

Terms of Reference

The Science Council is an independent expert committee of the Food Standards Agency (FSA). It is classified as a Departmental Expert Committee (DEC).

Purpose

The Science Council's purpose is to help to ensure that the FSA identifies, sources, integrates and uses the best scientific evidence and expertise from all relevant disciplines to inform and evaluate its work.

Role and responsibilities

The Council's advice focuses on how FSA can deploy scientific evidence and advice to deliver its current strategic priorities, to understand new developments - risks and opportunities - and to identify and develop new ways to deliver excellence in the future.

The Council is constituted to operate at a strategic level working across and bringing together insights from different disciplines.

The Council will work with the FSA to:

- help to ensure that FSA science has impact through advising on how the FSA can deploy the best evidence and advice to identify and to address the FSA's big issues, now and in the future
- help the FSA to identify and access wider sources and networks and expertise and evidence relevant to FSA's objectives
- advise the FSA on how it should address issues of strategic importance to the FSA which are not covered by an existing Scientific Advisory Committee or which relate to general principles
- provide advice and challenge on how the FSA identifies, gathers and uses scientific evidence and advice, with a particular focus on two areas of priority for the FSA:
 - how the FSA uses and combines different strands of evidence and advice in its decision-making

- the work of FSA Scientific Advisory Committees and how the FSA works with them to identify and define needs for SAC advice and co-ordinate its delivery, and how this advice is used by FSA
- advise on any other matters relating to the FSA's science as required by the FSA

Authority

The Science Council is an advisory body which makes recommendations to the FSA on its use of science.

Membership

The Council forms a core group which consists of (at full membership) ten members, including one Chair.

Members are recruited by open competition for their ability to work across disciplines, think strategically, and understand how science can be used to influence and test policy and to achieve concrete impacts to benefit people.

The normal duration of appointment for a Science Council member is 3 years and for the Chair 5 years. Members and Chairs will normally not serve for longer than 10 years continuously.

The Science Council is also able to identify and to draw in wider expertise and inputs across relevant disciplines and perspectives to address the issues at hand.

Meeting Arrangements

As part of its work programme the Science Council will hold two open meetings a year. These will usually consist of a short, general update session reviewing developments in work by the FSA and by the Council work, as a whole, followed by a themed session devoted to a specific issue (likely to be more of a workshop mode).

A quorum would be half of the total number of the appointed members including the Chair, plus one (rounded up to the nearest whole number). If the membership falls below 5 members a quorum will be full attendance by all appointed members.

These meetings will also ensure that the Council discusses in public the key issues and outcomes from its work, including work between meetings.

The FSA expects to work with the Council to develop and use online tools to support its work and communications both at and between meetings. The Council will establish and engage with wider networks of experts, including other SACs whose work is relevant to the FSA.

Science Council open meeting agendas, papers, minutes and reports are published, and open meetings can be attended by the public.

In addition, the Science Council will hold additional meetings as required in closed session (at least two per year) to track progress of the work programme or projects associated with that work programme.

Reporting

The Science Council provides high-level, expert strategic insight, challenge and advice to the FSA's Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) and to the Board and executive of the FSA on the FSA's use of science to deliver FSA objectives.

The Council Chair will report to the FSA Board annually at an open Board meeting (usually in March).

The Council Chair has the right of direct access to the FSA's CSA and Chief Executive (CE), and to FSA Board members (via the Agency Chair), at all times. Members also have the right of access to the CSA, the CE and Board on any matter which they believe raises important issues relating to their duties as a member.

Independence and transparency

The Science Council is an independent SAC which operates to the highest standards of openness and transparency. It will work in accordance with guidelines by the FSA and relevant guidance and rules established across Government for the operation of Scientific Advisory Committees. These include:

- The cross-Government Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees (CoPSAC), which includes the Principles of Scientific Advice to Government; [Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees and Councils: CoPSAC 2021 - GOV.UK](#)

- The FSA's Good Practice Guidelines for Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs)

[Good Practice Guidelines | Science advisory committees \(food.gov.uk\)](https://www.food.gov.uk/good-practice-guidelines-science-advisory-committees)

The FSA CSA and the Council Chair and members will maintain regular communications between meetings, including through monthly teleconferences (as required).

Resources and Budget

The Science Council is supported by a Secretariat provided by the Food Standards Agency.

The Secretariat is led by a Secretary who is responsible for the work of the Secretariat and a lead Secretariat who manages overall workflow.

The budget for the Food Standards Agency is agreed every year by the FSA Business Committee.

Deliverables

The Council's work programme will focus on high-level, cross-cutting issues identified by the FSA (the Council may also flag issues of importance to the FSA for possible consideration).

In addressing these issues, the Council will work with the FSA to understand the context of the issue and what FSA is seeking to achieve.

In responding to this and formulating its advice, it will normally generate its own content and intellectual input and generate and convene informed discussion and analysis on strategic issues, rather than reviewing detailed papers produced by the FSA.

Its outputs will include short reports on collective insights on big issues; it will also work with FSA to convene wider discussions, events or initiatives to generate and synthesise insights from wider groups on specific issues.

The Council Chair will work closely with the FSA CSA to develop and prioritise the Council's work programme, in line with its remit.

The Council may also flag issues of strategic importance for the FSA which the FSA has not itself identified, for possible consideration.

Reviews

The Council publishes an annual report which sets out its work during that year, its budgetary spend and its performance against the FSA's Good Practice Guidelines for Scientific Advisory Committees.

In addition to regular contact between meetings, the Council Chair and FSA CSA will meet for a feedback discussion each year to review the work of the Council against its remit, and the relationship with and support from the FSA.

The Council Chair will meet the FSA Chair annually to discuss the work of the Council.