



FSA Update: Science Strategy, Capability and Research Update Paper by Adam Cook

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1. Summary

1.1 This paper is primarily for information only and provides an update on recent developments within Science Strategy, Capability and Research team and the Science Evidence and Research Division on the FSA that may be of interest to the Science Council. However, Science Council members are encouraged to offer their input on any item, specifically how they might want to be involved.

2. Staffing

2.1 The Science Evidence and Research Division currently has approximately 100 staff showing a continued investment in FSA capability over the last few years. At the time of writing there are four specific areas of recent, or upcoming, recruitment that are of relevant to the Science Council.

2.2 Science Council support – As mentioned previously we have now recruited a Science Council project officer. This will provide additional resource to the

Science Council to ensure there are suitable dedicated resource to deliver future working group activities.

- 2.3 Strategic research – The [FSA Areas of Research Interest](#) were published on 10th July 2020 and have been discussed in previous Science Council papers. The FSA is making progress to deliver coherent research and evidence programmes (see below) and this will be enabled through the creation of the Strategic Research Team. This team will be responsible enabling the work of FSA scientists and strategic collaborations with external partners. The team leader for this team has been recruited and will be starting in January 2021 at which point we expect the rate of progress to increase.
- 2.4 Research programme coordination – in response to the recommendation of working group 5 we are recruiting specific posts with scientific project and programme management skills to coordinate the research and evidence programmes.
- 2.5 Horizon scanning – the FSA has made significant progress in horizon scanning. More details about this progress can be seen in the paper presented to the FSA Board in August (available [here](#)). To further develop this workstream a strategic insights team has been established and we are currently in the process of recruiting the members of this team. The Science Council will be invited to share their expertise as the work of the team progresses.

3. Science Council Recruitment

- 3.1 During the last recruitment campaign to the Science Council 3 new members were recruited to replace those that were leaving. For a period of time the number of members has been discussed and the need to stagger recruitment to ensure continuity and avoid all terms coming to an end at the same time has been debated. Therefore, as planned, the next scheduled recruitment campaign is will commence in November 2020 with new members inducted in April 2021. The intention of this campaign is to increase the size of the Science Council from 8 to 10 members.
- 3.2 The current membership has a significant breadth of expertise and networks, and experience of multidisciplinary working to tackle strategic challenges. The secretariat will work with the Science Council to identify any gaps in the current skillset or where additional expertise may be needed for future challenges. We

will also seek opportunities within this recruitment process to increase the diversity of the Science Council in all areas and will encourage underrepresented groups to apply.

- 3.3 As in previous years concurrently with this campaign, 16 members to the Science Advisory Committees will be recruited to fill vacancies in those areas.

4. EU Exit

- 4.1 Leaving the EU has not changed our top priority which is to ensure that UK food remains safe and is what it says it is. Our high standard of food safety and consumer protection will be maintained. From a science perspective, this requires ensuring the official control laboratory system remains robust and that we are prepared for additional risk assessments.
- 4.2 The FSA has a dedicated EU Transition work stream for official laboratories and we have continued to engage with National Reference Laboratories (NRLs) and Official Control Laboratories on changes to sampling post-transition including developing estimates for the changes in levels of sampling post transition to enable them to prepare. The FSA is working jointly with other government departments to ensure the laboratory system is prepared, including responding to any changes as a result of the Northern Ireland Protocol
- 4.3 For April 2020 we strengthened our risk analysis process to provide a 'minimum viable product' with several new elements including a clear separation between our risk assessment and risk management functions, an expanded role for our Scientific Advisory Committees and a new UK process for authorising regulated products. In the past six months we have been testing these systems and looking to move beyond the minimum viable product. As part of these preparations, we have considered further capacity needs. A bid has been submitted to Treasury in the latest spending round to consider whether funding is available to further extend these services.

5. Programme Approach to Research and Evidence

- 5.1 To deliver the FSA Areas of Research Interest, as has been mentioned previously, we are moving to a programme-based approach to the delivery of research. This is to ensure we are taking a coordinated multidisciplinary approach. We have now identified technical leads for each of the research

programmes and are initiating a series of steering group meetings in order to identify the research questions we need to answer in order to deliver robust policies and interventions. It is expected that key expertise from the Science Council and SACs will be sought during the development of the research programmes.

- 5.2 The first steering group to be established is that that for the food hypersensitivity programme. This groups will discuss how to implement the recommendations of Working Group 5 including the results of the priority setting exercise.

6. Collaborations and Publications

- 6.1 Since 2019, we have been expanding our external engagement in-line with recommendations from the Science Council and internal aspirations. Key collaborations in the past few months include:

- We held a food safety workshop with FSS and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to build shared strategic thinking around key emerging challenges for food safety in a transforming system, and opportunities to further an integrated approach to research and innovation for assurance of food safety and standards and innovation in food regulation.
- We co-hosted an online conference with the University of Sheffield entitled 'Understanding Food in a Digital World' as part of the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Festival of Social Science.

- 6.2 Key science publications by the FSA include:

- [Chief Scientific Advisor report on Risk Analysis](#)
- [2020 FSA science update](#)
- [Annual update on the FSA's antimicrobial resistance programme](#)

- 6.3 FSA staff also continue to be involved in leading academic research as named authors including:

- Holland et al. (2020) [Estimating deaths from foodborne disease in the UK for 11 key pathogens](#). BMJ Open Gastro (7).
- Holzhauser et al. (2020) [Are current analytical methods suitable to verify VITAL® 2.0/3.0 allergen reference doses for EU allergens in foods?](#) Food and Chemical Toxicology (145).

- Madsen et al (2020) [Can we define a level of protection for allergic consumers that everyone can accept?](#). Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology (117).

7. Other Matters

7.1 In addition to the key aspects above, there are some updates on other matters that have been presented to the Science Council in previous reports, they are:

- We continue to make good progress with the Strategic Evidence Fund (SEF) and have allocated 100% of the annual budget. However, delays to projects as a result of Covid-19 will affect this forecast and new proposals are being considered each month. This supports the aspiration to grow the fund in future years to ensure continued delivery of strategic science to support FSA needs
- The Science Council were provided with update on laboratories and sampling in June 2020 and since then the sampling framework has been further developed and presented to the Board on the 18 November outlining progress made with the framework and next steps. In addition, the workstream initiated to provide reassurance that our food is safe, inform post-Covid-19 priorities and maintain a level of sampling in the food system is progressing well and has provided assurance that the food system remains safe.

8. Discussion

8.1 The Science Council are asked to consider the information in this paper and provide any comment on how they might want to engage in any item identified.