

Final minutes of the 11th Science Council open meeting public session

Note of the Science Council 11th open meeting of 23 June 2022: Public Session

Attendees: [Annex 1](#)

Actions: [Annex 2](#)

Summary

- The Chair presented a summary of her activity over the last 6 months.
- The CSA updated the Council on his recent activity and discussions (publication of the first FSA annual review of food standards “Our Food,” modelling FSA staff headcount reduction for Cabinet Office, the Precision Breeding Bill, and alternative proteins).
- An update on progress of Working Group 6 on Food Safety and Net Zero Carbon (including the interim report and an HMG workshop).
- Updates from Science Council members attending Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs) and a brief on the tailored SAC review for Cabinet Office.

Minute

Agenda Item 1: Welcome and Introduction (10:00-10:20)

1. The Chair welcomed attendees and the new members of the Science Council (SC) briefly introduced themselves. Chun-Han Chan queried members’ relevant interests to the agenda with a nil return.
2. Minutes of the 10th Science Council open meeting were agreed, and Chun-Han Chan read out progress on actions from the public session of that

meeting.

3. The Chair then gave her report. Over the last 6 months she has:
 - Attended the Government Chief Scientific Advisor's (GCSA) Government Scientific Advisory Committees (GSAC) meeting where they discussed work on climate change and options for associate members of SACs;
 - Given a keynote speech at the Westminster Food and Nutrition Forum conference on 20 January, covering the SC food safety and net zero review.
 - Discussed with Julie Pierce the focused work of the Council;
 - Gave her annual update to the FSA Board meeting
4. The Chair then highlighted current work: Working Group 6 on food safety and net zero carbon. She then looked ahead to the next SC working group (to be discussed in the closed session) and Science Council preparations for the tailored review of the SACs.
5. There was a brief discussion of the new process for commissioning SC working groups with the FSA Executive Management Team (EMT) and Board with the CSA at the centre of the process. This had been discussed at the 10th open meeting, but a revised process diagram had not yet been circulated. The Chair considers this in draft and noted that members' views that it is important for the Council to be able to self-task.

SC 11.1a | Action (Members): Review entries on the register of interests by the 1 July.

SC 11.1b | Action (Secretariat): Circulate the latest version of Science Council Commissioning Process to members for final input.

Agenda Item 2: Chief Scientific Advisor Update (10:20-10:35)

6. The FSA Chief Scientific Advisor (CSA) Robin May updated members.
 - The first FSA annual review of food standards will be laid before Parliament on 27 June. It is the first of a series of evolving reports over next few years, and Council members' feedback would be welcome.
 - As part of the proposed arrangement for commissioning Science Council reviews, it has been agreed that the CSA will liaise between the FSA and SC. There will also be a standing agenda item at FSA EMT to discuss SC reviews.

- Cabinet Office has asked all Government Departments to model reduction in staff of 20, 30 or 40%. An FSA response is imminent and will prepare for the potential need to reprioritise work if needed.
- The Precision Breeding Bill, formerly the Genome Editing Bill, will partially deregulate Genome Edited (GE) foods. FSA is working closely with Defra (the lead department for the bill) to propose a regulatory framework that will support the bill whilst maintaining consumer confidence. This is a fast-moving area, and the CSA may ask the SC or individual members for advice on specific aspects as the bill progresses.
- FSA is currently recruiting for positions in bioinformatics and would appreciate suggestions from the Council.
- There has been rapid movement in recent weeks on alternative proteins (insect protein, laboratory grown meat and precision fermentation) including three Parliamentary Questions. The FSA is holding a workshop on 14 July for stakeholders to explain the current regulatory framework and potential changes.
- 3D printing of food is developing significantly. High end London restaurants have been selling printed burgers, illustrating how the market is moving ahead of regulators. It will be important for the FSA to consider its role in regulating both these products and the methods used to create them.

SC 11.2 | Action (Members): Contact Robin May about potential candidates in their networks for a bioinformatics position in the FSA.

Agenda Item 3: Working Group 6 update (10:35-11:05)

7. Claire Nicholson introduced the Working Group 6 (WG6) update paper and summarised recent interviews with experts and SACs.
8. A response from EMT to the interim report has not yet been received because of other priorities (headcount modelling as mentioned earlier)
9. A small workshop with Defra, BEIS, GO-Science, DfT and HSE took place on 16 June to consider which net zero carbon (NZC) activities with food safety implications might involve cross-government working. DHSC was not able to attend and will follow up separately.
10. Claire noted that whilst there will be some further analysis of these activities, some of the topics do not lend themselves to conventional literature reviews because the topic is new or there are no documents in the public domain).

