for the SAC Chairs.
- iv. The link between scientific advice on nutrition and on food safety provided through the Chair of SACN sitting as an invited observer was particularly valued by GACS and it hoped that a similar link would be conserved.
- v. If the SAC Chairs are not to be included in the Science Council, they could at least join meetings of the Science Council for part of the agenda.
- vi. Appropriate time should be taken to ensure that implementation of Recommendation 2 (to set up a new Committee on Innovation in the Food Chain) is informed by proper consideration of the types and sources of innovation expected in the future, for example food medicines, and animal feed health claims, and from small as well as larger organisations. The FSA should be aware that expertise in innovation, including on the appliance of

- research, would need to be sought from the food industry, and this would require management of conflicts of interests.
- vii. The membership of a new Committee on Innovation in the Food Chain would need careful consideration to ensure it could access the appropriate expertise including that required to cover the existing functions of ACAF and residual functions of ACNFP (which cover feed and food respectively and currently have little overlap in areas of members' expertise).
 - viii. It is important that generic issues that are continuing or continuous are picked up within the new structure. A hand-over of issues from GACS to the new Science Council at Chair level should be considered.

17. The Chair asked that the Minutes should record the unanimous concern of all members present. He asked FSA to take into account the Committee's concerns and advice. He considered that these concerns should also be relayed to the FSA Board. The CSA and DSER gave their assurance that these issues and concerns would be taken into account in how the FSA implemented the review recommendations. The Chair thanked the Committee Members for their contributions over the years; and reiterated that the GACS and its working groups will continue to operate within their current remit until such time as they hand over to a new FSA Science Council.

Action 4: Report the Committee's concerns to the Board and take them into account when implementing the recommendations of the FSA's Triennial Review of its SACs (FSA)

Agenda item 5: Summary of SACs activities (GACS 17-3)

18. Gwen Aherne outlined the regular update on issues identified by the SAC Secretariats with crosscutting or strategic relevance. This standing item highlights and fosters co-ordination across SACs. GACS noted the steady increase in such activities and identified some additional recent/ongoing activities:
- i. Joint COT and SACN work on maternal and infant nutrition, and on potassium-based sodium replacements
 - ii. COT-COC Synthesising epidemiological evidence subgroup
 - iii. SACN member on ACNFP
 - iv. SACN to advise Food Standards Scotland on folic acid

Agenda item 6: Report on FSA's current evidence portfolio and future priorities (GACS 17-4)

19. Dr Andrew Damant presented the report which provides the Committee with an annual overview of the FSA's current science, evidence and information portfolio and plans for future work. He sought the Committee's views on key priorities for the future of the programme; and also for their input on the FSA's outline proposals for seeking external input before new work is selected and prioritised.
20. GACS welcomed the publication of the 2016 forward evidence plan and the opportunity it provides for SACs (and others) to comment on new areas of work before the specifications are finalised.
21. GACS felt that it was important for FSA to maintain an element of more open-ended calls despite pressure on budgets, and to continue to maintain the proportion of the FSA's budget spent on science.

22. Synthetic biology was raised as an area of potential interest and Members suggested that it may be timely to review the area. FSA had completed some work on this previously and would circulate the report to the Committee.⁶
23. Food allergy was a high priority area for the FSA but this did not seem to be reflected in the investment level indicated in the report.
24. The Committee were interested in the set up and operation of the FSA's new Investment Board which replaces the Evidence Prioritisation Board for prioritising and funding research. Members were also interested in the impact of FSA-funded research (a table is provided in Annex B), noting that it was difficult to assess impact and that this should be done as robustly as possible. Professor Poppy reported that he was not a member of the Investment Board but he was consulted on the science, evidence and information elements.

Action 5: *Circulate previous research report on synthetic biology to the Committee (secretariat).*

Agenda item 7: Report from the Working Group on Science Skills and Capabilities (GACS 17-5)

25. Dr Bramwell provided an update on the Working Group, which had held two meetings since the last GACS meeting. The FSA had set up the working group in a new mode, to work as 'critical friends' to provide expert insight and challenge on FSA's development and implementation of the programme of work, rather than tasking the group to carry out detailed work themselves.
26. Dr Bramwell had found the working group's input valuable in shaping the science skills strategy and identifying its priorities, which now had five high-level outcomes to deliver between 2015 and 2020. GACS endorsed the report and welcomed the progress made.
27. The Committee discussed long-standing concerns with the pipeline of skills, particularly in toxicology. Members suggested it may be beneficial to learn from EFSA and how they support careers in risk assessment. Members also noted that much toxicology expertise resides in industry which could have implications for managing interests.
28. In response to a question from the Chair, Dr Bramwell confirmed that staff turnover was currently within normal levels, but this was an area FSA would need to continue to monitor. The SAC Chairs present confirmed that they were content with the secretariat support their Committees were currently receiving, which reflected improvements in resource and staffing since concerns raised the previous year.
29. Members emphasised the importance of the FSA making time available to its employees for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities and the importance of senior level support for this.

