

Final minutes of the 10th Science Council open meeting public session

Attendees: See Annex 1

Summary of Actions: See Annex 2

Summary

- The Chair presented a summary of the Science Council's activity over the last 6 months.
- The FSA provided an update on the Annual Science report to the FSA Board and the development of key performance indicators (KPIs) for FSA science.
- The CSA updated the Council on his recent activity and discussions (including the Government spending review, gene editing food, food labelling and alternative proteins).
- An update on progress of Working Group 6 on Food Safety and Net Zero Carbon (including the workshop on 18 November).
- Updates from Science Council members attending Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs).

Agenda Item 1: Welcome and Introductions (incl. review of members' interests)

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to this 10th open meeting of the FSA Science Council. Members were asked that before the meeting started, if their register of interests entry required any changes and if so, whether those changes have any implications for any item due to be discussed at this meeting.
2. John O'Brien briefly described two new work roles but that neither of these are related to the topics being discussed at this meeting. He agreed to provide a full update to be added to the Register of Interests.

Action SC 10-1: Science Council members to update their register of interest entries by cop 16 December.

Agenda Item 2: Agreement on the minutes of the 9th open meeting and progress on actions from the public session of that meeting

3. The Science Council approved as final the draft minutes of the 9th Science Council open meeting ([Doc. SC 10-2a](#)).
4. Chun-Han Chan (Science Council Secretary) summarised progress on actions from the 9th Science Council open meeting public session ([Doc. SC 10-2b](#))

Agenda Item 3: Chair's update

5. The Chair presented a summary of her key activities over the last 6 months since the 9th Science Council open meeting ([Doc. SC 10-3\(s\)](#)).
6. The Chair told attendees that Sarah O'Brien would be leaving the Science Council at the end of March 2022 after completion of a five year term of service. She thanked her for her wise counsel and valuable contribution to the work of the Council.
7. She also noted that with Sarah departing the Council, the Secretariat will now be recruiting three new members. Current members pledged to publicise the recruitment through their networks and social media whilst Robin May and the Chair plan to write to learned societies to publicise the recruitment exercise.

Action SC10-2: Robin May and Sandy Thomas to write to learned societies by 24 December to publicise the Science Council recruitment exercise.

8. Members asked about the National Food Strategy since the second and final report was published. Robin May said the government response to the strategy will be in the form a White Paper (that is currently being written). FSA has a role in helping (and challenging) Defra in preparing it, and a draft is expected during Spring next year. Robin May will talk to the Strategy team to agree when to bring the Council into discussions about the White Paper.

Action SC 10-3: Robin May will agree with Strategy team when to engage the Science Council on the Government White Paper responding to the National Food Strategy's recommendations by end of February 2022.

Agenda Item 4: FSA Science Update

9. Adam Cook presented this topic covering the Annual Science Update to the FSA Board and science key performance indicators (KPIs).

10. The **Annual Science Update** was presented to the FSA Board on 8 December ([FSA 21-12-06 - Science Update](#)). The paper provided a business update on capacity and capability, with key successes in the last year and the priority areas for the next 12 months. The subsequent Board discussion focused on improving how the impact of FSA science is publicised and doing more with FSA science.

11. Adam then explained that the science KPIs are grouped under 4 themes:

- Our people –Our people are our greatest asset, and we need to ensure they are suitably skilled and engaged.
- Our Partners –The FSA operates as part of a wider system and working with partners is important to supplement internal resources.
- Our Science Delivery–Our delivery must be efficient and effective to ensure we deliver the best service possible and have impact.
- Our Science Capability –Maintaining an internal capability is essential to create resilience to challenges that we may face and to provide assurance that we remain a trusted regulator

12. FSA have identified a set of four desired outcomes to which they aspire and which map onto, and cut across, the above four themes:

- Science will continue to sit at the heart of the FSA
- A motivated and inspired team of experts
- A trusted provider of independent evidence
- A culture of openness & collaboration

13. This creates a matrix of 16 KPIs against which FSA can measure progress.

14. The members emphasised FSA science has a high level of trust because of its transparency and openness. This creates trust in FSA science communication.

15. Members also noted that the paper discussed household food insecurity, which aligns with the National Food Strategy on topics like food banks. It is important when discussing topics that involve food choice (such as sustainability) to remember that many families on low incomes have very little choice when it comes to food purchases.

16. Robin responded that the FSA is working with the new Office for Health Improvement and Disparities to look at food issues that are associated with low income such as simply not having enough food, having enough but it not being nutritionally viable, and using foods past use by dates.