11. Two members noted that while businesses are exploring new technologies in this area, little is being published, as most emergent technologies are being developed by start-ups that, protective of their intellectual property.
12. One member gave examples of some problems with changing NZC approaches and technologies:
 - **Regenerative farming**: cross contamination of products in mixed farming, e.g., for example in a walnut and cereal crop rotation, there was cross-contamination of nuts into the cereal at harvest.
 - **Vertical farming** for producing baby foods where safety conditions for growing are claimed to be of a high standard. Start-ups are starting to target the selling of 'hypo-allergenic' food to hypo-allergenic patients.
 - **Cultured meat**: there are questions over risks of cancer cells propagating through cell lines.
 - **Labelling** can become very complex (part of later discussion).
 - **Packaging**: businesses are recycling foods into packaging such as 'tomato packaging' which includes materials made from tomato pulp. Packaging is also being made from waste coffee granules (caffeine can transmit to food) or mushroom fibre (that if wet will become biologically active).
13. The final point raised was that developing flexible regulation which is built to cope with rapid future innovation may be a good approach.
14. The Chair asked if members could advise on what are the best resources for further assessment? Where do we go from here?
15. Members suggested a few options to develop the review:
 - Convening further face to face conversations with experts could be helpful. A stakeholder discussion exercise could be the next stage of the Working Group.
 - Approaching the big retailers, e.g., Sainsbury & Tesco for insights. However, for smaller start-ups, it would be useful to talk to Innovate UK and/or venture capital community.
 - It may be possible to gather insight from trade literature, start-up company websites, and farming and agriculture magazines.
 - The problem with interpreting this material from start-ups is that they are making a case for investment and it can be hard to differentiate between the hype and reality.
 - Foods promoted and labelled as sustainable for the general public may have an unexpected and disproportionate effect (potentially further limiting food options) on those with eating disorders.

16. Greg Wasinski said that his team are doing work on anticipatory regulation, from the perspective of a regulator. It was noted that GO-Science has connections with the venture capital sector, which may provide useful.
17. Rick Mumford noted that there is an innovation pipeline from academics and start-ups to Innovate UK with the regulatory element often at the end of that pipeline. FSA is trying to ensure it is plugged in earlier to that pipeline and that there are channels to Innovate UK via Katrina Hayter (Challenge Director at Innovate UK, Transforming Food Production) to link up and establish priorities.
18. One member said start-ups often don't consider all the important issues that established food producers might: hygienic design, system specification, and consistency across business categories. A similar challenge was faced with CBD (i.e., a rush to the market of many actors not familiar with food production and food regulation). He met with Robin to discuss responsible innovation. FSA's current thinking in this space is risk based but thinking needs to be more preventative.
19. . Claire noted that the British Venture Capital Association may be a potential contact to better understand investments in this area. She noted that the defence often used is that new products and processes have to be approved by ACNFP, but in her time as an observer at ACNFP, it rarely sees new processes. It may be prudent for FSA to remind the business world that new processes need approval.
20. The Chair asked that members and colleagues reflect on the discussion and send in any more detailed thoughts on next steps.

SC 11.3a | Action (Robin May): Follow up discussion with John O'Brien on responsible innovation and links to preventative regulation.

SC 11.3b | Action (Members & Greg Wasinski): Follow up this discussion on next steps for WG6 with more detailed thoughts.

Agenda Item 4: SAC review (11:05-11:15)

21. Chun-Han noted the last Review of FSA's SACs was in 2015, published in 2016. The next review was scheduled for 2019 but was postponed due to UK exit from EU and the pandemic. The tailored review would take place over the coming months, using revised guidance from Cabinet Office.
22. Each SAC will do a self-assessment model (SAM), and this gives an indication of whether a deep review needed. However, it has been decided that SC and ACSS will have a deep review because they were established as a result of

the last Review.

23. The proposed timeline is that SAMS will be completed by the end of September 2022, with the deep reviews completed by the end of February 2023.
24. A member asked what would be needed from the Council. Chun-Han said Natasha Gladstone (SAC Administration Manager) will be working with secretariat complete the SAM and during this, questions may be posed to members. An independent review will be commissioned to perform the deep review.

