

**FSA Science Council Working Group on Risk and Uncertainty (Working Group 2)
Tuesday 8 May 2018 Teleconference meeting**

Attendees

Working Group	Secretariat	FSA
Mark Woolhouse (Chair)	Patrick Miller	Guy Poppy, Chief Scientific Adviser
Sandy Thomas	Gwen Aherne	Michelle Patel, Head of Social Science Transformation
Sarah O'Brien	Jane Ince	Justin Everard, Head of External Communications
Mark Rolfe	Ben Goodall	Manisha Upadhyay, Microbiological Risk Assessment Unit
Paul Turner		Milen Georgiev, Team Leader Meat Hygiene Policy
Apologies: John O'Brien		Carles Orri, EU Exit Risk Assessment Workstream Lead

Agenda item 1 - Welcome and introductions

1. The Working Group (WG) Chair Mark Woolhouse welcomed attendees to the call. He encouraged FSA attendees to contribute to the discussions.

Agenda item 2 - Draft minutes of the 5 February meeting:

- **SC WG2 TC2 paper 2**
2. The Chair invited final comments on the draft minutes of the last meeting 5 February. He noted that Action 2 (to arrange mid-year review by telephone for the Chairs of Working Groups 1 and 2) could be removed as things had moved on since then. Subject to this change the minutes were agreed.

ACTION 1 – Secretariat to prepare final version of the minutes of 5 February meeting

Agenda item 3: Recap on Working Group's progress to date:

- **SC WG2 TC2 paper 3: Draft uncertainty principles**
3. The Chair noted that the Working Group would need to decide how to combine its outputs from Phase 1 and 2 of its work. He suggested that principles for communication of risk and uncertainty, to be developed and drawn from working group Phase 2 discussions, could be incorporated into the Phase 1 principles in a form consistent to that document. Members agreed this seemed a sensible approach.
 4. The Chair invited comments from both the Working Group and FSA attendees on the latest Draft Uncertainty Principles. The following points were made:

- a. The Working Group found that the last 2 bullets did not relate specifically to uncertainty and could be moved to the general text on communication.
- b. The Working Group felt the definitions of variability and uncertainty were important and should be incorporated fully into the main document (with other definitions). Manisha Upadhyay noted that the definitions quoted and used in chemical risk assessment were also used in microbiological risk assessment.
- c. The last bullet point in the risk assessment section – correct this to read: “Measures that could be taken to reduce uncertainty and *characterise* variability should be identified” (since variability, as defined, cannot be reduced)
- d. The last bullet point in the risk management section – change ‘sensible’ to balanced/reasonable/proportionate/considered
- e. Risk communication bullet 3 – text on ‘framing of a counterweight to science’ has become redundant in that point
- f. Risk communication last bullet is repeated in document ‘what does successful communication look like’
- g. Guy Poppy noted that it would be helpful if communication principles referred to the need to reflect the needs of different audiences, such as in the EFSA draft guidance which characterises EFSA’s target audiences by reference to levels of expertise (entry level, informed, technical)
- h. The Chair recorded again the Working Group’s thanks to Steve Wearne, FSA Director of Policy, for producing initial draft principles on uncertainty for the Working Group’s consideration.

Agenda item 4 – A practical risk communication framework for the FSA – discussion:

- **SC WG2 TC2 paper 4: What does successful communication on risk look like?**
 - **SC WG2 TC2 paper 5: A practical risk communication framework for the FSA**
 - **Note of WG comments on possible communication principles**
5. The Chair invited Michelle Patel to introduce her discussion paper. Michelle is leading work on risk communication, working with the FSA’s new Advisory Committee on Social Sciences (ACSS), and drawing on the Working Group’s advice. Michelle’s paper sought the Working Group’s advice on some key questions which will help to shape the development of a practical risk communication framework for the FSA. A parallel paper was to be tabled at the first ACSS meeting on 15 May¹ (to be informed by the Working Group discussion on 8 May).
 6. Michelle confirmed that she planned to develop the framework ready for use by April 2019. This will be an operational tool for FSA staff. Michelle invited comments on the paper and questions listed within in. The Working Group made the following points -

¹ <https://acss.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/acss-risk-communication.pdf>

