

**FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY SCIENCE STRATEGY 2005/2010**

**Executive Summary**

1. This paper proposes changes to the Agency's draft Science Strategy 2005/2010 in light of responses to the public consultation on the Strategy, and seeks agreement to publication of the final Strategy.
  
2. The Board is asked to:
  - **consider** the results of the public consultation on the draft Science Strategy;
  - **comment** on the proposed responses to key points
  - **discuss** proposed changes to the draft Science Strategy in the light of the consultation responses and agree consequential changes; and
  - **agree** that the new Science Strategy should be published in spring 2006

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## FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY SCIENCE STRATEGY 2005-10

### Issue

1. To agree proposed changes to the Agency's draft Science Strategy 2005/2010 (Annex 1) in light of responses to the public consultation on the Strategy, and publication of the final Science Strategy.

### Strategic Aims

2. The Agency's Science Strategy describes how the Agency will obtain and use the scientific evidence it needs to support all its strategic objectives, ensuring the Agency has a sound scientific evidence base for its policies and advice.

### Background

3. The Agency has updated its Science Strategy to reflect and support its new Strategic Plan, and to reflect other developments in the Agency's own science work - including horizon-scanning – and cross-government initiatives and guidance on the use of science in government. It will also reflect relevant elements of the work on governance of science, discussed in the related Paper (FSA 06/02/08). The new Science Strategy replaces the Agency's initial Science and Innovation Strategy (2002)<sup>1</sup> and the basic statement of science strategy included in the Arbutnott report (2001)<sup>2</sup> and adopted by the Agency.
4. The Agency produced a draft Science Strategy 2005-10 under the guidance of the Advisory Committee on Research (ACR) and particularly its Science Strategy Sub-Group.<sup>3</sup> Agency policy Divisions provided detailed contributions in their areas of responsibility. The work was co-ordinated by the Agency's Research Co-ordination Unit (RCU).

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<sup>1</sup> *Science and Innovation Strategy*. Food Standards Agency, January 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *A review of the Food Standards Agency's Research Portfolio and Research Management Systems*. Food Standards Agency, July 2001.

<sup>3</sup> The ACR Science Strategy Sub-Group comprised three ACR members, members of the ACR Secretariat, and a representative from the Office of Science and Technology (OST) who provided valuable advice on central guidance on Departmental Science Strategies.

5. The draft Science Strategy followed the advice of the ACR that it should:
  - set out how the Agency would obtain and use science effectively and properly to support delivery of its strategic objectives, ensuring a sound base of scientific evidence for Agency policy and advice.
  - comprise two main parts describing (i) the key issues and needs for scientific evidence in each of the Agency's strategic areas ('what'); and (ii) the processes and plans for governance and management of science, to ensure we effectively identify, obtain, interpret, use and communicate science ('how').
6. A public consultation on the draft Science Strategy 2005-10 was carried out from 6 June to 29 August 2005. Board members received copies of the consultation pack in June 2005.

### **Analysis of the consultation responses**

7. A total of 53 responses were received, covering key stakeholders in the Agency's science and wider work. Annex 2 summarises the significant points raised in the consultation, with proposed Agency analysis and response, including any changes to the draft Strategy (this Annex also lists the seven consultation questions). A list of responders by type of organisation is at Annex 3.
8. Comments were initially assessed and compiled by the RCU. RCU staff not directly involved in this work and Agency policy divisions were shown the full consultation responses and asked to check that the analysis summary table had not misrepresented detailed comments or omitted important points. Agency Policy Divisions provided detailed analysis and responses on individual points, as appropriate.
9. The ACR discussed the key points from the consultation and the overall approach to these at its open meeting on 25 October 2005. The ACR's advice on key points is included in the discussion below.
10. A revised draft Strategy (Annex 1) and analysis table (Annex 2) have been produced through iterative rounds of comment and discussion between the RCU, other Agency staff and the ACR. This also picked up amendments needed to reflect developments since the consultation (for example the section on TSEs has

been updated to take account of the change from the Over 30 Months Rule to testing).