Agenda Item 5: Chief Scientific Advisor (CSA) Update

17. Robin May gave a verbal update on his recent activity and high-level FSA science news:

- **The Government spending review settlement** has been largely positive for FSA. There is an appetite for more science activity, but we still need to translate budget into people and resource.
- A year after **leaving the EU** things have largely been going well. As CSA, he has focused on oversight of very high-risk issues whilst the new risk assessment system has been 'bedding in' but moving forward he would now like to consider more routine assessments.
- Defra continues to consult other government departments (OGDs), including FSA, on **future of food labelling** and how to include information on issues such as trade, authenticity, animal welfare, sustainability, etc. Whilst Defra leads on food labelling legislation, Robin is keen for FSA to act as convener of other groups to discuss food labelling as FSA has a unique relationship with consumers and industry.
- There are two key issues for the FSA on food labelling:
 - i. consumer information (not just what is on the label but how it is used by consumers).
 - ii. overall accuracy of information about food is a consumer issue which is an FSA lead as food regulator.

- Defra have drafted proposals responding to their **Gene Editing (GE) food consultation**. These will (amongst other things) change rules on genome edited crops so it is easier to do field trials. FSA's role is further down the line when these products go on sale. If GE is not regulated under existing GM rules, it may default to novel food rules to assess them to go on the UK market which may not be appropriate, discussion with Defra about alternative mechanisms are therefore taking place. Devolved administrations also need close involvement in planning across the four nations.
- At **COP26** FSA had a joint workshop with Food Standards Scotland (FSS), discussing sustainability, climate change and the food system.

18. There are four areas where Robin will be actively engaging with Science Council in the near future:

- **Science Council Recruitment**, helping to identify potential candidates.
- **Assurance role**, without it being a major burden for the Council, he would like them to consider how they could assure and support post-EU risk assessment.
- **Alternative proteins**, this fast growing market is a mix of traditional (vegetable protein) and new technologies (e.g., laboratory grown meat) and he expects to ask the Council for strategic insights.
- **Health claims**, for supplements and foods/feed that make health claims (e.g., reducing methane from cattle) he may seek Council insights soon.

19. Members' discussion following this update raised some interesting points:

- **Packaging** has limited space for consumer information. Online retail and food services often don't show food packaging, so providing accessible information to consumers on food they eat goes beyond that one channel.
- FSA should act as a challenger to OGDs on **labelling and food information** as well as a convener.
- Understanding how consumers use supplements may help with tackling questionable **health claims**.
- For **health claims** it is also important that businesses and the public have a clear understanding of division of responsibility between, for example, FSA and PHE.

20. Robin responded that information that guides consumer decisions comes from many sources, and we need to ask: what is the information? How is it communicated? How will the public understand/use that information? Consumers

may need a tool or app to help inform their decision making.

21. Provision of consumer information in catering has improved, e.g., on inclusion of calories in restaurant menus. If FSA propose e.g., sustainability labelling on menus, this may lead to resistance from industry due to current pressures.

22. FSA is engaged in discussions with Department for Education (DfE) regarding public procurement of school meals. If sustainability information is included in school and hospital menus, consumers might demand that it be provided elsewhere.

23. Finally on supplements and claims, Cannabidiol (CBD) containing foods are now a huge market. Some labels claim products will help users 'be more relaxed' and 'have a stress-free existence', and are borderline medical claims. Medicines & Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and FSA want to scrutinise those claims that suggest a medical benefit.

Agenda Item 6: Working group 6 update (Review of Food Safety and Net Zero Carbon)

24. Claire Nicholson presented the meeting paper ([Doc. SC 10-6](#)) and gave a verbal update on the initial outputs from the recent 18 November workshop on food safety and net zero carbon in primary production/processing. Claire noted that the attendees were a good mix of practitioners and academics and that using a fixed timeline (the next decade) had helped focus discussions.

25. Some specific topics that were flagged at the workshop as having food safety implications include:

- **Circular use of waste** in food production and food hygiene outcomes.
- **New proteins:** insects, plants, fungi, algae, plant-based 'meat'. The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP) are able to review new products for human consumption, but what about use in animal feed?
- **GE and GM changes** for more efficient inputs/reduce environmental emissions are due to a mix of net zero and other goals.
- **Regenerative farming**, etc. Mixing arable and livestock could lead to food hygiene issues, returning to risks that we may have historically managed but have fallen out of practice with more segregated farming.

