

FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY : REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEES

RECOMMENDATION	IMPLICATIONS FOR ACMSF
<p>THE AGENCY'S RESPONSIBILITIES – ESTABLISHING AND SUPPORTING THE COMMITTEES</p>	
<p>Role of the Secretariat</p> <p>1. Each Secretariat should include, or have immediate access to, people with relevant scientific/technical expertise (para 20)</p>	<p>The ACMSF Secretariat includes a Medical Secretary. Secretariats of Working Groups have Scientific Secretaries. The Secretariat also has access to medical, scientific, veterinary and other specialist expertise within FSA and other Government Departments.</p>
<p>2. So that issues can be addressed by the committee without undue influence from any one member, Committee papers should be drafted by the Secretariat, drawing on the expertise of members, as appropriate (para 21)</p>	<p>ACMSF members do not draft ACMSF papers; although they do draft parts of ACMSF subject-specific reports. The Secretariat will continue to produce drafts, drawing on the detailed expertise of members, where this is practicable. However, many checks and balances already exist which would prevent unrepresentative views being advanced in the collective name of the ACMSF.</p>
<p>3. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) should continually review the efficacy of the Secretariats, in consultation with the committee Chairs (para 26)</p>	<p>Await FSA proposals for taking this forward.</p>

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<p>Appointment of committee members</p> <p>4. Open competition may discourage some experts from applying for posts on FSA advisory committees. The FSA should streamline its appointment procedures, so far as is possible within the Nolan procedures (para 30)</p>	<p>Await FSA proposals for taking this forward. The ACMSF Secretariat already supplements open competition with other means of identifying potential candidates for ACMSF appointment.</p>
<p>5. In addition to publicising committee vacancies through the usual channels, the FSA should actively search for suitable experts and encourage them to apply (para 31)</p>	<p>See 4 above.</p>
<p>6. As recommended in the Phillips Report,¹ the possibility of learned societies and Research Councils helping to identify individuals with particular expertise should be explored further (para 31)</p>	<p>Would add to existing suite of options.</p>
<p>7. Each advisory committee should have at least 2 non-specialist members², one of which should have a background in consumer affairs (para 33).</p>	<p>ACMSF has 2 non-specialist members, one a past member of the MAFF/DH Consumer Panel and the other from the Consumers' Association.</p>

¹ Report of the BSE Inquiry (Chairman : Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers).

² The Review Group use this term to cover consumer members, lay members, and public interest representatives.

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<p>8. When advertising committee posts, the FSA should provide prospective applicants with an information pack explaining the roles of committee, secretariat and FSA. The FSA should specify clearly what is expected of all members, focusing particularly on the role of non-specialist members (para 34)</p>	<p>ACMSF Secretariat has prepared guidance notes for members and also issues an information pack when advertising membership vacancies. These will be reconsidered in the light of this recommendation and updated as necessary.</p>
<p>9. The FSA may occasionally require additional <i>ad hoc</i> advice to supplement the expertise among regular committee members. The FSA should consider establishing an identified pool of internationally-recognised experts (para 35)</p>	<p>For action by the FSA.</p>
<p>Training and support for members</p> <p>10. The FSA should provide a programme of induction for new committee members and this should include training in consumer issues for scientific members and possibly facilitated sessions in effective committee functioning (paras 37, 38, 40)</p>	<p>For action by the FSA.</p>
<p>11. The FSA should provide additional support for non-specialist members (para 38)</p>	<p>For action by the FSA.</p>

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12. Chairs have an important role in communicating the work of their committees. Training in media skills should be offered to Chairs and certain other committee members (para 39)	For action by the FSA.
13. The FSA should obtain feedback from committee members on the adequacy of the support and training they receive and should take the necessary action to address any deficiencies (para 41)	For action by the FSA.
<p>Monitoring the scope and performance of committees</p> 14. The FSA should continue to monitor whether gaps develop between the remits of the various committees (para 43)	For action by the FSA.
15. The FSA should take appropriate steps to address emerging issues not covered by existing committees (para 43)	For action by the FSA.
16. The FSA, in conjunction with the committee chairs, should determine at regular intervals whether each committee continues to fulfil its intended function and whether all the current committees are still needed (para 44)	For action by the FSA.

