

## Triennial review of the Social Science Research Committee (SSRC)

### Action plans from SSRC and the FSA to implement the review recommendations

#### SSRC Action Plan

Recommendation	SSRC Action
<b>Recommendation 1</b> The remit of the Committee with regard to risk assessment/management should be clarified on the Committee's website and drawn to the attention of the members to ensure that all members are fully aware of that.	The SSRC has implemented this recommendation.  Members and the SSRC website have been updated accordingly.
<b>Recommendation 2</b> The Committee's independent status should be specifically stated on the Committee's website and the annual report.	The SSRC has implemented this recommendation.  The website has been updated and this information will be made explicit in the next SSRC annual report.

### **Recommendation 3**

There is a need to ensure that the activities/actions undertaken by the Committee are those that are likely to be of the most importance to the FSA. Specific recommendations have been made to help to ensure that.

- *The Secretariat ensures that awareness of the Committee and how it can help is increased across the FSA so that the Committee's advice is proactively sought in areas where it would be beneficial to do so. Awareness might be increased for example by internal presentations, supported by examples of how the Committee has added value.*
- *The Secretariat routinely reviews the minutes and papers of the meetings of the other Scientific Advisory Committees, as well as discussing with the Secretariats of those committees, to help identify issues being addressed by other committees where the input of the SSRC would be beneficial*
- *Activities/actions to be undertaken by the Committee should be specifically considered in terms of what they will add to the FSA, for example how they will help the FSA, how the FSA will benefit and what the end result of the work will mean to the FSA;*
- *The activities/actions should be prioritised according to their importance, or potential importance, to the FSA.*

The SSRC is implementing this recommendation though we note that no evidence was presented in the review to suggest that the past and current activities of the SSRC do not align with the Agency's priorities.

The SSRC is keen to extend its role across the Agency (as required) but the resources required to implement this recommendation (as described in the bullets) should be acknowledged. The SSRC is keen to maximise the Agency's capacity for social science research and does so with minimum secretariat support.

Full implementation of this recommendation also relies on other SACs being receptive to the contribution that can be made by social science. Aligning effort with likely effect will need to be considered in prioritising how these wider social science contributions can be most effectively delivered.

The recommendations included here focus on delivering the Agency's current strategic objectives. The SSRC also sees its role in influencing those objectives and ensuring the Agency has access to appropriate social science research to identify and pursue specific objectives in order to most effectively deliver its remit.

Finally, it should be noted that the SSRC considers the Agency's Forward Evidence Plan and provides a formal response as well as discussing this in open session in order to deliver on its responsibilities relating to ensuring that the Agency has access to the most appropriate social science evidence to deliver its strategic priorities.

<p><b>Recommendation 4</b> When work is completed, a brief bullet point summary of the work undertaken, the results of the work and the difference it made to the FSA should be produced.</p>	<p>The SSRC plans to implement this recommendation.</p> <p>This will be implemented for all future work and, where possible, for on-going work. The SSRC notes that this will require consideration on an on-going basis as the impact of social science contributions may take some time to accrue.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 5</b> Proposed timescales and resources should be identified and agreed for activities/actions.</p>	<p>The SSRC plans to implement this recommendation for all future work.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6</b> The results of the recent Horizon Scanning process should be considered further by the Committee and if appropriate incorporated into the forward work plan.</p>	<p>Horizon Scanning will be further considered at the next meeting of the SSRC. Actions resulting from this work will be included in the forward work plan.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 7</b> The Committee should show greater evidence of scientific rigour by using the FSA's Science Governance Framework and supporting documents more explicitly.</p>	<p>The SSRC will implement this recommendation but notes that its wording could be construed to suggest that there has been a lack of scientific rigour in the work undertaken to date (when no such case has been made). SSRC would like to draw attention to its previous work in revising the science checklist, a key governance document used by the Agency, to ensure that it is applicable to social science research.</p> <p>The Agency's revised governance documents may make transparency in this area more straightforward, and the SSRC will consider whether this is the case in its use of these documents. Where improvements to the framework are identified through the work of the SSRC, these will be communicated to the Agency to ensure that governance frameworks are fully functional for social science evidence as well as for natural science evidence.</p>

**Recommendation 8**

Further steps should be undertaken by the Secretariat to ensure that advice is being sought from the Committee as appropriate from across the FSA, including from the other scientific advisory committees. Specific recommendations have been made to help to ensure that.