- Different **technologies and farming methods** like vertical farms with more intensification and automation generate a different risk profile than conventional farming.
- Risk that increased **volume of incidents in future** may overwhelm current systems (e.g., existing methodology to test for botulism may be overwhelmed).
- Moving to a plant-based diet will change the **nutrition profile** of consumption in the UK (and moving from meat to ultra-processed plant-based foods may not be the healthy option it is perceived as).
- Will **traceability and surveillance systems** be robust enough to keep up with the pace of change?

26. The outputs from the workshop won't be finalised until mid-January but to decide which activities flagged by attendees as having implications for food safety need further investigation:

- we need to separate out activities which were not directly connected to net zero carbon (the focus of the review) and more about general sustainability.
- assess the urgency of investigation based on how soon a change or technology will come to market.

27. Jonathan Wastling added that aquaculture and fishing (seafood and seaweed) was an interesting area of development and that expertise in water was underrepresented at the workshop. A constant theme when talking to workshop attendees was that many of these changes are not happening in the future but here and now. It was also noted by Claire that food risks are not limited to areas that the FSA regulates, but also linked to Defra (especially around primary production).

28. Claire said that once we have received the final report of the workshop, Science Council is needed to help answer two questions:

- What will be the best way to do 'deep dives' of select activities?
- Do we have enough to occupy ourselves with a focus on primary production or do we continue down the food chain?

29. Several members suggested covering the whole of the food chain in a single review would be too much and should be addressed in another review to follow Working Group 6. A few members were concerned that this would mean recommendations on the rest of the food chain wouldn't be available for some time.

30. Robin and Rick agreed that a separate review might be best for the rest of the food chain, but also suggested that several of the topics that had been flagged are of interest to the FSA right now.

31. They would be interested in taking those topics away and organising their own targeted analysis or workshops on those issues. For example, FSA would be interested to explore developments in seafood and seaweed and to consider doing this jointly with Defra/Environment Agency (EA). Furthermore, regenerative farming is a big theme for Defra, and FSA could do a joint working group with them to consider food safety as part of their activities.

32. It was agreed that Science Council produce an interim report early next year that sets out the outcome of the workshop and makes recommendations such as 'FSA convene a group to consider seafood', or Science Council recommend 'FSA convene a group to look at mixed agriculture' The FSA could then take forward some areas of further investigation directly which have immediate relevance, with the Science Council continuing with a deep dive of those remaining issues which have a longer timescale.

33. Members noted that some activities to decarbonise may not have much published material available for a literature review in peer reviewed journals, or maybe even in publicly available grey literature, and at that point further discussion with practitioner experts becomes the best course.

34. The Chair noted that the Council's support for the proposed interim report. However, on establishing a separate follow-up review on the remainder of the food chain, there was broad agreement that further discussion was needed at another time. Once the workshop report is delivered, the WG6 Chairs can refine questions and present this at another meeting to decide how to take forward the analysis of NZC activities and how to address the rest of the food chain. Claire noted any meeting to make these decisions will need to be after the report is delivered (meeting around late January).

35. Rick agreed that FSA would summarise what they are doing in this area to show where action is already being taking (so the review doesn't start a deep dive on a topic that is already being addressed by FSA).

Action SC 10-4: Rick Mumford to discuss with Claire Nicholson current and planned FSA activity on food and sustainability (including net zero carbon) by the end of February 2022.

Action SC 10-5: Claire Nicholson and Jonathan Wastling to prepare an interim report for Working Group 6 by the end of March 2022.

Action SC 10-6: Claire Nicholson and Jonathan Wastling to present a shortlist of key NZC activities that require a further deep dive for the March closed project meeting.

Agenda Item 7: Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) update

36. The Chair presented the meeting paper setting out SAC activity over the last 6 months, along with feedback on key issues that may be of interest to the Science Council from members who had attended these meetings.

37. The discussion that followed between members was themed around engaging with SACs on issues emerging from Working Group 6 (WG6).

38. Reviews by the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF) can appear to be quite retrospective because they are asked to review contemporary issues and their reviews can take some time to complete. There may be value asking ACMSF to look at some future scenarios, and test capability to respond to enhanced threats, for example could the system for monitoring cases of botulism cope with a 10-fold increase in cases? There is a question about capability in food control laboratories, and a need to build capacity to cope with surges.

39. Robin commented that SACs are often, due to the nature of their work, being asked about current issues (reviewing dossiers etc). For future facing questions such as regenerative farming, they could be posed that question as a whole committee, or it may be more agile to second one or two experts from ACMSF to a sub-group of WG6 looking at that topic.