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<p>Cross-membership of committees</p> <p>17 Where appropriate, permanent links should be maintained between committees in the form of cross-membership through <i>ex-officio</i> appointments (para 48)</p>	<p>Professor Johnston provides ACMSF cross-membership with ACNFP.</p>
<p>Remuneration of members</p> <p>18. The FSA should make academic institutions and employers aware of the valuable contribution made by members of their staff who are appointed as committee members (para 51)</p>	<p>For action by the FSA.</p>
<p>19. The FSA should recognise that, in some cases, members may require additional remuneration to reflect increased preparation time for meetings. The FSA should examine the current level of remuneration offered to members consulting, where appropriate, with other Government Departments (para 52)</p>	<p>For action by the FSA.</p>

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<p>Indemnities</p> <p>20. The FSA has a clear duty to indemnify committee members against any action that might arise as a result of their work, provided they have not acted improperly. Statements of indemnity should be drawn up and kept up to date for committees, their sub-groups and other <i>ad hoc</i> expert groups (para 55)</p>	<p>The ACMSF indemnity appears as Annex III of the Committee's 1999 Annual Report. The Secretariat is currently reviewing the indemnity with FSA Legal Advisers and Finance colleagues.</p>
<p>Devolution and international issues</p> <p>21. In order to keep abreast of international developments, committees should receive regular updates on the work of their EU and international counterparts (para 59)</p>	<p>Briefing is provided from time to time on developments in international fora (eg. CODEX – see 21 March 2002 agenda). A presentation is planned for the June 2002 meeting on EU food hygiene legislation and consolidation. The Secretariat is happy to provide briefing/presentations on other issues identified by members as of interest.</p>

RECOMMENDATION	IMPLICATIONS FOR ACMSF
<p>THE COMMITTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES – CONDUCT OF COMMITTEE BUSINESS</p>	
<p>Openness</p> <p>22. Committees should follow standard practices in making their documents available, by publishing agendas and committee papers in advance of each meeting, and minutes and/or summary reports afterwards (para 63)</p>	<p>ACMSF complies, except that papers are not currently made available until after they have been considered by members.</p>
<p>23. The data used as the basis for risk assessments and other committee opinions should be made freely available (para 64)</p>	<p>ACMSF papers are already made available (with few exceptions on grounds of confidentiality). Full supporting data, including risk assessment material and a comprehensive reference section, are provided in the Committee's subject-specific reports.</p>
<p>24. Applications to committees should be published for public comment prior to any substantive discussion by the committee, wherever appropriate (para 64)</p>	<p>ACNFP's approvals process is held up as a model which other committees should adopt, where appropriate. However, it should be noted that the ACNFP has a statutory role in novel process authorisations. The ACMSF does not have a similar role. It is an advisory body.</p>

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<p>25. Committees should work in as consultative a manner as possible so that alternative opinions and interpretations can be considered. Whenever time permits, committees should issue a draft opinion for public consultation before offering their final advice (para 65)</p>	<p>This seems wholly impracticable for handling day-to-day issues, and needs further discussion with the FSA. Annex B of the latest version of the Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees stipulates that 12 weeks should be the standard minimum period for public consultations.</p> <p>Perhaps an alternative for day-to-day issues would be :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACMSF issues “provisional” advice to FSA; • minutes and papers posted on website and public comment invited through ACMSF e-mail address; • ACMSF considers any comments at following meeting; • ACMSF issues supplemental advice to FSA, as necessary. <p>The ACMSF could issue subject-specific reports in draft prior to submission to FSA if that is what the Agency wants. This would add significantly (>3 months) to the timetable. Needs further discussion with FSA.</p>

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<p>26. All committees should move to a position where they conduct as much of their business as possible in open session (para 66)</p>	<p>There is no reason in principle why the ACMSF should not hold all 4 of its main meetings a year in public. However, the FSA will need to provide additional funding (likely to amount to some £10k per meeting).</p>
<p>27. Committees should draw up clear guidelines to define what material can justifiably be regarded as confidential (para 68)</p>	<p>The ACMSF already has its own guidance for members on handling papers. The Review Group now envisages that the FSA will draw up guidance centrally which will be published and made available to those submitting data for consideration by the Agency's committees (para 68). Await FSA proposals.</p>
<p>Setting agendas/work programmes</p> <p>28. Committees should, at least once a year, publish a forward work plan (para 72)</p>	<p>All ACMSF Annual Reports contain a Forward Look section. The Committee had horizon scanning on its agenda for its March 2002 meeting and will return to the issue in June 2002. This could be a regular annual agenda item. However, much of the Committee's work is demand-determined and so the FSA should contribute to the forward planning exercise by identifying areas of work/topics on which it expects to seek ACMSF advice in the outlook period.</p>

