Research into policy – the UK FSA experience

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Background to the FSA

• Non ministerial Government Dept
• Governed by a Board – Chair, Deputy Chair + 10
• Open selection, members of general public
• open and transparent operation
• c800 staff in London, Belfast, Aberdeen, Cardiff
  – Almost half are qualified scientists
• Executive agency – Meat Hygiene Service
• 1,500 staff incl Meat Inspectors and vets in abattoirs
• Network of scientific advisory committees
• 10 independent committees; draw on expertise of ~140 eminent scientists
• Budget £140 million/year - c £20m pa on research
• Remit Food safety, nutrition, choice
Handling Risks: Lessons Learned

- Seek advice and challenge from independent scientists
- Acknowledge uncertainty
- Recognise risk appetite of consumers
- Help consumers to make their own judgements
- Actively engage with stakeholders at all key stages
Handling Risks: The Processes
ZERO RISK?

- What do consumers expect?
- What can the FSA deliver?
- Different types of risk, different appetites
RISK ASSESSMENT

• Based on evidence from the scientific literature and work commissioned by the FSA.

• Risk assessments are carried out by in-house scientists with the support and challenge of independent scientific advisory committees.

• These in-house scientists are integral to the teams developing and implementing policy.
Managing Risks

- RM less easy to describe through accountable processes
- far wider evidence bases need to be considered, not only the science
- it’s about judgement, but accountable through open, transparent processes
Functional Separation of RA and RM?

• Yes, through the independent SACs (RA) and the FSA’s Board (RM)

• But, integrated model of risk analysis that has public engagement at its heart

• Openness and transparency are key to accountability and winning trust
Risk and Regulation: A Proportionate Response?

- FSA advice based on robust analysis of the best available evidence, setting out the uncertainties

- Regulation not always the answer

- respect the reality of concerns even when not supported by the evidence

- Trust in food safety work provides the mandate for FSA’s work on healthy eating
Why does the FSA fund research and surveys?

- Provides a basis for Agency policies.
- Ensures sound advice.
- Informs the UK negotiating position.
- Ensures staff are “intelligent customers”
- Influences other research funders.
Strategic research priorities

Strategic Plan to 2010 sets three high-level priorities

**Food Safety**
- continue to reduce foodborne illness
- reduce risks to consumers from chemical contamination of food

**Eating for health**
- make it easier for all consumers to choose a healthy diet
- improve quality of life by reducing diet-related disease

**Choice**
- enable consumers to make informed choices
Content of research themes

• Themes covering major areas of work eg microbiological safety, diet and health etc

• Each theme is made up of several programmes on specific issues – (currently over 40 programmes)

• Some programmes carried forward from pre FSA origins and have evolved. Some “sunsetted” and new ones have been created.

• Programmes reviewed every 5 years (and often interim as well) – to check progress, direction

• Programmes combine research, surveys, literature reviews, other science activities as needed to achieve aims

• Majority are chemical/biological science based – some with social science aspects to a greater or lesser extent eg economics, nutrition programmes on food acceptability and choice, enforcement
Social sciences – where do they fit in?

- Potentially across all programmes – particularly where interventions/implementation are important
- Statistical input to Agency surveys – at requirement generation, proposal evaluation, project management and report evaluation
- Other social sciences input to Agency requirements where appropriate as internal capability has developed.
- Oversight and advice via Social Science Unit and advice from independent Social Science Research Committee
Content of research themes

- Currently about 200 live projects
- Individual projects run for a few months to several years - most 1-3 years
- from £10k to £15m; most below £500k
- Annual research reports – now to be part of Annual Chief Scientist Report
- Open Access Repository - Foodbase
Engagement with others

- Other government departments, Research Councils, industry, EU
- Co-ordinate at strategic level, and through funders groups in specific priority areas (TSE, microbiological safety, nutrition, nanotechnology).
- Specific funding schemes eg with UK Research Councils
- EU: shape priorities in Framework Programmes; links with funders in Europe/internationally, co-funding FP projects, partner in EU-funded ERA-NET project SAFEFOODERA
- Links to EFSA via Advisory Forum, Focal Point network and other initiatives
- In 2007/08, total of £3.8m funding to 28 co-funded projects (nearly 20% of Agency’s total spend on research; highest ever annual spend on co-funded projects. Includes 2 largest projects (NDNS and the IID-2 study). For these 28 projects, total Agency spend is £22m, compared with a total value of £55m across all funders
Semicarbazide
Diet and health
Traffic light labelling
Emerging Risks – the host environment (Ref Periapt project)

Science, Technology & Industry
- new scientific knowledge
- new technologies
- processing & distribution

Nature & Environment
- climate
- pollution
- natural catastrophes

Government & Politics
- new legislation
- supervision/enforcement
- trade barriers
- food terrorism

Information
- media
- communication interest
- expert roles

Food Chain

Consumer Behaviour
- perception
- diet
- attitude

Economy
- trade
- supply & demand
- wealth & income level
- globalisation

Agriculture
- plant & animal health
- production systems
- biodiversity

Public Health & Welfare
- infrastructure
- lifestyle
- diseases

Culture & Demography
- lifestyle
- mobility
- education
- ageing
Nanotechnology and food