40. The Chair wondered is there a way we could pose questions raised by WG6, thinking about what those risks might look like, to SACs to map out the risk area? If the issue and the risk are likely to emerge in the short term, an SAC expert secondment to Council meetings may work.

41. Robin and Rick suggested that, again, in any interim report for WG6 the Council recommendations could include requests that other SACs consider particular issues (for example, recommendations about regenerative farming, put to ACMSF for a view).

42. The Chair suggested that the Council introduce the other SACs to this idea and have a conversation with them in early new year.

43. Finally, it was suggested that Science Council ask the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) if a Council member could attend meetings as an observer. This is in light of the increasing profile of nutrition in the FSA.

Action SC 10-7: Sandy Thomas to discuss with other SAC Chairs their possible engagement in supporting WG6.

Action SC 10-8: Sandy Thomas to contact the SACN Chair and ask if a Science Council member could attend in an observational capacity by mid-February 2022.

Agenda Item 8: Any Other Business

44. Chun-Han updated the Council on secretariat activity to promote the framework for assessing unsolicited third-party evidence within the FSA, engaging with policy colleagues to explain how such evidence is managed. The next stage will be to work with FSA corporate support unit and helpline (as they are often the first contact for people outside the FSA).

Agenda Item 9: End of meeting & Agenda Item 10: Q&A

45. The Chair thanked everyone that had attended the public session of the 10th Science Council open meeting. She noted that no questions had been received from the public for the Science Council, so she officially closed this session.

Annex 1: Lists of Attendees

Science Council

- Sandy Thomas, Chair (physical attendee)
- John O'Brien, Member (physical attendee)
- Paul Turner, Member (physical attendee)
- Peter Gregory, Member (physical attendee)
- Claire Nicholson, Member (physical attendee)
- Jonathan Wastling, Member (physical attendee)
- Sarah O'Brien, Member (virtual attendee)

- Patrick Wolfe, Member (virtual attendee)

Food Standards Agency

- Robin May, FSA Chief Scientific Advisor (physical attendee)
- Rick Mumford, Head of Science Evidence and Research (physical attendee)
- Adam Cook, FSA Head of Science Strategy, Capability & Research (physical attendee)
- Greg Wasinski, FSA Head of Strategic Insights Team (virtual attendee)
- Chun-Han Chan, FSA Science Council Secretary (physical attendee)
- Paul Nunn, FSA Science Council Secretariat Lead (physical attendee)
- Azuka Aghadiuno, FSA Administrative Support Risk Assessment Committees (physical attendee)
- Azhar Kabli, FSA Science Assurance, Information & Skills Officer (virtual attendee)
- Rebecca Gillespie, FSA ACSS Secretary (virtual attendee)

Observers (morning session)

- Elli Amanatidou, FSA Senior Risk Assessor (virtual attendee)
- Chloe Thomas, FSA Senior Risk Assessor (virtual attendee)
- Shaddad Saleh, FSA Risk Assessor Support (virtual attendee)
- Erica Kintz, FSA Risk Assessor (virtual attendee)
- Adib Khondkar, FSA CSA Private Secretary (virtual attendee)

Annex 2: Actions agreed at this meeting

| Ref. | Summary | Review Date | Lead |
|----------------|--|------------------------|---------|
| SC 10-1 | Science Council members to update their register of interest entries. | cop 16 December | Members |

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| SC10-2 | Robin May and Sandy Thomas to write to learned societies to publicise the Science Council recruitment exercise. | by 24 December | Robin May and Sandy Thomas |
| SC 10-3 | Robin May will agree with Strategy team when to engage the Science Council on the Government White Paper responding to the National Food Strategy's recommendations. | end of February 2022 | Robin May |
| SC 10-4 | Rick Mumford to discuss with Claire Nicholson current and planned FSA activity on food and sustainability (including net zero carbon). | end of February 2022 | Rick Mumford |
| SC 10-5 | Claire Nicholson and Jonathan Wastling to prepare an interim report for Working Group 6. | end of March 2022 | Claire Nicholson and Jonathan Wastling |
| SC 10-6 | Claire Nicholson and Jonathan Wastling to present a shortlist of key NZC activities that require a further deep dive. | 17 March 2022 (closed project meeting) | Claire Nicholson and Jonathan Wastling |
| SC 10-7 | Sandy Thomas to discuss with other SAC Chairs their possible engagement in supporting WG6. | end of February 2022 | Sandy Thomas |
| SC 10-8 | Sandy Thomas to contact the SACN Chair and ask if a Science Council member could attend in an observational capacity. | mid-February 2022 | Sandy Thomas |

