

Social Science Research Committee – Terms of reference

The role of the SSRC is to help the Agency achieve its strategic goal of strengthening its capacity for social science research. It will provide assurance to the Agency's Board about how the Agency gathers and uses social science evidence and advice.

The terms of reference for the Social Science Research Committee are:

- To support the Agency develop its social science capacity by advising how social science can best contribute to meeting the Agency's Strategic Plans
- To advise and critically assess how the Agency gathers and uses social science evidence and advice
- To draw on wider expertise as appropriate to provide independent critique on social science based evidence
- To keep the Agency in touch with relevant social science activity both in the UK and internationally

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COMMITTEE (SSRC) DRAFT CODE OF PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

1. In line with central government guidance and Food Standards Agency policy, each independent advisory committee that advises the Agency operates to a published Code of Practice that sets out the key principles and procedures that govern the Committee's work.
2. The Code of Practice for the SSRC is subject to periodic review by the Committee in light of experience with its use and any new or updated guidance from central Government or from the Agency.

PURPOSE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SSRC

3. The role of the SSRC is to help the Agency achieve its strategic goal of strengthening its capacity for social science research. It will provide assurance to the Agency's Board about how the Agency gathers and uses social science evidence and advice. The Committee's Terms of Reference are to:
 - Support the Agency develop its social science capacity by advising how social science can best contribute to meeting the Agency's Strategic Plans
 - Advise and critically assess how the Agency gathers and uses social science evidence and advice
 - Draw on wider expertise as appropriate to provide independent critique on social science based evidence
 - Keep the Agency in touch with relevant social science activity both in the UK and internationally

PUBLIC SERVICE VALUES

4. All members must:
 - Follow the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life
 - Not misuse information gained in the course of their public service for personal gain or for political purpose, nor seek to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interests or those of connected persons, firms, businesses or other organisations; and
 - Not hold any paid or high-profile unpaid posts in a political party, and

not engage in specific political activities on matters directly affecting the work of this body. When engaging in other political activities, members should be conscious of their public role and exercise proper discretion.

THE ROLE OF THE SSRC CHAIR

5. The role of the SSRC Chair is to:

- Chair the Committee's meetings, overseeing the operation and output of the Committee
- Act as the Committee's spokesperson to the Board (see paragraph 7)
- Liaise with FSA staff, and provide ad hoc advice to the Agency, as necessary
- Decide, in discussion with the Secretariat, who should be invited to give evidence/provide information to the Committee
- In discussion with the Secretariat, draw on wider social science expertise, setting up Working/Ad hoc groups as appropriate in order to gather information and provide thorough and robust advice to the Agency
- Ensure that every member of the Committee is heard and that no view is ignored or overlooked, using where appropriate, a structured process which ensures that all views are captured and explored
- Ensure that unorthodox and contrary views are given a fair hearing
- Ensure that any significant diversity of opinion among the members of the Committee over its findings is accurately reflected in the report and in any other communications with the Agency
- Ensure that the Committee acts in the public interest;
- Represent the Committee to the public, the media and other interested organisations in consultation with the Agency *via* the Secretariat (unless other specific arrangements have been made);
- Sign off the Committee's Annual Report to the FSA Board
- Each year conduct a brief feedback on Members' experience of the Committee

THE ROLE OF THE MEMBERS AND LAY MEMBER

6. The role of the Members is to:

- Attend meetings (and working groups, as appropriate)
- Engage fully in collective consideration of the issues, taking account of the full range of relevant factors, including any guidance issued by the

Agency or the Board

- In dealing with issues to make the Committee aware of the full range of opinion within their discipline
- Ensure that contrary views and the views and values of stakeholders are taken into account in formulating advice
- Ensure that the Committee's advice is comprehensible from the point of view of a lay person and that the implications of any uncertainties concerning the basis of the Committee's advice are fully explained
- Ensure that the minutes of meetings are accurate and that any concerns are recorded
- Act in the public interest;
- Liaise with the Secretariat and FSA staff as necessary
- Contribute to and approve the Annual Report
- Participate in the annual feedback process of the Committee

COMMUNICATIONS WITH AGENCY BOARD, CHIEF SCIENTIST AND EXECUTIVE

7. Communications between the SSRC and the Agency Board will generally be through the Committee's Secretariat although the SSRC Chair has the right of access to Board members, *via* the Agency Chair, at all times. Any member also has the right of access to the Board on any matter which he or she believes raises important issues relating to his or her duties as a member. In such cases the agreement of the SSRC Chair should normally be sought.
8. Similarly, communications between the SSRC and the Agency Executive will be generally be through the Committee's Secretariat, although the SSRC Chair has the right of access to the Director of Communications at all times. Any member also has the right of access to the Agency's Chief Scientist on any matter which he or she believes raises important issues relating to his or her duties as a member. In such cases the agreement of the SSRC Chair should normally be sought.