Agenda item 8: Report from the Working Group on Risk (GACS 17-6)

30. Dr Miller provided an update on the Working Group. The paper provided a short note from the Secretariat on the scope, first meeting and plans for future meetings. This Working Group had also been set up as 'critical friends' to provide advice and challenge on the FSA's developing programme of work on risk.

⁶ <http://www.food.gov.uk/strategievidenceprogramme/x02projlist/fs102068>

31. GACS endorsed the report. The Committee advised that the new model and the more traditional model of engagement with SACs could both be effective and appropriate, depending on the nature of the task, noting that it should be clear at the outset which model the FSA is using for new working groups. It advised the FSA to consider what the implications might be of moving to use the more collaborative 'critical friends' model on a regular basis – this could be an issue to refer to the new Science Council.

Agenda item 9: Update on the Cross-SAC Working Group on the framework for foods that present an increased risk per serving (GACS 17-7)

32. Gwen Aherne provided a short update on the new cross-SAC working group, which brings together experts from GACS, ACMSF, COT and SSRC, and was holding its first full meeting on 31 March.
33. Mrs Petré and Professor Boobis are members of the Group. They noted that this was a complex and important piece of work; that the working group had asked to have case studies to consider how the framework plays out in practice and its implications for consumers; and had asked the FSA to invite NICE to participate in a working group meeting to share knowledge and experience.
34. Members noted that it will be important to have a clear and shared understanding of terms and that benefit would need to be considered explicitly in the framework, as well as risk.

Agenda item 10: Register of Member's interests (GACS 17-8)

35. Members were reminded to inform the Secretariat of any changes to their interests. Professor Maskell had provided some changes to the Secretariat that morning and these would be reflected in an updated register.

Action 6: Update the register of interests (secretariat)

Agenda item 11: Any other business (AOB)

36. Professor Boobis noted that the European Union Agencies Network of Scientific Advice (EU ANSA) had just published a paper about peer review of evidence that is reviewed by Advisory Committees. The Chair asked that a link to the paper is circulated to all SAC members.⁷
37. The Chair raised the wider discussion of the so-called anti-lobbying clause introduced by the government, which requires that anyone funded by public funds should not be able to use those funds to lobby for changes to government policy. He understood that the motivation for the clause was concern about NGO's using government subsidies directly to lobby government, but he reported widespread concern that it could have the unintended effect of preventing scientists in receipt of public funding from publishing or discussing research results that are contradictory to government policy. He felt that there is a distinction between freedom to publish properly conducted peer reviewed scientific research; as opposed to actively campaigning against public policy on the basis of personal opinion. GACS noted that the clause also raised questions on

⁷ <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/-peer-review-by-eu-ansa-agencies-pbTE0215981/?CatalogCategoryID=7QwKABstDHwAAAEjK5EY4e5L>

implications for policy evaluation, and for REF exercises⁸ which include a requirement to submit evidence on how institutions' research has influenced policy.

38. Professor Poppy reported that the government CSA network had discussed this; it was for each department to decide how they apply this guidance to their research. Dr Bramwell noted that the clause appears to apply only to grant funding and that most of the FSA's funding is contractual. Dr Bramwell is seeking clarification on it and will come back with further details in due course; however, FSA had no intention of restricting publication of its research data.
39. In closing the meeting, the Chair asked the Committee to stand ready to have another meeting if required. Professor Poppy recorded his thanks to the Committee for their support since he was appointed and said he would like to invite the Committee to the inaugural meeting for the new Science Council.

Action 7: *Circulate a link to the EU ANSA paper (SAC secretariats)*

Action 8: *FSA to seek clarification on the government's anti-lobbying clause and update the Committee on this (FSA DSER)*

Action 9: *Circulate draft minutes to Members for comment (Secretariat)*

Action 10: *Send any comments on draft minutes to the Secretariat (Members)*

⁸ The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions: <http://www.ref.ac.uk/>

Annex 1 Summary of actions from the 17th meeting of GACS

ACTION		Action for:	Target date
1	<i>Inform the Secretariat of any changes in their interests.</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>As they arise</i>
2	<i>Publish final minutes of the 16th meeting</i>	<i>Secretariat</i>	<i>End April 2016</i>
3	<i>Refer outstanding issues to new Science Council</i>	<i>FSA and Secretariat</i>	<i>On set up of council</i>
4	<i>Report the Committee's concerns to the Board and take them into account when implementing the recommendations of the FSA's Triennial Review of its SACs (FSA)</i>	<i>FSA</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
5	<i>Circulate previous research report on synthetic biology to the Committee</i>	<i>Secretariat</i>	<i>End April 2016</i>
6	<i>Update the register of interests</i>	<i>Secretariat</i>	<i>End April 2016</i>
7	<i>Circulate a link to the EU ANSA paper (SAC secretariats)</i>	<i>SAC Secretariats</i>	<i>End April 2016</i>
8	<i>FSA to seek clarification on the government's anti-lobbying clause and update the Committee on this</i>	<i>FSA DSER</i>	<i>In due course</i>
9	<i>Circulate draft minutes to Members for comment</i>	<i>Secretariat</i>	<i>29 April 2016</i>
10	<i>Send any comments on draft minutes to the Secretariat</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>13 May 2016</i>