

PAPER SSRC 01.03.2008 - PROVISIONAL MEDIUM TERM WORK PROGRAMME

The Social Science Research Committee (SSRC) has been set up to provide the Agency with access to external expertise and challenge in how the Agency draws on and makes use of the social sciences. Specifically, the SSRC has been established to support the Agency in developing its social science capacity by:

1. Advising how social science can best contribute to meeting the Agency's strategic aims
2. Advising and critically assessing how the Agency gathers and uses social science evidence and advice
3. Drawing on wider expertise as appropriate to provide independent critique on social science based evidence
4. Keeping the Agency in touch with relevant social science activity both in the UK and internationally

The Chair and Secretariat have developed the following provisional medium term work plan for discussion at the first meeting of the Committee. The work programme has been structured under each of the four Terms of Reference listed above. There are three specific areas where the Agency is looking to the Committee for its expertise and advice. In addition there are some ad hoc activities where the Committee can support the Agency on an on-going basis.

1. Advise how social science can best contribute to meeting the Agency's Strategic Plans

Implementation of the Social Science Research Strategy

Background: The Agency needs to draw on a broader range of social sciences and social science research methods to further our commitment to evidence based policy development. We have developed a draft strategy for developing and embedding social science across the Agency and now need to implement the strategy.

Aim: Subject to the SSRC endorsing the Agency's Social Science Research Strategy, the Agency would welcome the Committee's support in developing an action plan to implement the strategy. Each of the five strategic elements needs a comprehensive set of actions with a clear view on what the Agency needs to deliver in the short, medium and longer term and by whom.

How and when: One way to do this would be for a couple of SSRC members to work closely with the Agency's Social Science Research Unit to prepare an action and delivery plan by the end of March 2009.

2. Advise and critically assess how the Agency gathers and uses social science evidence and advice

Advise on the future design and scope of the Agency's portfolio of attitudes research

Background: Currently, the Agency has three main vehicles for capturing public attitudes:

- Annual Consumer Attitudes Survey (CAS)
- Quarterly Tracking survey (Tracker)
- British Social Attitudes survey (BSA)

The Agency has commissioned an annual attitudes survey (CAS) and tracking survey since it was set up in 2000¹. The content of these surveys have not changed significantly since they began. The Agency also sponsored a module on the BSA² for the first time in 2008 – the theme was public attitudes to food technology. The Agency plans to repeat this module in a few years time and is currently deciding on a suitable theme for BSA 2009.

Aim: The Agency would value advice about an alternative approach to its annual attitudes survey, taking account of the tracker and BSA module that we could commission during 2009 and which would serve as a possible baseline prior to our next strategic plan for 2010-2015.

How and when: A way of doing this would be to set up a sub-group of the SSRC which is led by one or two members. The sub-group would work closely with the Social Science Research Unit and other FSA colleagues. We would like to receive SSRC's recommendations by April 2009 so we have time to commission and gather data during 2009.

Advise on the scope of FSA/ESRC research collaboration on behaviour

Background: We have negotiated funding to work in collaboration with the ESRC on a programme of research to provide a holistic understanding of food purchasing and consumption behaviours. The aim of the research is to draw on a wide range of social science disciplines and methods to harness a broader understanding about how and why people eat the food that they do. CAS 2006 data was segmented and one idea might be to undertake a longitudinal and ethnographic approach to understand more about each of the four segments³. Another idea (possibly in addition) might be to explore how the Agency

¹ CAS 2007 can be found at <http://www.food.gov.uk/science/socsci/surveys/foodsafety-nutrition-diet/eighthcas2007> and the Tracker at <http://www.food.gov.uk/science/socsci/surveys/publictrackingsurvey>

² www.britsocat.com

³ <http://www.food.gov.uk/science/socsci/surveys/foodsafety-nutrition-diet/>

could make use of existing data sources such as BMRB's Target Group Index (TGI). We are also keen to incorporate people's use of food labels into the study.