ROLE OF THE SECRETARIAT

9. The role of the Secretariat is to:
 - Support the Committee by assembling and analysing information, preparing papers and taking minutes of the Committee's meetings
 - Advise the Committee on process and procedure
 - Draw the Committee's attention to any emerging issues of concern

- Identify all relevant and appropriate analytical information and ensure that it is made available to the Committee
- Ensure that the proceedings of the Committee are properly documented so that there is a clear audit trail showing how the Committee reached its decisions
- Ensure that the Committee's conclusions and advice are clearly reported to the Board
- Prepare and draft, under the Committee's guidance, its Annual Report to the Board

CIRCULATION OF PAPERS

10. The Secretariat aims, where possible, to provide papers for the Committee 10 working days prior to the meeting at which they are to be discussed. Where papers are circulated for comment by correspondence between meetings, the Secretariat will aim to allow members 10 working days to comment, where possible.

INTERACTION WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND THE MEDIA

11. The SSRC Chair will normally represent the Committee and its views to stakeholders and the media, after consultation with the Secretariat. However, if members receive invitations to speak to outside organisations or to meetings in their capacity as a member of the Committee, they should notify any such requests to the SSRC Chair and to the Agency *via* the Secretariat who will provide advice and briefing if required.

12. The SSRC may invite submissions from outside bodies or individuals on specific subjects. The Secretariat will co-ordinate any such consultations or invitations to submit information, including their publication and communication as necessary. In line with other committees the SSRC will be encouraged to publish its preliminary conclusions for comment prior to their finalisation.

13. The SSRC Secretariat will deal with routine correspondence and enquiries from the public with regard to the work of the Committee, consulting with the SSRC Chair as necessary.

CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS

14. All members should declare any personal or business interest that may, or may be perceived (by a reasonable member of the public) to, influence their judgement. This should include, as a minimum, personal direct and indirect pecuniary interests. If a member is unsure whether an interest might be regarded as influencing their advice they should seek advice from the SSRC Secretariat as to whether it should be declared. The register of interests will be kept up to date and be open to the public.

15. Members should declare any personal or business interest before an item

to which the interest relates is discussed. They should not participate in the discussion or determination of matters in which they have a direct or pecuniary interest. If their interest is covered in specific guidance issued by sponsor Departments which requires them not to participate and/or to withdraw from the meeting, they should act in accordance with that guidance. A guide to the different interests that are required to be declared is included with the application form. Members with a conflict of interest in a matter under discussion should normally withdraw from the meeting but, at the discretion of the SSRC Chair, may remain but refrain from participating in the discussion and drawing of final conclusions.

LIABILITY OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

16. Subject as provided in paragraph 18 of this document the Food Standards Agency hereby undertakes with the Members (including the Chair) of the Social Science Research Committee (“the Members”) to indemnify them against all liability in respect of any action or claim which may be brought, or threatened to be brought, against them either individually or collectively by reason of or in connection with the performance of their duties as Members, including all costs, charges and expenses which the Members may properly and reasonably suffer or incur in disputing any such action or claim.
17. The Members shall as soon as practicable notify the Food Standards Agency if any action or claim is brought or threatened to be brought against them in respect of which indemnity may be sought pursuant to paragraph 18, and if an action or claim is brought, the Food Standards Agency shall be entitled to assume the legal representation for that action or claim. The Agency shall notify the Members as soon as practicable if it intends to assume the legal representation and the Members shall then provide to the Agency such information and assistance as it shall reasonably request, subject to all out of pocket expenses properly and reasonably incurred by them being reasonably reimbursed. The Food Standards Agency shall, to the extent reasonable and practicable, consult with and keep the Members informed as and when reasonably requested by the Members in respect of any action or claim. If the Food Standards Agency does not assume the legal representation of such action or claim, the Members shall keep the Agency fully informed on its progress and any consequent legal proceedings and consult with the Agency as and when required concerning the action or claim.
18. The indemnity contained in paragraph 16 shall not extend to any losses, claims, damages, costs, charges, expenses and any other liabilities:
 - (a) in respect of which the Members are indemnified by or through any defence organisation or insurers or;
 - (b) which may result from bad faith (including dishonesty), wilful default or recklessness on the part of the Members; or
 - (c) which may result from any of the following circumstances:

- (i) any settlement made or compromise effected without the knowledge or consent of the Agency on behalf of the Members of any action or claim brought, or threatened to be brought, against the Members; or
- (ii) any admission by the Members of any liability or responsibility in respect of any action or claim brought, or threatened to be brought, against them; or
- (iii) Members taking action that they were aware, or ought reasonably to have been aware, might prejudice the successful defence of any action or claim, once the members had become aware that such an action or claim had been brought or was like to be brought.