Agenda Item 5: Other Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs) (11:30-11:45)

25. The update paper was presented, and Jonathan noted that the ACNFP plenary clashed with this meeting. Secretariat agreed to look at better SAC coordination.
26. The Chair mentioned that SACN had agreed to have an SC observer and she and the secretariat would follow up on this soon with members.
27. Chun-Han noted from secretariat's position it is important there is a balance struck between usefulness of attending SAC meetings in person and managing time and budgetary pressures. She proposed that rather than attend all SAC meetings, members mix between attending specific meetings of most use and catch-ups with SAC Chairs.
28. There was a mixed reaction from members who attend SAC meetings. Two noted that it was not always necessary for them to sit through all the discussions on a position paper or a long discussion of detail which is not high level enough to be of interest to the Science Council. They felt that regular catchups with the chair on broader topics for the SAC linked with attending a few meetings where items are of specific interest to the SC would be a good use of time.
29. One member was wary about this approach as it could lead to the SC becoming so removed from other SACs that members were not well sighted on their activities. Sometimes there are issues that are cross cutting that are not apparent to individual SACs, i.e., the increasing discussion on supplements across COT and ACNFP and poorly characterised materials make it difficult for SACs to review applications.
30. The Chair reminded members that attending SACs may be interesting and professionally exciting, but we have to demonstrate that participation gives really good value for the FSA. However, on the last point about cross-cutting

issues she noted that the horizon scanning function across SACs might be strengthened further.

31. Paul Nunn reminded members that secretariat had made a one-page form for members to give a brief readout of their attendance at SAC meetings but these were only regularly filled in by one SAC attendee. As such secretariat would look at how to further simplify the reporting process to remove any friction.
32. One member advised that as reporting SAC activity is done during the public session of these meetings then any sensitive information that may be of interest to the Council has to be omitted. They suggested that this update be moved to the closed session in the afternoon.

SC 11.5 | Action (Secretariat): Confirm how the proposed changes to participation and reporting of other SAC meetings would work in practice.

Agenda Item 6: AoB (11:45-11:55)

33. The Chair noted the 12th open meeting will be on 8 December 2022, dates for 2023 are not yet set and members will be contacted for availability soon.

Agenda Item 7: Public Questions (11:55-12:10)

34. No questions were submitted by the public or posed by the audience.

Agenda Item 8: Closing the public session (12:10-12:15)

35. The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the public session.

Annex 1: Lists of Attendees

Science Council:

- Prof Sandy Thomas | Science Council Chair | in person
- Prof John O'Brien | Science Council | in person
- Prof Peter Gregory | Science Council | online
- Prof Jonathan Wastling | Science Council | online
- Prof Peter Borriello CB | Science Council | online

- Prof Michael Tildesley | Science Council | online
- Prof Simon Pearson | Science Council | online
- Mrs Claire Nicholson | Science Council | online
- Prof Patrick Wolfe | Science Council | online
- Dr Paul Turner | Science Council | online

Secretariat:

- Dr Chun-Han Chan | Science Council Secretary | in person
- Paul A Nunn | Science Council Secretariat Lead | online
- Aisling Jao | Science Council Secretariat | in person

Departmental:

- Prof Robin May | FSA, Chief Scientific Advisor | online
- Emily Miles | FSA, Chief Executive Officer | online
- Prof Rick Mumford | FSA, Head of Science, Evidence and Research | online
- Dr Adam Cook | FSA, Head of Science Strategy, Capability and Research | online
- Dr Greg Wasinski | FSA, Head of Strategic Insight Team | online
- Adib Khondkar | FSA, Private Secretary to the Chief Scientific Advisor | online
- Lisa Nelson | FSA, Senior Communications Manager | online

Observers:

- Sonia Lourenco | Food and Drink Federation | online

Annex 2: Actions agreed at this meeting

| Ref. | Summary | Review Date | Lead |
|-----------------|--|-------------|--------------------|
| SC 11.1a | Review entries on the register of interests. | 1 July | Members |
| SC 11.1b | Circulate the latest version of Science Council Commissioning Process to members for final input | 31 August | Secretariat |

| | | | |
|---------------------|--|---------------|--|
| SC 11.2 | Contact Robin May about potential candidates in their networks for a bioinformatics position in the FSA | 31 August | Members |
| SC 11.3a | Follow up discussion with John O'Brien on responsible innovation and links to preventative regulation | 31 October | Robin May |
| SC 11.3b | Follow up this discussion on next steps for WG6 with more detailed thoughts. | 31 August | Members & Greg Wasinski |
| SC 11.5 | Confirm how the proposed changes to participation and reporting of other SAC meetings would work in practice | 31 October | Secretariat |