- *The Secretariat should ensure that awareness of the Committee and how it can help is increased across the FSA so that the Committee's advice is proactively sought in areas where it would be beneficial to do so. Consideration should be given across the areas of the FSA's remit. Awareness might be increased for example by internal presentations, supported by examples of how the Committee has added value.*
- *The Secretariat should consider providing the Committee members with a summary of the activities of the other Scientific Advisory Committees, rather than just notifying them of the dates of the meetings, to help the members to identify any issues being addressed across the other committees where SSRC may be able to make a positive difference.*
- *The Secretariat should routinely review the minutes and papers of the meetings of the other Scientific Advisory Committees, as well as discussing with the Secretariats of those committees, to help identify issues being addressed by other Committees where the input of the SSRC would be beneficial. Regular attendance by the Secretariat and/or members of the SSRC as observers at the meetings of other FSA scientific advisory committees should also be considered.*
- *In some cases it may be beneficial to consider direct involvement of SSRC members with other Scientific Advisory Committees or their Working Groups. The Secretariat and the Chair should work with the Secretariats and Chairs of the other Committees to identify whether that is the case and if so discuss the most appropriate way to achieve that. Depending on the specific issues being addressed, direct input rather than cross-referral between committees may enable social science aspects to be identified and considered earlier in the process and enable more timely as well as more effective working.*

This recommendation is being implemented through a pilot project to appoint an SSRC member to one of the other SACs.

A member of SSRC will attend the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Foods (ACMSF) in an *ex officio* capacity on a trial basis. This will be the person with the most relevant expertise, agreed on a meeting-by-meeting basis, in order to make sure that they are able to contribute within their particular sphere of expertise.

This initiative is being carried out as a pilot, with the possibility of it being extended to other SACs if it is successful. Both SSRC and ACMSF chairs, members and secretariats are fully engaged with this process and it is noted that this is crucial to the success of this pilot, and any future roll-out.

SSRC also note the resourcing demands of the suggestion that the Secretariat and/or members of SSRC should consider regular attendance at other SAC meetings.

<p><b>Recommendation 9</b> The Secretariat should work with the Chair and members to identify how members can best contribute to the FSA's requirement for information on relevant external research findings and reports</p>	<p>The SSRC intends to implement this recommendation. Attention is drawn to improvements in this area demonstrated in recent updates.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 10</b> The Secretariat should review the SSRC website to include the Terms of Reference and Code of Practice, and include a section on the Advisory/Working Groups.</p>	<p>This recommendation has been implemented.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 11</b> The Secretariat and the Chair should consider how to get the most value from the meetings by appropriate planning of the agendas and balancing of presentation and discussion time.</p>	<p>The SSRC intends to implement this recommendation.  Balancing presentation and discussion time was a particular issue at the meeting attended by the reviewer and has not been an issue previously. A post-meeting review has already identified the problem of holding a full meeting following a workshop (as was the case on the day of this meeting). Further consideration is being given to agenda planning for future meetings.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 12</b> The terms of reference for the current Advisory and Working groups should be clarified, together with the specific roles and responsibilities of the members of the Committee on those Groups and the role of the Secretariat and any third parties attending the meeting</p>	<p>This recommendation will be implemented for all current and future Advisory Groups and Working Groups.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 13</b> A written update on the work of the Advisory / Working Groups should be provided for each of the main Committee meetings.</p>	<p>An update paper on the work of Advisory Groups and Working Groups will be published with the meeting papers for future meetings.  How to provide information about key activities of Working Groups and Advisory Groups to stakeholders outside the committee and between meetings is being further considered.</p>

## FSA action plan

### General Comments

The FSA is pleased to note that the report identifies ten areas of good practice and concludes that the support provided by the Secretariat is of a high standard. The report also makes thirteen recommendations to maximise the value of the SSRC's work. The Committee has outlined how these will be implemented. The FSA will seek a report on progress to implement these recommendations in SSRC's future annual reports and the FSA Chief Scientific Advisor will discuss progress at his annual meeting with the SSRC Chair.

