

Draft Minutes of the FSA Science Council 12th open meeting on 8 December 2022 (public session)

Note of the Science Council 12th open meeting public session (draft)

Summary

- The Chair presented a summary of her activity over the last 6 months.
- The FSA led a discussion of the FSA Science Update 2022 ([FSA 22/12/07](#)) to the FSA Board.
- The CSA updated the Council on his recent activity and discussions (including Government Office of Science's review of SACs, changing FSA priorities this year, the Precision Breeding Bill).
- Updates from Science Council members attending Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs) and a proposed streamlining of members' engagement.

Minutes

Agenda Item 1: Welcome and Introduction

1. The Chair (Sandy Thomas) welcomed attendees.
2. Members were asked by the Secretary (Chun-Han Chan) if their interests had changed since the last open plenary or if any interest had particular relevance to the topics under discussion. The Chair said that she had recently become a trustee of Rothamsted Research.
3. Minutes of the 11th Science Council open meeting (23 June 2022) were approved.

4. The Secretary updated members on actions arising from the public session of the 11th open meeting.

5. The Chair updated members on her activity over the last 6 months:

- This included catch-up meetings with Robin May ([FSA CSA](#)), Julie Hill ([ACSS](#)), Prof Susan Jebb ([FSA Chair](#)) and Emily Miles ([FSA CE](#)).
- In June she attended the 9th ACSS plenary updating them on Council activity.
- In September she gave a speech to the annual dinner of the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD) Technical Directors, focusing on the current Council work on food safety and net zero carbon (NZC).

6. The Chair then went on to highlight how closely she had been working with the team delivering the Working Group 6 review of food safety and NZC. She noted that the review is now complete and a final report is in draft and will be presented to the FSA Board at its meeting on 22 March 2023.

7. Finally, the Chair noted that the tailored review deep dive of Science Council is ongoing and encouraged members to actively engage with the process and provide feedback to the review team.

ACTION: Members to ensure their [register of interests](#) entry is up to date by cop 13 January.

Agenda Item 2: FSA Science update

8. Adam Cook led the discussion of the [FSA Science Update 2022](#) which was presented to the FSA Board at the 7 December meeting.

9. Adam presented highlights from the report and new metrics not included in the report: forecasted external science spend in capabilities (staff training, national labs etc) and laboratory/sampling for FY22/23 and forecasted overall spend for FY22/23.

10. There followed a **short discussion**, where the points below were made:

- FSA noted that if laboratory activity is delayed, then unspent money cannot be carried forward into the next year, but can be moved into other budgets to fund other priority activities.
- FSA evidence budget is split to include separate R&D and sampling programmes (incl. improving capability, purchasing equipment) which allows

differentiation between capital and programme spending.

- A member noted the science update paper is not consistent in setting out the consequence of each action (e.g. PATH-SAFE was delayed so reduced its focus for this year to two pathogens but it does not say which).
- Members were interested obtaining more granular understanding of the organisation of FSA's science and allocation of funds.
- A member thought some consideration is needed of how the new third pillar in the FSA strategy (healthy diets and sustainability) affects the composition of the Council, as there are no members with relevant expertise (e.g. nutrition).

ACTION: Secretariat to note request for additional content in future FSA Science Updates.

Agenda Item 3: Chief Scientific Advisor Update

11. The FSA Chief Scientific Advisor, Prof. Robin May provided a short update:

12. **Tailored review of FSA Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs):** The current deep dive of Science Council and ACSS aims to assist the FSA by looking for ideas and areas for improvement. He encouraged members to be open and transparent, not just about Science Council but other committee experiences.

13. **GO-Science review of HMG SACs:** There have been two meetings of the review group led by Sir Patrick Vallance, which has done good scoping job of SACs (109 total). FSA was highlighted as a leader in this space. The next step is improving the visibility of expertise across SACs and accessing this across government (but some SACs that deal with confidential information may be an issue). Also there are plans to streamline and standardise terminology and function (e.g. which SACs advise Ministers, which are advisory boards etc). GO-Science may approach Council members next year about their experiences with SACs.

14. **Independent scientists to work in FSA:** The Royal Society policy scheme has placed an academic in the FSA Products of Genetic Technology team. UKRI now have a specific science policy fellowship route to mirror more traditional laboratory fellowships they have funded in the past. They are looking to place scientists (with 2-3 years independence) from February in government, NGOs etc

ACTION: Council members to forward details of qualifying academics who would be interested science policy fellowships to Rick Mumford or

Robin May.

15. Changing FSA priorities: Review of Retained EU legislation is going ahead with a deadline of December 2023. Given the timeline, FSA will need to draw resource from other priorities to review around 150 pieces of legislation and repeal some legislation. In parallel to this, there is a shift in civil service funding which has led to FSA reprioritising its work, with food safety remaining a primary focus but some ambitions around future scoping and third pillar activity (healthy diets and sustainability) being revised. However, the Chancellor has been clear that R&D funding will be protected. Robin will keep the Council updated.

16. Precision Breeding Bill: Robin has attended a couple of technical meetings with Peers, in line with the Bill's progress through the House of Lords. Many of the Lords' concerns focus around powers within the Bill that would enable the Secretary of State for Environment to take a number of actions without consulting Parliament. However, peers' concerns that are more relevant to FSA science focus on the traceability and labelling of precision bred foods. Robin is holding meetings with stakeholder groups on both sides of the debate to ensure their views feed into FSA decision making on this topic. He may call on members for their individual expertise.