## **Discussion**

11. Responses to the consultation indicate broad overall support for the draft Strategy – including from the government’s Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir David King. Respondents also made a number of criticisms, comments and suggestions, which may be divided into three categories:

- i. Strategic science issues cutting across themes;
- ii. Specific aspects of science or policy in themes/programmes; and
- iii. Comments on issues beyond the remit of the Science Strategy.

12. Overall the comments do not suggest a need for fundamental revision or reorientation of the draft Strategy, but they do indicate a need for more detail and emphasis in some areas. The key comments on strategic and cross-cutting issues, the ACR’s views on these, and the Agency’s proposed responses are discussed below, with a summary of the approach taken to the comments in the second and third categories.

### **Strategic and cross cutting issues**

13. Comments on wider issues focused on suggestions that the draft Science Strategy needed more detail or emphasis in four related, strategic areas:

- **Horizon-scanning.** The Strategy should discuss the wider trends and future issues that will affect the Agency’s work and how the Agency will identify and address them. Some respondents felt this should extend to a detailed ‘horizon scan’.
- **Collaboration.** The Strategy should give more emphasis to the importance of collaboration in addressing the issues and activities it describes, and explain how the Agency will develop collaboration in its science work.
- **Priority setting.** The Strategy should explain more clearly how it identified and set its current priorities and how it will establish future priorities.
- **Cross-cutting issues.** The Strategy should give more emphasis both to how the Agency will ensure a co-ordinated approach to issues cutting across its

strategic themes and to specific cross-cutting issues that were suggested as particularly important – notably social sciences and probabilistic modelling.

#### *Views of the ACR*

14. The ACR advised that as a high-level document, the Strategy is not intended to give a detailed statement of needs and activities in all areas over the next five years. High-level issues should be explained in more detail in the introduction with relevant examples in the main text as appropriate. Further, the Strategy should include more detail on the Agency's processes for horizon scanning, with examples of relevant emerging issues. Similarly, collaboration should be described in more detail in the introductory sections, with relevant examples under the different themes.

#### *Agency analysis and proposed response:*

15. The consultation draft summarised key issues and needs for each Agency theme, following the priority areas in the Strategic Plan. This approach was generally welcomed as demonstrating how the Agency's science supports its Strategic Plan, but gave relatively little emphasis to strategic and cross-theme issues. Information on these issues scattered throughout the consultation draft should be brought together and reinforced.

16. These points have been addressed, in line with the ACR's views, by expanding the Executive Summary, the overall introduction and the introductions to Parts 1 and 2 to provide more detail and emphasis, with additional detail as needed in the relevant sections of the main body of the Strategy (Parts 1 and 2). These changes:

- explain the document is not intended as a detailed formal horizon-scanning paper, but seeks to identify some key issues and needs that will inform our science strategy and wider work in each strategic area;
- provide more detail on our current horizon-scanning processes and plans to develop them (including a summary of the Agency's Horizon Scanning Programme as Annex E to the Strategy).
- summarise some of the wider scientific, social and political issues that we will need to keep track of (as opportunities and threats) and that will cut across themes.

- note the importance of co-ordination across themes, particularly in developing our work on social sciences and probabilistic modelling; and
- highlight the importance of collaboration in addressing the challenges ahead, noting our current engagement and future plans, and identifying some key relationships for the future.
- explain more clearly that the Agency's science priorities follow those set out in our Strategic Plan - including by reorganising our research into top-down strategic themes reflecting the priority areas in the Agency's Strategic Plan - and how we will ensure our science supports our strategic objectives effectively and informs the review and development of our strategic objectives in the future;
- give more detail on current processes for priority setting (including collective assessment of new research by senior managers against its potential contribution to Agency strategic objectives, and linking of science planning with wider business planning) and our plans to develop these further by identifying tools to support research priority setting at theme level (see paragraphs 98 to 104 of the draft Strategy).

## **Evaluation and monitoring**

17. Part 2 of the draft Strategy describes future initiatives in science management and governance and lists some indicators of success. Several respondents suggested a need for more detail on how the Agency would monitor and evaluate its success in delivering the Strategy. Some suggested the indicators of success should be clearer and more specific, although few examples of new or improved indicators were suggested.