The FSA has agreed the actions below to implement the review recommendations.

Recommendation	FSA response
<b>Recommendation 1</b> The remit of the Committee with regard to risk assessment/management should be clarified on the Committee's website and drawn to the attention of the members to ensure that all members are fully aware of that.	The FSA Chief Scientific Advisor will discuss progress on implementation by the Committee as part of his annual review and feedback meeting with the Committee Chair.
<b>Recommendation 2</b> The Committee's independent status should be specifically stated on the Committee's website and the annual report.	The FSA Chief Scientific Advisor will discuss progress on implementation by the Committee as part of his annual review and feedback meeting with the Committee Chair.

**Recommendation 3**

There is a need to ensure that the activities/actions undertaken by the Committee are those that are likely to be of the most importance to the FSA. Specific recommendations have been made to help to ensure this:

- *The Secretariat ensures that awareness of the Committee and how it can help is increased across the FSA so that the Committee's advice is proactively sought in areas where it would be beneficial to do so. Awareness might be increased for example by internal presentations, supported by examples of how the Committee has added value.*
- *The Secretariat routinely reviews the minutes and papers of the meetings of the other Scientific Advisory Committees, as well as discussing with the Secretariats of those committees, to help identify issues being addressed by other committees where the input of the SSRC would be beneficial.*
- *Activities/actions to be undertaken by the Committee should be specifically considered in terms of what they will add to the FSA, for example how they will help the FSA, how the FSA will benefit and what the end result of the work will mean to the FSA.*
- *The activities / actions should be prioritised according to their importance, or potential importance, to the FSA.*

The FSA acknowledges the implementation of this recommendation will have resource implications for both the committee and Secretariat. The FSA will continue to provide support to the committee in delivering its functions and monitor the secretariat resource to ensure there is appropriate level of resource and of social science expertise within the Secretariat.

The FSA has a number of mechanisms to address this recommendation and has established new science governance procedures to help identify issues being addressed by other SACs where input of the Committee would be beneficial. Discussions will take place at the start of new bodies of work requiring SAC input, or initiated by an SAC, between the policy team commissioning the advice, the SAC Secretariat(s) and the Chief Scientific Advisor Team. In addition, discussions will also take place between policy leads and the Chief Scientist Team on approaches to scientific evidence for new policy papers and significant policy projects.

The FSA agrees that effective forward planning is good practice that will help to ensure prioritisation of future SAC work. Committees are expected to have a rolling, summary work plan, covering 12-18 months, which is published on their website and updated periodically.

<p><b>Recommendation 4</b> When work is completed, a brief bullet point summary of the work undertaken, the results of the work and the difference it made to the FSA should be produced.</p>	<p>The FSA Chief Scientific Advisor will discuss progress on implementation by the Committee as part of his annual review and feedback meeting with the Committee Chair.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 5</b> Proposed timescales and resources should be identified and agreed for activities/actions.</p>	<p>The FSA Chief Scientific Advisor will discuss progress on implementation by the Committee as part of his annual review and feedback meeting with the Committee Chair.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6</b> The results of the recent Horizon Scanning process should be considered further by the Committee and if appropriate incorporated into the forward work plan.</p>	<p>The FSA Chief Scientific Advisor will discuss progress on implementation by the Committee as part of his annual review and feedback meeting with the Committee Chair.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 7</b> The Committee should show greater evidence of scientific rigour by using the FSA's Science Governance Framework and supporting documents more explicitly.</p>	<p>The FSA has clarified that the recommendation relates to the need for the Committee to be more explicit in demonstrating its scientific rigour, rather than suggesting that rigour is not present. The FSA Chief Scientific Advisor will discuss progress on implementation by the Committee as part of his annual review and feedback meeting with the Committee Chair.</p>

**Recommendation 8**

Further steps should be undertaken by the Secretariat to ensure that advice is being sought from the Committee as appropriate from across the FSA, including from the other scientific advisory committees. Specific recommendations have been made to help to ensure this:

- *The Secretariat should ensure that awareness of the Committee and how it can help is increased across the FSA so that the Committee's advice is proactively sought in areas where it would be beneficial to do so. Consideration should be given across the areas of the FSA's remit. Awareness might be increased for example by internal presentations, supported by examples of how the Committee has added value.*
- *The Secretariat should consider providing the Committee members with a summary of the activities of the other Scientific Advisory Committees, rather than just notifying them of the dates of the meetings, to help the members to identify any issues being addressed across the other committees where SSRC may be able to make a positive difference.*
- *The Secretariat should routinely review the minutes and papers of the meetings of the other Scientific Advisory Committees, as well as discussing with the Secretariats of those committees, to help identify issues being addressed by other Committees where the input of the SSRC would be beneficial. Regular attendance by the Secretariat and/or members of the SSRC as observers at the meetings of other FSA scientific advisory committees should also be considered.*
- *In some cases it may be beneficial to consider direct involvement of SSRC members with other Scientific Advisory Committees or their Working Groups. The Secretariat and the Chair should work with the Secretariats and Chairs of the other Committees to identify whether that is the case and if so discuss the most appropriate way to achieve that. Depending on the specific issues being addressed, direct input rather than cross-referral between committees may enable social science aspects to be identified and considered earlier in the process and enable more timely as well as more effective working.*

The FSA agrees that it would be helpful for the Committee to be involved in all areas of the FSA's remit including the work of the other SACs.

There are a number of mechanisms in place which the Secretariat/Committee can draw upon to help facilitate this including:

- The General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS) takes a proactive approach at its meetings to ensure better communication and co-ordination across SACs.
- The Chairs of the other SACs that advise the FSA are present at meetings as *ex officio* members of GACS.
- GACS' paper on '*Science in the SACs*'- this standing item paper includes issues identified by the Secretariats that may have a cross-cutting or strategic relevance.
- The Chief Scientific Advisor has established a Science Leads Group in the FSA to facilitate better communication between Secretariats. This allows the Secretariats to discuss issues that involve joint working between the SACs.

<p><b>Recommendation 9</b> The Secretariat should work with the Chair and members to identify how members can best contribute to the FSA's requirement for information on relevant external research findings and reports.</p>	<p>The FSA notes the valuable contribution of Committee members on other FSA work, which is not part of the Committee's work plan. Members contribute to a number of different activities including the FSA research programme, research appraisals, and peer review as well as on the work of other government departments. The FSA Chief Scientific Advisor will discuss progress on implementation by the Committee as part of his annual review and feedback meeting with the Committee Chair.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 10</b> The Secretariat should review the SSRC website to include the Terms of Reference and Code of Practice, and include a section on the Advisory/Working Groups.</p>	<p>The FSA Chief Scientific Advisor will discuss progress on implementation by the Committee as part of his annual review and feedback meeting with the Committee Chair.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 11</b> The Secretariat and the Chair should consider how to get the most value from the meetings by appropriate planning of the agendas and balancing of presentation and discussion time.</p>	<p>The FSA Chief Scientific Advisor will discuss progress on implementation by the Committee as part of his annual review and feedback meeting with the Committee Chair.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 12</b> The terms of reference for the current Advisory and Working groups should be clarified, together with the specific roles and responsibilities of the members of the Committee on those Groups and the role of the Secretariat and any third parties attending the meetings</p>	<p>The terms of reference and roles and responsibilities for Advisory and Working groups should be clear as part of good governance. It is good practice when Groups are set up that the terms of reference and roles and responsibility of members, Secretariat and any external contributors are clearly defined and agreed by the main Committee. The FSA Chief Scientific Advisor will discuss progress on implementation by the Committee as part of his annual review and feedback meeting with the Committee Chair.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 13</b> A written update on the work of the Advisory/Working Groups should be provided for each of the main Committee meetings.</p>	<p>It is good practice for all SACs to publish information on the work of Advisory/Working Groups at the main Committee meeting to promote openness and transparency. The FSA Chief Scientific Advisor will discuss progress on implementation by the Committee as part of his annual review and feedback meeting with the Committee Chair.</p>