17. There followed a **short discussion** where the below points were made:

- FSA noted with tight budgets there is a need to spend on external R&D in a timely manner within its allotted financial year or lose that funding.
- The tightening budget does provide an opportunity for FSA to collaborate and pool funds (e.g. [PATH-SAFE](#) and citizen science).
- For surveillance FSA are trying to have better long term planning with national laboratories to identify potential future spend.
- Science and engineering fast stream has been reactivated and the Chancellor has announced that Sir Patrick Vallance will be leading a task force on regulatory opportunities for innovation. This ties in with regulatory reform FSA want on regulated products.

18. The Chair asked if the short term reduction in long term strategic work, includes work done by the Science Council or by the FSA's own Strategic Insights Team (SIT). Robin replied it would not be sensible to commission lots of foresight activity now when there is no capability to then act on that information. It makes sense to put on hold strategic work if its outcomes require resource to deliver. He expects that strategic activity will pick up when resources become released.

19. Rick Mumford added that SERD is a key facilitator and enabler and whatever FSA policy are going to prioritise we need to follow that. Finally, Michelle Patel said that SIT's strategic insights programme has filled many known foresight evidence gaps over the last few years. Effort could be better spend translating and influencing evidence instead.

Agenda Item 4: Other Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs)

20. The Chair presented the paper updating the Council on SAC activities (including a proposed new streamlined approach for members engaging with SACs).

21. There followed a **short discussion** where the below points were made:

- Members noted that they can see where there are issues that cut across SACs, one example given is the uncertainty when assessing risk of how people take supplements (such as turmeric) which was mentioned in both ACNFP and COC.
- Observations such as this can be shared with the Council Chair who can then raise at FSA's SAC Chair biannual meetings or by talking to her counterparts on the relevant SACs.
- Members noted some products can trigger a range of regulation not entirely under the control of FSA such as those containing CBD, may be given a clean bill of health as safe to use by ACNFP, but are then sold with medicinal claims (which is the responsibility of MHRA).
- However, local trading standards should take action to remove any product making a health claim if it does not have MHRA approval.

22. There was concern that there needed to be some control of how Science Council interacts with these committees as it could be seen as meddling. Secretariat advised there is an existing code of conduct when Council members attend other SACs which was agreed a couple of years ago with SAC Chairs. The Chair suggested secretariat should review the existing agreement. Robin added that input should be strategic not look like 'marking the homework' of other SACs.

23. Prof Wastling noted after the meeting that he had prepared text for the agenda paper on his attendance at the ACMSF but had not been able to submit it in time for inclusion in the meeting paperwork. Secretariat will produce a revised version of the original paper for this agenda item ref. SC 12-4(amended) including

this text.

ACTION: Secretariat to review the existing code of practice for Council members attending SACs to see whether it is still fit for purpose.

Agenda Item 5: Any Other Business

24. The Secretariat noted that it is in the process of assessing where existing SAC terms of reference and codes of practice need to be updated in light of the latest Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees (CoPSAC). It reminded members it is a good idea to refresh their understanding of the Science Council's Code of Practice (and Terms of Reference) annually. Finally the Secretariat provided notification that the annual performance appraisal for SACs will be starting around the end of March/April next year.

25. Finally, Chun-Han, notified the Science Council that she would be moving to another role in the FSA and will be stepping down from her position as Secretary on 16 December. The Chair thanked her for her diligent service and support over the last 3 years.

Agenda Item 6: Public Questions

26. None were received.

Agenda Item 7: Close Public Session

27. The Chair formally closed the public session of the Science Council 12th open meeting, thanking members and attendees for their contribution. She noted that the next open meeting will not be until 7 September 2023.

Annex 1: Lists of Attendees

Science Council:

- Prof. Sandy Thomas (Chair) – In person
- Prof. John O'Brien – In person
- Dr. Paul Turner – In person
- Prof. Peter Gregory – In person
- Claire Nicholson – In person
- Prof. Jonathan Wastling – In person
- Prof. Patrick Wolfe – Absent

- Prof. Michael Tildesley – Online
- Prof. Simon Pearson – In person
- Prof. Peter Borriello CB – In person

Secretariat:

- Dr. Chun-Han Chan – In person
- Paul A Nunn – In person
- Natalie Coles – In person
- Carol Scott – In person

Food Standards Agency:

- Prof Robin May (CSA) – Online
- Julie Pierce (Director of Information and Science) – In person
- Prof Rick Mumford (DCSA, Deputy Director of Science, Evidence and Research) – In person
- Michelle Patel (Deputy Director of Science, Evidence and Research) – In person
- Dr. Adam Cook (Head of Science Strategy, Capability & Research) – In person

Observers:

- Jacqui McElhiney (Food Standards Scotland) – Online
- Antony Threadgould (FSA Science Fast streamer) - Online

Annex 2: Actions agreed at this meeting

Ref.	Summary	Review Date	Lead
SC 12-1	Members to ensure their register of interests entry is up to date.	by 13 January 2023	Council Members (done)
SC 12-2	Secretariat to note request for additional content in future FSA Science Ongoing Updates.	Ongoing	Secretariat

SC 12-3	Council members to forward details of qualifying academics who would be interested science policy fellowships to Rick Mumford or Robin May.	by 13 February 2023	Council Members (via secretariat)
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SC 12-4	Secretariat to review the existing code of practice for Council members attending SACs to see whether it is still fit for purpose.	By 30 April 2023	Secretariat
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