### *Views of the ACR*

18. The ACR advised that the Strategy should be kept under review and a mid-term review would be sensible. This should follow on from the mid-term review of the Strategic Plan, to ensure that the Strategy continues to support the Agency's objectives.

### *Agency analysis and proposed response:*

19. The Agency does need to consider and develop plans to monitor and evaluate progress on the initiatives set out in the Strategy. This has always been intended to form a major part of the work to implement the Strategy, which would be done with input and advice from the ACR.

20. A mid-term review of the Science Strategy, linked to the mid-term review of the Strategic Plan, would help to address the need to monitor and evaluate progress on the Strategy. It would also reflect the strongly supported links between the Science Strategy and the Strategic Plan, and could also consider further the outcomes of the ongoing work to develop the Agency's processes for horizon-scanning priority setting.
21. The draft Science Strategy has been revised to include more details on the proposed approaches to monitoring and evaluation, including a mid-term review, which would be taken forward with advice and input from the ACR (paragraph 97 and Endpiece of the draft Strategy).

## **Style**

22. Most respondents did not comment on the overall style, and several who did thought the draft clear and well structured. The Scottish Food Advisory Committee (SFAC) suggested that the draft needed rewriting to improve clarity and understanding for lay readers, including an extended 'lay' summary. A number of other respondents commented that specific sections could be clarified.

### *Views of the ACR*

23. The ACR advised that the introductory sections should explain clearly the intended purpose and primary audience for the Strategy. The Strategy is not aimed primarily at a lay audience but should be understandable to interested lay readers.

### *Agency analysis and proposed response:*

24. These comments have been addressed by reviewing the wording of the draft and revising it to make the language simpler and clearer and the style more consistent. The Introductory sections include clearer statements of the purpose and structure of the Strategy. Part 2 has been restructured to describe current good practice to be continued before new initiatives proposed to develop them.
25. The primary audience for the Science Strategy will be the Agency's science stakeholders, particularly funders and performers of research in areas relevant to Agency's interests and related fields, and to those with an interest in how we use science in policy making. It will also be useful to the Agency itself as a high-level

statement of science priorities, processes and plans. A brief statement to this effect could be included in the Chair's introduction to address the ACR's comment on the primary audience.

### **Detailed comments in specific areas**

26. There are, as expected, many suggestions for amended or additional drivers, issues and needs in specific areas. These comments represent a very valuable input from many of our key stakeholders. Each was considered on its merits by the relevant Agency Divisions, on the basis of an overall willingness to take on comments where they have a sound rationale. The Agency's analysis of each point and where appropriate any consequent changes to the draft Strategy are set out in Annex 2.

### **Issues beyond the remit of the Science Strategy**

27. The consultation responses included some comments raising wider issues relating to the Agency's work, including its position on diet and health. Some of these repeat points raised previously in the consultation on the Agency's Strategic Plan 2005-10 or elsewhere. These issues are recorded in Annex 2 with an Agency response. They do not require revisions to the Science Strategy itself.

### **Forewords from the Agency Chair and Chief Scientist**

28. It is proposed that the final Science Strategy will open with an Introduction from the Chair of the Agency, as for other strategic publications from the Agency. It would also be appropriate to include a brief foreword from the Agency's acting Chief Scientist (subject to the Board's discussion on the governance of science – see related Paper (FSA 06/02/08)). These sections will be drafted after the Board meeting so that they can reflect any key issues arising from the Board's discussions.

### **Impact**

29. The Science Strategy sets out how the Agency will obtain and use the scientific evidence it needs to support all its strategic objectives over the next 5 years, including its plans to develop its collaboration and communication with stakeholders in our science work. It provides a clear statement of our science

priorities and plans, and a basis for future collaboration. Both of these should benefit our science and other stakeholders. The activities described in the Strategy are covered by plans for existing Agency work streams (including the forward work of the ACR) or by the proposals for new work discussed in the related paper on governance of science (Paper FSA 06/02/08).

### **Board Action Required**

30. The Board is asked to:

- **consider** the results of the public consultation on the draft Science Strategy;
- **comment** on the proposed responses to key points
- **discuss** proposed changes to the draft Science Strategy in the light of the consultation responses and agree consequential changes; and
- **agree** that the new Science Strategy should be published in spring 2006.