

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEES (COPSAC)

1. In December 2010 ACMSF contributed comments to the public consultation carried out by the Government Office for Science (GO-Science) on review of the Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees (CoPSAC).
2. This is to inform you that the revised Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees has now been published (see ACM/1054a) and is also available on the GO-Science website¹.
3. CoPSAC is intended to be a guidance framework rather than a set of instructions. It provides guidance on the establishment, management and conduct of SACs and their relationship with the body that they advise.
4. CoPSAC 2011 brings the 2007 Code up to date making it more accessible and linking it specifically to the 'Principles of Scientific Advice to Government' (see ACM/1054a annex A). Although the document has been completely restructured this revision does not make any substantial alterations to the guidance itself. This update seeks to address ambiguity and gaps identified through the consultation, adding to rather than altering the guidance.
5. The new entries in the guidance include:

- **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

- **Scientific Advisory Committee that are not Public Bodies (pages 3 and 4)**

- Covers guidance for SACs providing advice on very specific issues or on a time limited basis so as to ensure that scientific advice is provided in accordance with the Principles of Scientific Advice to Government.

- **Probity and Accountability (page 4)**

- Emphasises the significance of documentation and accountability concerning the appointment of members and draws attention to the

¹ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/bispartners/goscience/docs/c/11-1382-code-of-practice-scientific-advisory-committees.pdf>

possible effect of the Freedom of Information legislation on the work of SACs.

- **Chapter 2 – Scientific Advisory Committee Purpose and Expertise Independence and Objectivity (pages 8 and 9)**

Underlines the importance of independence in the work of SACs and impartiality in the way members carry out their responsibilities. It encourages SACs to be involved in setting their agendas and supports open meetings.

Maintenance of Expertise and Future Need (page 9)

Highlights the significance of SAC members maintaining contact with professional bodies, academic institutions and research communities to ensure the maintenance of skills and expertise. It covers the need for members to receive appropriate induction, mentoring and training and mentions the need for assessment of future work requirements and skills audit.

- **Chapter 4 – Committee Support and Departmental Relationships**

Relationship with sponsor department(s)/bodies (pages 15 and 16)

Provides guidance on how SACs and government should interact so as to have a good working relationship.

Relationship with Departmental Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) and Ministers (pages 16 and 17)

Provides advice on access arrangements for SAC Chairs to Departmental CSA and Ministers.

Relationship with Chairs of Other SACs (page 17)

Mentions the meetings the Government Chief Scientific Adviser has with SAC Chairs and encourages these gatherings.

- **Chapter 5 – Working Practice**

Use of Non-Disclosure Agreements (page 23)

Provides guidance on Non-Disclosure Agreements (a legal contract between at least two parties on the use of confidential material or information) should SACs require to use them in course of their work.

Engaging the Broader Academic Community (pages 23 and 24)

Encourages SAC members to take the appropriate steps to ensure they remain connected to their professional areas of expertise.

Handling Disagreement with Sponsoring Body or Minister(s) (page 24)

This section highlights that there may be occasions when differences of opinion could arise. It provides advice on dealing with differences and also refers to the guidance set out in the Principles of Scientific Advice to Government.

- **Chapter 6 – Communication and Transparency**

Dealing with National Emergency (page 29)

Encourages SACs to consider having procedures in place for providing advice in the event of a national emergency.

- **References**

Annex A: Principles of Scientific Advice to Government (page 32)

Principles are outlined in ACM/1054a.

6. Members will wish to note the amendments made concerning the responsibilities of Chairs (see pages 7 and 8, paragraph 29 is new), members' rights and responsibilities (see pages 10 and 11, paragraphs 42 and 43 are new), role of the secretariat (pages 14 and 15, paragraph 55 is new) and role of other officials and departmental representatives (page 17: formerly referred to as assessors).

Action

7. ACMSF Members are invited to note the changes made on this revised Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees.

Secretariat

January 2012

