

SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW – CSA RESPONSE

In December 2016, in my capacity as the Chief Scientific Advisor to the Food Standards Agency, I commissioned a review of the role and capability of Social Science in the Food Standards Agency. The review, carried out by Professor Ragnar Lofstedt, is being published alongside this response.

Looking at the current social science capability, Professor Lofstedt uses a broad and inclusive definition of social science, allowing the reviewer to identify social science capability across the organisation. The FSA, as noted in the review, also accesses external and independent social science expertise through the Social Science Research Committee, a non-departmental public body, recently reviewed alongside all FSAs independent committees by the Cabinet Office Triennial Review in 2016 (<https://www.food.gov.uk/news-updates/news/2016/15022/triennial-review-of-six-fsa-scientific-advisory-committees>) and through externally commissioned research through the central government procurement process.

The review, very helpfully, considers the experience of use of social science capacity elsewhere in government and in similar public agencies in other countries. I note the positive comments on the perceptions of how FSA currently uses social science expertise and welcome the ideas and lessons we can learn from the experiences of others. Although FSA has a long established internal social science capability we acknowledge that the kind of expertise and set of skills within it has probably not kept at pace with the evolution and complexity of the system which FSA regulates.

Professor Lofstedt recommends that we take action in four areas:

1. Increasing the social science capability in the agency
2. More senior level support for social science
3. Increased understanding of how social science can help FSA deliver its objectives
4. Clarifying what social science expertise FSA needs in-house and what type of expertise it can bring in from outside

I welcome Professor Lofstedt's recommendation to increase the capacity of a core team that can provide a clear leadership function to deliver the visibility and traction currently missing and the need of a senior leader to drive this, at least as a temporary and transitional measure.

Another important finding in the review is the need to consider the right skills and expertise within social science that may be required in the short and long term as FSA positions itself as a modern, excellent and accountable regulator. Once the

UK has left the EU it is likely that the FSA will play a greater role in the risk analysis paradigm (framing the question, risk assessment, risk management, implementation and communication, evaluation), and we need to be prepared for this expanded role.

So, I agree with the need for the Agency to be able to access expertise in behavioural economics, decision science, and consumer science. The implementation of the Triennial Review recommendations currently underway will provide an opportunity to create a departmental expert committee which will help to address this recommendation. I welcome his recommendation that FSA considers creative ways of bringing in the right expertise at the right time through a combination of in-house and externally sourced capability.

To conclude, I would like to thank Professor Lofstedt for the valuable insight and challenge in his recommendations. The Festival of Social Science planned for Monday 7 November 2017 will be a valuable opportunity to share our future plans for social science within the FSA.