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<p>Communicating the committees' conclusions</p> <p>29. Information published by committees should be intelligible to the widest possible audience. Committee advice in complex areas should be accompanied by a summary that sets out the main points of the committee's conclusions in simple language (para 74)</p>	<p>The ACMSF already endeavours to do this, and will continue to do so. The Committee's press releases assist this process.</p>
<p>30. Committees have a key role in presenting issues to the media and Chairs must ensure that the committees' conclusions are clearly explained. Chairs should have access to professional advice on publicity and media handling and should normally act as the Committee's spokesperson (para 76)</p>	<p>The ACMSF Chairman is the Committee's spokesperson. Await FSA plans on how it intends to provide the assistance recommended.</p>
<p>Handling conflicts of interest</p> <p>31. Committee guidelines should reflect that relevant declarable interests include links from which members benefit materially, including those with pressure groups and non-governmental organisations as well as industry (para 80)</p>	<p>The ACMSF already operates on the basis of Cabinet Office model guidance.³ The Secretariat recently reviewed the ACMSF's code of practice, in consultation with FSA legal advisers, and issued a revised version.</p>

³ Cabinet Office (2000). Non-Departmental Public Bodies : a guide for Departments; 203.

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<p>32. The FSA should produce guidelines, as provided for in the Cabinet Office guidance, upon which decisions can be made on the handling of members' interests (para 82)</p>	<p>The ACMSF already operates on the basis of Cabinet Office model guidance. Await FSA proposals in response to this recommendation.</p>
<p>33. Interests should be declared by prospective committee members as part of the recruitment process, and taken into account in making final appointments, to enable a sensible balance on each committee (para 83)</p>	<p>The Secretariat will amend the application form it sends to applicants for ACMSF vacancies accordingly.</p>
<p>34. Chairs of the FSA's advisory committees have a vital role in guiding and communicating the committees' decisions. They should not be employed by, or receive personal remuneration from, industrial organisations or pressure groups during their term of appointment (para 84)</p>	<p>The Secretariat will need to state this precondition clearly in future material advertising ACMSF Chair vacancies.</p> <p>It should be noted that the ACMSF Chairman intends terminating his industrial consultation work.</p>

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<p>Data that has not been reviewed</p> <p>35. Wherever possible, Secretariats should ensure that committees have access to comments from appropriate external experts before considering novel research which has not been peer reviewed (para 86)</p>	<p>This is intended to relate to the consideration by the advisory committees of new information at the cutting edge of science which has not been peer reviewed. The Review Group envisages that “the Secretariat should arrange for the new data to be reviewed by 2 outside experts so that their views can be brought to the attention of the committee alongside those of the researchers. Where necessary, this could be achieved by sending the data to the relevant experts and inviting them to the meeting where the issue is to be discussed.”</p>
<p>Role of the chair and members</p> <p>36. Committee chairs should ensure that committee decisions include an explanation of where differences of opinion have arisen during discussions and why conclusions have been reached. They should also ensure that any assumptions and uncertainties are clearly spelled out (para 89)</p>	<p>It is current ACMSF practice to record the main strands of the discussion and the consensus view reached in the minutes of the Committee’s meetings. Similarly, the breadth of argument, the assumptions made, and the uncertainties inherent in the conclusions reached are also all detailed in the Committee’s subject-specific reports.</p>

