

FSA Science Council Working Group 3: Global food system risks and horizon scanning

First meeting, Thursday 28 September 2017

Conference Room 1, 4th floor, Aviation House, London

Participants

Working Group	FSA	Secretariat
John O’Brien (WG Chair) Laura Green Mark Rolfe Sandy Thomas Patrick Wolfe (t/c) Mark Woolhouse	Guy Poppy (FSA CSA) Andrew Damant (Surveillance Programme lead)	Patrick Miller Gwen Aherne Emma Lamb Rachel Mumford

INTRODUCTION

1. Sandy Thomas (Council Chair) and Guy Poppy gave a brief introduction highlighting that this Working Group (WG) has a slightly longer timeframe than the other two WGs, in order to ensure that a quality product is developed through the desk study and the analysis of its outputs. Sandy will update the FSA Board on progress in her report to the Board in March 2018.
2. Mark Rolfe declared an interest: his company is also commissioning a pilot study on surveillance. The Chair and Secretariat agreed that while this was relevant it did not represent a conflict with regard to the discussion at this meeting.
3. The WG made a number of overarching comments which would inform its work. Horizon scanning (HS) is becoming ever more important and is essential to ensure the FSA remains on the front foot for upcoming issues, particularly in light of Exit from the EU. The key is that horizon scanning should lead to actions and this depended on FSA being clear on what it wanted to achieve from HS.
4. The WG agreed its Terms of Reference.

STRENGTHENING FSA’S HORIZON SCANNING CAPABILITY

5. The WG discussed this question drawing on background papers on FSA’s current capability and activity (paper 1-3) and on FSA’s developing programme on strategic surveillance (Paper 1-4).
6. The WG noted that while surveillance was a distinct activity from HS and foresight, there were nevertheless potential overlaps in terms of the information sources, tools and people who might be involved in each. Surveillance is generally shorter term than horizon scanning or foresight, and focused on specific current or imminent risks (in FSA’s case, to food safety and authenticity). Horizon scanning tends to be broader and less filtered as it isn’t looking for specifics. Foresight does look at specific questions but

these are set at a more strategic level and set in a longer time frame; HS and foresight relate more to resilience than immediate issues.

7. Part of the task for the WG is to see how a capability on HS and foresight could complement the work on surveillance and how the two could be mutually supportive. HS will throw up issues for which surveillance will be part of the FSA's response; while surveillance may identify issues which are more in the territory of HS.

Surveillance

8. The WG noted a number of points on surveillance which might also be relevant to or have parallels for their discussions on HS:
 - (i). It needs to be embedded beyond the science teams and be highlighted to and developed with customers.
 - (ii). Algorithms should ideally be open and adaptable/usable by others and in other contexts.
 - (iii). Outputs will reflect the quality of the data that go in and there would need a process to assess and grade quality. Andrew Damant confirmed this is part of the programme. The WG suggested ONS and other government departments may have useful learning/capability in this area.
 - (iv). Selection and analysis of data should ensure that events for which there is no precedent in the data don't get missed (such as happened with the banking crisis).
 - (v). Surveillance could provide insights useful for HS and also provide one mechanism for taking action to follow up insights from HS
 - (vi). There were few examples of such an approach in other food regulators but it may be useful to discuss with those working in the security area who are likely to have well-developed approaches. (Guy noted that he and the FSA Chair are speaking to the insurance sector which also has interesting perspectives on this).
9. Patrick Wolfe offered to provide specific input on surveillance, separately from the work of the WG, drawing on his work in data science

Horizon scanning and foresight

10. The WG noted that the outline of FSA's current activities showed FSA was aware of and linked to most of the relevant activities across government and more widely, but it was evident that the FSA's capacity to engage with these was limited under current resource, and is more reactive than proactive. The WG also noted there was limited intelligent customer capacity for HS and foresight in FSA and no staff with specialist training in doing this type of work. To expand capability, FSA would need a more strategic approach which could perhaps mirror elements of the approach to surveillance.
11. The WG felt it would need to revisit these issues in more detail in light of the outputs of the desk study and workshop. Carrying out these activities would in themselves make a significant contribution to developing FSA capability both in the evidence base and in engagement with and intelligent customer capability for HS, through the workshop.

However it is likely that more resource would be needed to make a significant increase in capability.

12. The study will also help to elucidate what sort of HS the FSA needs and should lead to further, specific actions to develop these further. It should also help to elaborate how doing more will lead to specific benefits. The specification for the desk study should ensure its outputs support this objective (see below).
13. The WG noted that there was scope to explore increasing our work with other Departments (such as Defra) and that their activity in this space may also increase as they face similar drivers to those prompting FSA to seek to expand its capability.
14. The WG noted that the Strategic Evidence Fund is an obvious source to look to for support ongoing activity and investment in HS activity.

