

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL FEEDINGSTUFFS**

**42nd Meeting of ACAF on 3 June 2008**

**Information Paper**

**GENERAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE (GACS)**

**Secretariat May 2008**

## General Advisory Committee on Science

1. The independent General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS) was established in December 2007 to give independent challenge and advice on how the Agency collects and uses scientific evidence. It is chaired by Professor Colin Blakemore and its members include 13 expert members (including the Chairs of the nine scientific advisory committees that advise the Agency, who sit on GACS as *ex officio members*) and two lay members. Its main tasks are to:
  - provide independent challenge and advice on Agency science;
  - advise on general and strategic science and research issues; and
  - develop good practice and fit-for purpose science processes.
2. The GACS Terms of Reference are attached at Annex 1 and details of GACS membership are attached at Annex 2.
3. GACS held its first meeting on Tuesday 11 March at the Royal College of Physicians, London. At this open meeting the Committee discussed its role and how it intended – agreeing on the importance of providing credible, independent challenge to the Agency and engaging actively with a wide range of expertise and opinion. The Committee also discussed its busy work programme and initial priorities, which included how to evaluate success for the Agency’s science, Agency research priorities and strategy, good practice for scientific committees, and horizon scanning. It agreed to establish a working group to develop measures of success for the Agency’s science, and its members would act as rapporteurs to explore and report back to the Committee on how the Agency commissions, manages and disseminates research.
4. The 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> meetings of GACS will be held on 29 October 2008, 25 February 2009 and 8 September 2009, respectively.
5. GACS also hosted a public panel debate on 11 March 2008, in tandem with its first meeting, to explore views and issues around the role that science should play in decisions about food. The aim of the event was to help GACS engage with different perspectives, and frame questions for future discussions. The debate was part of National Science and Engineering Week 2008.

6. The public panel debate was chaired by Professor Colin Blakemore, Chair of GACS, and facilitated by science writer and broadcaster Vivienne Parry. A panel of three leading science practitioners and commentators – Professor Kay-Tee Khaw, Professor Erik Millstone and Dr Ben Goldacre – gave presentations outlining key aspects of the debate as they saw them. An open discussion with the panel and an audience of about 90 (including many of the members of the GACS) explored these issues and raised further points.
7. Key issues and challenges from the debate included:
  - ensuring transparency about the arguments for making recommendations, and what the uncertainties are;
  - ensuring that the expert advisory committees advising the Agency follow clear, established procedural rules; and
  - showing your working and making it possible to drill down to original methods and results: publish what you did, why you made those decisions, explain the kinds of studies you looked at, and give links to the original data.
8. Minutes and papers for GACS meetings and a report of the public panel debate are available on the GACS web pages, along with other information about the Committee and its work. See [www.food.gov.uk/science/ouradvisors/gacs/](http://www.food.gov.uk/science/ouradvisors/gacs/). For further information about the committee, contact Dr Patrick Miller, GACS Secretary (tel. 020 7276 8277; email: [gacs@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:gacs@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk)).

**ACAF Secretariat**  
**May 2008**

**GACS Role and terms of reference****Annex 1**

The overall **purpose** of the GACS is to support the Agency's Chief Scientist by providing independent challenge and advice to the Chief Scientist and the Agency Board on the Agency's governance and use of science. It will carry out the following tasks.

**Providing independent challenge and advice**

- on how the Agency obtains and uses independent scientific advice including through the Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs) that advise the Agency<sup>1</sup>;
- on the Agency's science governance processes; and
- on the Agency's Science Strategy and its implementation and periodic review.

**Advising on general and strategic science and research issues**

- Undertaking strategic horizon scanning, co-ordinating and building on the work already carried out by the individual SACs.
- Advising on whether the Agency's science and research is aligned with the Agency's overall scientific and strategic aims, including advice on science prioritisation.
- Providing a forum to discuss issues which cut across the remit of more than one committee and hence formalise interactions between the SACs
- Advising on issues that are not covered by an existing SAC or which relate to general principles.
- Advising on any other matters relating to research, surveys or science policy remitted to the Committee by the Agency's Board or Chief Scientist.

**Developing good practice and fit-for-purpose science processes**

- Identifying and developing good practice for all of the SACs and encouraging and monitoring its application<sup>1</sup>.
- Building links with others working on the use and governance of science, to identify, develop and share good practice.

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<sup>1</sup> GACS does not have a role in approving the work of the other SACs. It will consider whether the SACs are adhering to the Good Practice Guidelines which have been developed.

*Note: At its first meeting GACS recommended that its Terms Of Reference should be amended to make explicit that the Committee may itself suggest relevant issues for consideration.*

**Membership of the GACS****Annex 2**

Chair	Professor Colin Blakemore
Expert members	Dr Ian Brown (ACAF Chair)
	Professor Sarah O'Brien (ACMSF Chair)
	Professor Mike Gasson (ACNFP Chair)
	Professor David Phillips (COC Chair)
	Professor Peter Farmer (COM Chair)
	Professor David Coggon (COT Chair)
	Professor Alan Jackson (SACN Chair)
	Professor Chris Higgins (SEAC Chair)
	Professor Sir Roger Jowell (SSRC Chair)
	Professor Janet Bainbridge
	Professor Jeya Henry
	Professor Duncan Maskell
	Professor Anne Murcott
Lay members	Mrs Pamela Goldberg
	Mrs Leen Petré