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<p>37. When expertise is not available within the committee, the chair, in consultation with the secretariat, is responsible for ensuring advice is sought from additional experts (para 90)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACMSF membership is regularly reviewed to identify any shortage of expertise. This process led recently to the appointment of new members with expertise in virology, catering and SMEs. • Where, in the past, additional expertise has been required to enable the Committee to advise on a particular issue (eg. infectious salmon anaemia), external expert opinion has been obtained. • External expertise is routinely co-opted to the Committee's Working Groups.
<p>38. Committee chairs should be responsible for discussing each member's performance with the committee Secretary at the end of the member's first year of appointment, and when re-appointment is being considered. As part of this process, members should be asked to prepare a report at the end of their first year of membership that reflects how they perceive the contribution they have made towards the work of the committee, and they should use this as the basis for discussion with the Chair (para 91)</p>	<p>Arrangements are already in place for the ACMSF Chairman and Secretariat to discuss members' performance when re-appointment is being considered, as part of the information-gathering process to inform the FSA Chairman's decisions. The Secretariat is happy to facilitate the discussion of performance between Chairman and members, as required.</p>

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<p>Specialist members</p> <p>39. Each committee should have (within its membership) access to advice on quantitative analysis and modelling (since quantitative interpretation of complex data sets is an essential part of the work of advisory committees) (para 94)</p>	<p>This recommendation will need to be reflected when future ACMSF vacancies are advertised. The ACMSF already has some expertise in these areas within its current membership. In addition, additional advice will continue to be available to the ACMSF on demand from within Departments.</p>
<p>Attendance at meetings</p> <p>40. The number of officials attending a meeting should be kept to a minimum and their attendance limited to those particular items where they are required (para 97)</p>	<p>Steps were introduced some years ago to achieve this objective. The attendance of officials not making presentations is at the discretion of the Chairman, with advice as he deems necessary from the Secretariat.</p>
<p>41. The seating at meetings should be arranged so that the presence of observers does not inhibit the committee's discussions (para 97)</p>	<p>This is already done.</p>
<p>42. The Chair should limit contributions by non-members during discussions (para 97)</p>	<p>This already happens. Discussions at ACMSF meetings is routinely conducted through the Chair. Guidance on the role of assessors is contained in the Committee's 1999 Annual Report.</p>

RECOMMENDATION	IMPLICATIONS FOR ACMSF
SEEKING AND USING THE COMMITTEES' ADVICE	
<p>Uncertainty</p> <p>43. When offering advice, committees should highlight any uncertainties identified during their deliberations and explain how these uncertainties have been handled in reaching their final conclusions (para 100)</p>	<p>The ACMSF already does this and will continue to do so.</p>
<p>44. Committees should spell out the assumptions that have been made in each assessment and identify any gaps in the current knowledge, and the action that might be taken to address them. These should be made public (para 100)</p>	<p>The ACMSF already does this and will continue to do so.</p>
<p>45. The Secretariat, assisted by committee members, should take responsibility for identifying when new data becomes available that might justify the committee reviewing its earlier advice (paras 25 & 101)</p>	<p>The Secretariat already endeavours to do this, in conjunction with officials from FSA (eg. emerging information on MAP) and other Government Departments.</p>

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<p>Relationship between the committees, executive and the FSA Board</p> <p>46. The current arrangements, whereby information is conveyed from the committee to the Board via the executive, should continue. This may be supplemented from time to time by direct briefing of the Board by the Chair of the committee (para 102)</p>	<p>This reflects current practice. The ACMSF Chairman has provided direct briefing to Board members at their invitation.</p>
<p>47. The FSA Chairman should meet with committee chairs once a year to review progress over the previous 12 months and to look to the future (para 102)</p>	<p>Await FSA proposals for implementing this recommendation.</p>

<p>Responsibilities for risk assessment/risk management</p> <p>48. Committees should not be asked to manage risks, although they may be asked to consider risk management options and provide scientific advice (para 104)</p>	<p>This reflects current practice.</p>
<p>49. In line with the proposals in the May Report,⁴ the FSA, in consultation with committees, should develop a formal approach to risk assessment (para 105)</p>	<p>The ACMSF has decided to set up an <i>Ad Hoc</i> Group to develop proposals for taking this forward.</p>
<p>Research</p> <p>50. The FSA's Advisory Committee on Research should monitor whether committee research recommendations are being suitably addressed by the Agency (para 107)</p>	<p>Await the FSA's response to this recommendation.</p>

⁴ DTI (2000). Review of risk procedures used by the Government's advisory committees dealing with food safety. Report of the group led by Sir Robert May, Chief Scientific Adviser.