SPECIFICATION FOR AND APPROACH TO DESK STUDY AND WORKSHOP (PAPER 1-5)

15. The WG discussed the draft specification for the desk study and the approach to the workshop with experts and stakeholder which would elaborate the implications and recommendations for FSA.
16. The WG agreed that the study must go beyond another literature review and allow the WG and FSA to draw out the key issues and implications for the FSA. The specification needs to be clear on what the FSA needs, but leave enough room both for creativity in how the study is approached; to be open to academic and consultant contractors; and also to be realistic in its expectation of the depth of any contractors understanding of FSA's remit and needs. It may be helpful to include a 'one-page' outline of the FSA and its remit and priorities as background to the specification.
17. The WG agreed that the questions in the specification should be modified to reflect these points, and to pick up the previous discussion with regard to the study helping to identify how FSA could develop and maintain its HS capability.
18. The WG suggested the revised words below:

Q1 What are the key novel or emergent features of the potential future food system to 2030?

Q2 Which potential features, changes, trends or dynamics in the system have the most significance for the UK and why?

Q3 What are the main challenges and opportunities relating to food safety and authenticity in response to the issues identified in Q1 and Q2?

Q4 What sources of evidence can the FSA draw on to better understand, prioritise and respond to these issues?

Q5 What approaches and inputs could FSA have access to in order to implement an ongoing capability for horizon scanning and foresight?

19. With regard to the workshop and other stages in developing its report to the FSA, the WG agreed the following:

- (i). Early working by the contractor should be shared with the WG to ensure that the end product will be useful. The better the contractors are directed the better the resultant report will be. There should be a longer period for iteration and comments on the draft report from the desk study, allowing inputs from the WG as well as key experts and stakeholders in FSA and externally.
- (ii). The workshop should be held on one day and focused, with no more than around 20 participants, to ensure an effective and productive discussion. FSA would lead on organising the workshop with input from the WG; the contractor would participate. FSA could consult internally first to ensure wider views were represented.
- (iii). FSA (WG Secretariat) would lead on drafting the report from the workshop, working with the WG, and this would form the core of the WG's report to the Council and to FSA.
- (iv). The outputs of the workshop will need to allow the WG to develop clear recommendations to FSA on how the FSA can strengthen its HS capability and this should be reflected in the approach for the workshop.
- (v). FSA should look to what other activities it could include, besides the workshop, to build awareness, engagement and intelligent customer capability on the back of the desk study and workshop. For example, internal workshop(s) on what HS can do and how to be an intelligent customer for HS
- (vi). The WG would provide further advice at a later stage on who should be invited to contribute to iteration on the draft report and to the workshop.

Action 1: Update the draft specification to reflect the discussion at the WG meeting and circulate to the WG for final comments (Secretariat)

Action 2: Provide input on people/organisations to be included in (i) the iteration on the draft report and (ii) to the workshop (WG)

Action 3: Update the timeline and develop the approach to the study and workshop to reflect the discussion at the WG's 1st meeting (Secretariat)

Invitations to tender

20. The WG discussed who should be invited to tender for the study, noting that the Secretariat had developed a list of possible candidates drawing on input from Sandy and Guy and from the HS network across government. The WG identified some further groups and individuals to be considered for the invitation to tender.¹

Peer review/expert input

21. Sandy, John and Guy would act as peer reviewers for the bids; we could include someone from the cross-government HS community too if availability allows. FSA

¹ Their names are omitted from this note as details of the tender process are commercially confidential.

should consider others who we would want to make aware and potentially ask for input as expert reviewers as the study progresses - these might include the Defra Science Advisory Council.

NEXT STEPS

22. The draft specification should be sense-checked to make sure it is consistent with the updated questions and the points above, and the timeline would need to be updated (and extended) to reflect these changes.
23. The Secretariat will work with the WG to draft the WG's report to the Council meeting in December. The report would include an outline of the key points from the WG discussion including any initial recommendations; an update on progress on the tender and workshop; and invitations for input from the Council on participants for the iteration and the workshop and potential expert advisers.

Action 4: Draft a first report from the WG to the Council for comment by the WG Chair and members (Secretariat).

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Action		Owner	Due Date
1	Update the draft specification to reflect the discussion at the WG meeting and circulate to the WG for final comments	Secretariat	19 Oct 2017
2	Provide input on people/organisations to be included in (i) the iteration on the draft report and (ii) to the workshop	WG	22 Dec 2017
3	Update the timeline and develop the approach to the study and workshop to reflect the discussion at the WG's 1 st meeting	Secretariat	31 Oct 2017
4	Draft a first report from the WG to the Council for comment by the WG Chair and members	Secretariat	Mid-Nov 2017