

FSA SCIENCE UPDATE

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1. Summary

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

- The Science Strategy Capability and Research Unit
- Areas of Research Interest
- September of Science
- Horizon Scanning

2. Science Strategy, Capability and Research Unit (SSCR)

2.1 As was presented at the September 2019 meeting of the Science Council, to complete the structure of The Science, Evidence and Research Division, the Science Strategy, Capability and Research Unit (SSCR) was established to bring together the work of the CSA Team (CSAT), Scientific Methods and Laboratory Policy (SMLP) and the newly formed Strategic Projects team (SPT). In the intervening months, SSCR has started to make progress in a number of areas.

2.2 The Science Council will be aware of CSAT as this is the team responsible for, amongst other things, providing the secretariat for the Science Council and coordinating SAC engagement. Two significant recent CSAT achievements of relevance to the Science Council are revision of the Strategic Evidence Fund (see Science Council paper SC 6-11Ci) and progress with defining the FSA Areas of Research interest (discussed later in section 3).

- 2.3 The primary role of SMLP is to manage the UK laboratory capability surrounding food safety. The key recent success for SMLP is the redrafting of a joint MoU between FSA and Food Standards Scotland with the United Kingdom Accreditation Service to ensure effective and efficient laboratory accreditation.
- 2.4 The final team is SPT who are responsible for cross cutting scientific strategic projects that have received Board approval. Currently these are [National Laboratory Review](#), [Sampling Strategy](#) and [Horizon Scanning](#). Recruitment is currently underway to staff this team so at present most progress has been made with Horizon scanning (discussed later in Section 4)

3. Areas of Research Interest

- 3.1 Areas of Research Interest (ARI) are a cross-government initiative to identify the research priorities of different departments. The FSA published its ARIs in 2017 alongside other departments but it has been acknowledged that most departments have not fully utilised their benefits and as a result the Government Office for Science (Go-Science) has encouraged a refresh of all ARIs by the end of 2019. The original intention was to publish the ARIs by the end of December but in light of purdah this is being delayed until early 2020.
- 3.2 SSCR has been leading on a refresh of the FSA ARIs with the intention that they will form the basis of all research going forwards in order to meet the strategic aims of the organisation. The ARIs are comprised of 11 high level questions (see the Annex to this paper for the current draft) each underpinned by more detailed requirements. Internal consultation is currently underway to review the questions and detail beneath them. Wider consultation is expected in the coming weeks. Once published, the ARIs will be used to facilitate scientific engagement and collaboration with external research communities and across government departments.

4. September of Science

- 4.1 September of Science was an internal communications initiative to raise the profile of Science across the FSA. This involved a month long takeover of internal media channels and face-to-face events. The month was a great

success with engagement significantly increasing (e.g. total view on science pages went up by over 400% compared to the monthly average in the 2 months prior to the initiative).

- 4.2 The results of the pre-campaign survey showed that most responders understood why science is fundamental to the work of the FSA but there was less knowledge around how to access science, who to speak to in SERD and what the Strategic Evidence Fund (SEF) is. Therefore, during the campaign, and since, most effort has concentrated on increasing the awareness of what each team in SERD is working on and who to speak to in order to find out more and improving the SEF (see Science Council paper SC 6-7i). We intend on repeating the survey to measure the success of the campaign.

5. Horizon Scanning

- 5.1 The final item of note is the progress being made by SPT on horizon scanning. A collaborative approach will be taken to identify, explore and prioritise 'signals'. The initial stage of information gathering will be user driven; the 'signal' will then be added to the food system map which will seek to identify interdependencies and hence internal stakeholders who may be interested. The stakeholders identified will then generate cause, barrier and effect assessments of the 'signal' to allow for a risk-likelihood RAG score to be assigned to the output and for mitigations to be identified.
- 5.2 Currently the SPT has 1 FTE dedicated to creating the tools and systems for the Horizon Scanning process. An FSA community of interest, to be launched in January 2020, will build capability and capacity across the organisation. Initial process testing will be internal for refinement and will then be communicated externally with other Government departments and key FSA stakeholders.
- 5.3 The SPT are testing its horizon scanning approach through developing three different test case scenarios, that will be completed by June 2020. The outcomes and process reported back to the Science Council by September 2020. As part of this the SPT is working with the FSA's digital team in order to test how tools such as data scraping can be used to inform the FSA's Horizon Scanning program.

- 5.4 The SPT is creating a Horizon Scanning Community of interest This strategic prioritisation will be consolidated at an annual stakeholder workshop, where priorities will be tested and challenged by internal and external stakeholders. An annual board paper highlighting the FSA's future challenges and priorities will be created from this.
- 5.5 The lead on horizon scanning within SPT is working closely with Working Group 5 to ensure the activities align.

6. Discussion

- 6.1 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.

Areas of Research Interest (Top Level Questions)

1. How can the FSA remain at the cutting-edge when developing and implementing food regulations by fully considering the most up to date cross cutting scientific and technological developments?
2. How can the FSA protect the UK consumer from the health risks posed by food hypersensitivity (incl. allergies and intolerance)?
3. How can the FSA fully understand the impacts of foodborne diseases and develop modern preventative and control measures to mitigate them?
4. How can the impact chemical contaminants (incl. nanomaterials and microplastics) in food be assessed and minimised?
5. What is the role of food safety in nutrition and public health?
6. What is the impact of novel and non-traditional foods and processes on the UK consumer?
7. Which measures will assist the FSA to prevent and control the spread of AMR through the food chain?
8. How can digital innovations be used to create a safer food system?
9. What role does consumer and FBO behaviour and perception play in ensuring food safety?
10. What are the best ways of identifying emerging risks and opportunities, and their impact on the UK food system?
11. What is the impact of crime in the UK food supply chain, including food fraud, and how can it be better detected and monitored?