- a. FSA has to expect criticism and challenge and anticipate and be prepared for this. Having a checklist can be useful but doesn't avoid criticism. This point was also picked up in Phase 1 recommendations. Further to this, the Working Group advised that risk of criticism should not stop the FSA from communicating risks to the public. Michelle noted there was some evidence to suggest that FSA communications that generate the most criticism of the FSA can also be those that enhance trust in the FSA.
 - b. FSA needs to explain why it considers a particular action or decision is proportionate, making specific reference to the target audience.
 - c. The FSA could consider extending further its programme for testing approaches to risk communication with consumer focus groups, and with other stakeholder groups and audiences. The Working Group noted that questions or topics that are too generalised and not for a specific communication/campaign may generate less useful information; however, on the other hand this sort of research could be useful in building a stronger evidence base on approaches that work across issues. Guy Poppy agreed this could be useful to inform the FSA's communication functions at a strategic level.
 - d. The FSA's values of openness, honesty and transparency should be mentioned explicitly and up front in the framework.
 - e. The Working Group expressed its support for the FSA's work to develop its evidence base on trust (what drives trust in FSA and what undermines it). The Working Group recommended that the FSA should continue to develop the evidence base so that its communications continue to enhance trust in the FSA.
7. The Chair invited comments on paper 4 'What does successful communication on risk look like?'. This had been developed from Working Group discussions in February and comments provided since that meeting. The Working Group made the following points:
- a. The language needs to be more robust and the points need to be fleshed out into the same format as the Phase 1 principles.
 - b. Bullets 2 and 4 could be brought together to make the point that FSA explains why it considers a particular action or decision is proportionate, making specific reference to the target audience.
 - c. The Working Group favoured a short list of principles that were FSA specific. This would be more useful to FSA than adopting work done by others, but the FSA principles could reference other important material. (This point is also picked up later at paragraph 9).
 - d. Bullets 5 and 7 to be brought together – on reaching target audience and achieving desired behaviour change. The FSA should aim to measure both to monitor impact of communication. The Working Group noted that changing behaviour through communication alone is not easy and where communication does affect behaviour this is often difficult to demonstrate clearly.

Agenda item 5: Communication tools and guidance from others:

- **SC WG2 TC2 paper 6: Risk Profiles**
 - **SC WG2 TC2 paper 7: Other approaches and guidance on communicating risk**
8. The Secretariat had identified some relevant work by others and would welcome Working Group comments on these:
- a. Guidance or reports on risk communication:
 - i. POST note on communicating risk²
 - ii. Defra Science Advisory Council report on communicating risk³
 - iii. EFSA guidance (a consultation on draft EFSA guidance on communication of uncertainty in risk assessment).⁴
 - b. Specific tools: Use of risk profiles by BfR (German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment)⁵.
9. The Working Group asked whether the FSA could use guidance off the shelf rather than developing a new set of principles. Guy Poppy noted the value in having something FSA specific and succinct - the principles developed through Working Group discussions are necessarily very specific and relevant to FSA, and they have had a large pool of contributions from FSA staff and the FSA's Scientific Advisory Committees. Guy felt this was an important point to note in the introduction to the principles. He suggested this could also reference important guidance from others which the Working Group has looked at and which it considers the FSA should refer to in developing its approach.
10. The Working Group agreed that if the Working Group's report and principles are too long and complicated few people will read it.
11. The Working Group noted the POSTnote on communicating risk was very useful as a generic reference suitable for a wide audience.
12. The Working Group considered the Defra Science Advisory Council sub group report to be an impressive piece of work which had clearly taken considerable time and effort. The Working Group would be interested to hear how it has been taken up within Defra. The Working Group advised that the FSA should in particular take a detailed look at the report's eight components of good risk communication and its Table 1 checklist for framing and evaluation of different risk communication activities.
13. The Working Group recommended that the FSA engages with the EFSA consultation process. Table 1 of the draft EFSA guidance setting out a mapping of EFSA's target audiences for its external communications according to expertise (entry, informed, technical levels) could be of particular interest and use for FSA. The Group noted that pages 15-17 of the EFSA guidance (section 3 Guidance on Communicating Uncertainty) was closest to the activity the Working Group has been undertaking, although the

² <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/POST-PN-0564>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/science-advisory-council-communicating-risk-report>

⁴ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/consultations/call/180504>

⁵ http://www.bfr.bund.de/en/bfr_risk_profile-186391.html

overall approach is more in the form of technical and operational instructions than the principles-based approach the Working Group is producing. The Group noted that the draft guidance seemed very comprehensive as an operating manual.

14. The Working Group agreed its advice should include for the FSA to consider the usefulness of specific communication tools such as risk profiles.

Agenda item 6: Discuss Working Group final outputs (to include phase 1 and phase 2) for 27 June Council meeting; and next steps

15. The Chair would work with the Secretariat to develop the Working Group's outputs into the form of Principles on Communication of Risk. As discussed at the start of the meeting (see paragraph 3) the Principles on Uncertainty and the Principles on Communication would be combined with the Phase 1 Principles on Risk and Uncertainty. This would be circulated for comments to the Working Group, to FSA staff contributing to the Working Group meetings, and to the FSA Scientific Advisory Committee Chairs. Comments would be requested by end of May to meet the deadline for clearance of Science Council meeting papers during the week commencing 11 June.
16. The Council Chair Sandy Thomas requested that the Secretariat provide advance warning and reminders on deadlines for comment.
17. In response to a question from Mark Woolhouse, Guy Poppy confirmed that there would be a process for feeding back to the Council on FSA's response to and progress on implementation of this and other WG's recommendations. This could be a standing item at Council meetings.

ACTION 2 – Secretariat to discuss with Chair and prepare and circulate a combined draft of the principles on establishing and communicating risk and uncertainty for comments by mid-May

Meeting actions list

ACTION 1 – Secretariat to prepare final version of the minutes of 5 February meeting

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