Aim: We would like the SSRC to work with the Social Science Research Unit and the ESRC to scope the content and design of this collaboration. The ESRC will issue a call for proposals and help manage the research and dissemination.

How and when: We envisage a sub-group of the SSRC working with the Unit and the ESRC to discuss and agree a suitable approach at the next meeting of the SSRC. We would like to be in a position to issue a call for proposals by the end of 2008.

Input to the Agency's scientific research programme reviews

Each of the Agency's scientific research programmes is reviewed every five years by an expert panel. Our portfolio of nutrition research is about to be reviewed and the SSRC will be one of several stakeholders who will be invited to contribute to the review. Views are likely to be sought during October to December 2008.

At the end of September this year (29th and 30th) our GM and novel foods programme is being reviewed and a member of the SSRC has been invited to attend the proceedings.

On-going methodological advice

From time to time the Agency would like to seek advice from the SSRC on research design issues for pieces of social science research commissioned within and in addition to its research programmes.

3. Draw on wider expertise as appropriate to provide independent critique on social science based evidence

This area might involve the SSRC reviewing FSA or external research and advising on possible peer reviewers for FSA commissioned research.

4. Keep the Agency in touch with relevant social science activity both in the UK and internationally

On an ongoing basis the Agency would like to ask the SSRC for advice on key external links and new pieces of relevant social science research that we should be tapped into. Initially we would like the SSRC to comment on our initial list of journals and organisations (Annex 1 and Annex 2).

Annex 1 List of useful journals

Methodological

Journal of Social Research Methods

International Journal of Social Research Methodology

Journal of Social Policy

Food specific

Food, Culture and Society

Food Policy

Other relevant journals

European Journal of Social Psychology

British Journal of Social Psychology

Journal of Applied Social Psychology

British Journal of Health Psychology

Journal of Social Issues

Journal of Marketing

Journal of Retailing

Journal of Consumer Research

Qualitative Market Research

MRS 'Research Magazine'

Annex 2 List of key organisations

We plan to develop a database of key organisations with whom we need to engage by either regular written, face to face contact or monitoring websites for example so we are aware of relevant external research.

Universities

- University of Sheffield – Changing Families, Changing Food programme (Peter Jackson)
- University of Southampton - Professor Jim Stevenson
- University of Surrey - Food, Consumer, Behaviour and Health research centre (Dick Shepherd)
- University of Sussex
- University of York
- SOAS - Food Studies Group
- BSA – SCOFF group (Wendy Wills)
- ESRC (Adrian Alsop)

Social Research Organisations

- NatCen
- Social Research Association
- Market Research Society

Commercial and Market Research companies

- Mintel – Head of Retail Research, Richard Perks
- Future Foundation
- Data monitor
- TNS
- BMRB
- GfK NOP
- Ipsos Mori
- ONS

Other research institutes

- Sustainable Consumption Institute <http://www.tescocorporate.com> (based at University of Manchester)
- National Children's Bureau
- Institute of Food Research, Norwich – Consumer Science
- Leatherhead Food International, LFI – Sensory and Consumer research
- Cardiff Institute of Society, Health and Ethics (CISHE)
- Public Health Improvement Research (PHIRN) – Cardiff University
- Institute for Social Marketing & Centre for Tobacco Control Research, University of Stirling & The Open University,

Government Departments

- GSRU
- DfT
- HSE
- GSRU
- DEFRA
- COI
- DoH

Retail / Manufacture

- UFIC, United Food Industries Corporation
- British Council of Shopping Centres – Changing Demographics and the third age shoppers
- Institute of Grocery Distribution
- British Retail Consortium
- Tesco
- Sainsburys
- Waitrose
- Morrisons
- Co-op
- Asda
- M&S
- Food and Drink Federation (FDF)

International

- European Food Information Council
- FSANZ (Food Standards Agency Australia and New Zealand)
- Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
- Food Safety Authority Ireland
- EFSA (European Food Safety Authority)
- Canadian Food Inspection Agency

NGO's

- WRAP
- Which?