OPENNESS

19. The Committee will abide by the Agency's Code of Practice on Openness. The Committee should always meet in open forum. Certain stakeholders may be invited to attend where they have an interest in issues under discussion. Places will be allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis and the numbers of observers should not be so great as to stifle debate or hinder effective working of the Committee. Any observers will sit away from the main table. Observers will not normally be expected to speak during meetings but may be invited to comment at the end of a meeting at the discretion of the SSRC Chair. The Secretariat will circulate details of any observers attending meeting to Members in advance. Members will review practice in the light of experience.

Dealing with confidential information

20. The Committee may, on occasion, need to discuss matters that are subject to restriction of confidentiality and cannot be put in the public domain. In such cases the Committee may hold a discussion in closed session, separate from an open meeting. It is expected that such cases will be rare and only in clearly justified circumstances. Information subject to such restriction will be placed in the public domain as soon as practicable should the restrictions cease to apply at a later date. When the SSRC holds a closed session, the agenda, minutes and associated papers will explain this procedure, the reasons for withholding any information, and where possible, an indication of when the information withheld may be published.

Agendas

21. Published agendas should contain enough background information to allow a reader to understand why the item is being discussed and what sorts of questions are being considered. Dates of meetings and agendas should be published in advance in the FSA News and on the FSA website.

Minutes

22. Minutes should accurately reflect the proceedings and discussions that take place and, as with most other comparable committees, will be recorded on a non-attributable basis except where the views of one or more members need recording, for example when declaring an interest. Minutes of meeting of the SSRC will be made available via the Agency's website and on demand in paper form. They will be written by the Secretariat as soon as possible after

the meeting to which they refer and circulated to the Committee for comment within 10 working days. The Secretariat will amend the draft minutes in the light of members' comments and ensure that the amended draft is placed on the Agency's website. Any further corrections will be made at the following meeting when the minutes will be formally adopted. The final version of the minutes will then be placed on the Agency's website.

Working papers

23. To ensure openness and transparency the Committee should seek to keep the public and stakeholders informed as it develops advice. In addition to timely publication of final papers, minutes and agendas the Secretariat will publish discussion papers on the FSA website in advance of meetings to allow interested parties to comment. For copyright reasons, published material annexed to papers will not normally be supplied but the Secretariat will provide the relevant references. The SSRC may need, on occasion, to treat some matters as confidential (e.g. commercial or financial). Any confidential data will be annexed to the relevant paper. The published paper will not contain this annex but will still refer to it.

Unpublished research

24. Where the Committee's disclosure of information would involve bringing into the public domain previously unpublished research, it should consider whether this could hinder the process of formal consultation elsewhere and, if so, explore arrangements that avoid the problem (such as parallel publication).

Annual report

25. As with other committees, the SSRC will publish an Annual Report on its work.

PROCEDURES FOR ARRIVING AT CONCLUSIONS

26. The Committee should attempt to reach a consensus on the advice it gives, recognising that this might not always be possible.

DISSENTING VIEWS

27. The Committee should not seek unanimity at the risk of failing to recognise different views on a subject. Any significant diversity of opinion among the members of the Committee which cannot be resolved should be accurately reflected in the minutes or report.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF APPOINTMENT

28. The SSRC is expected to hold 2 formal meetings a year. Meetings will normally run for around 4 hours and lunch will be provided.
29. The Committee may also need to provide advice to the Agency on social science issues that arise between meetings.
30. SSRC Members will need to attend meetings and devote some time to reading and preparation.

31. It is expected that the Committee Chair will need to spend around 8-12 days and Committee members around 6-10 days per year on Committee business.
32. The Chair will be paid a daily fee of £250 and other members of the Committee will be paid a daily fee of £200 for each meeting and training event they attend, including any preparatory or planning meetings with the Secretariat.

FEEDBACK ON PERFORMANCE

33. The SSRC Chair and all members will be asked to provide an annual feedback to the Secretariat of their experience on the Committee. This will help the Agency ensure that the Committee operates effectively, and to identify any areas for improvement.

