

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

**DEVELOPING A BEST PRACTICE AGREEMENT FOR THE SCIENTIFIC
ADVISORY COMMITTEES**

Better Governance of Science

1. Since its foundation in April 2000, the FSA has based its decisions on scientific evidence. The network of independent scientific advisory committees that provide external scientific expertise and advice are fundamental to the Agency's work and reputation. The Dean Review¹ showed that there was overwhelming support for the FSA's policy of basing decisions on scientific evidence, and that this policy should be maintained and developed further. In response the FSA has made proposals (Board paper February 2006 – 06/02/07) for strengthening the systems and processes used for science governance and making them more transparent:

- the relationship between the Board and the scientific advisory committees could be more direct and interactive to provide greater assurance to the Board about the use of science in policy development;
- ways of enabling all Board members to carry out their role in the governance of science should be developed which respond to the Board's wide range of expertise; and
- the role of the FSA Chief Scientist should be further developed to strengthen assurance to the Board about the use of science in policy development.

A new role for the Chairs of Scientific Advisory committees

2. It is important that the Board can be assured that the science that underpins the policy proposals has been properly assessed and faithfully presented. Generally, the work of the scientific advisory committees is commissioned by the Executive, although committees have some latitude to self-task. The subsequent advice

¹ 2005 review of the Food Standards Agency. An independent review conducted by The Rt Hon Baroness Dean of Thornton-le-Fylde. March 2005.

forms part of the evidence presented to the Board in policy papers prepared and presented by the Executive. Until recently, there had been no direct formal contact between the Board and the committees.

3. To remedy this, since May 2005, where proposals or papers being considered by the Board rest on scientific evidence, the Chair of the relevant scientific advisory committee has been invited to the table at Open Board meetings to provide this assurance, to answer Members' questions on the science and to provide an independent view on how their committee's advice has been reflected in the relevant policy proposals. The Chairs may also, where appropriate, be invited to provide factual briefing to Board members about particular issues within their committees' remits, in advance of discussion at open Board meetings.

Enabling the Board to fulfil its role in the Governance of Science

'Science Checklist'

4. As part of the FSA's work on the governance of science (Board paper February 2006 – 06/02/07), the Board asked for a tool to enable Board members to assure themselves about the integrity of the science being presented to them. A 'Science Checklist' has been developed. It has been developed from the 'Post Phillips Framework'² through consultation with staff in the Agency and Board members. The aim of the Science Checklist is to act as a *guide* to the points to be considered (primarily by the Executive and the scientific advisory committees) when presenting scientific evidence to the Board. It is not a substitute for judgement. The Board wants the Checklist to be used when developing oral presentations as well as written papers, and to be used by the Executive, the scientific advisory committees and any experts invited to advise the Board. The Checklist is now being used by the Executive in helping to prepare and present science based issues to the Board.

A Best Practice Agreement for the Scientific Advisory Committees

5. The Chairs of the Scientific Advisory Committees have been consulted on the draft science checklist and have suggested that their committees should work together to develop a statement on best practice. This would set out the processes which they use in drawing up their advice and providing the Board with assurance that the science has been properly gathered and assessed by their

² The FSA published The Post-Phillips Framework in 2002 (Paper NOTE 02/02/05). It was developed as a means of measuring the performance of the Agency against the lessons in Lord Phillips' report on the BSE Inquiry.

committees. It was also suggested that the Best Practice Agreement (BPA) could be based on the most appropriate parts of the Science Checklist.

6. This paper presents a generic draft Best Practice Agreement (BPA) for consideration by the Scientific Advisory Committees. The draft reflects the expectations of the Board and has been based on:
 - the recommendations of the Report on the Review of Scientific Committees; and
 - those parts of the science checklist most relevant to the work of the committees.
7. The Committee is asked to consider and comment on the draft Best Practice Agreement.

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