



Government  
Office for  
**Science**

# ***Sharing experience: Improving engagement across SAC secretariats***

Report of a series of workshops designed to facilitate greater engagement across the Scientific Advisory Committee community



# Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Lay membership</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Who are lay members? .....	9
Lay representatives; a unique perspective.....	9
Induction and training for lay members .....	11
A key relationship: SAC secretariat and lay member .....	11
Communicating lay expertise .....	12
Lay members: successes and issues .....	15
<b>Openness and transparency</b> .....	<b>19</b>
Why be open and transparent? .....	19
Engagement.....	19
Measuring the success of engagement .....	25
Being transparent.....	27
An ideal SAC.....	28
Engaging with the media.....	31
<b>The Landscape of SACs across Government</b> .....	<b>32</b>
Visualising independent science advice.....	32
<b>The future of independent science advice</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>Acting to cultivate a community of SACs</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>What next?</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>ANNEX A – Presentation to Lay Members’ workshop from Dr Jack Stilgoe</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>ANNEX B – Summary of answers to Seven Questions</b> .....	<b>44</b>



# Foreword

by the **Government Chief Scientific Adviser**

The last twelve months have seen increased engagement between government and its community of Scientific Advisory Committees and Science Advisory Councils (SACs).

In part, these interactions were sparked by the need to bring expert advice to bear on the UK's approach to addressing issues such as the emergence of swine flu and the impacts of the volcanic eruption in Iceland. As the Government Chief Scientific Adviser, I was closely involved with the Government's responding to these issues. I greatly appreciated the ability to draw on the expertise of SACs, and valued their ability to provide advice essential to effective contingency planning as well as the creation of long-term policy.



In addition to working with members of SACs on specific issues, I held two working meetings with the Chairs of these groups. These meetings proved particularly timely as I was able to consult with them on the draft *Principles for scientific advice to Government*. I am pleased that the published Principles explicitly recognise the special role of SAC Chairs in advising the Government.

A clear theme of my meetings with SAC Chairs was that the landscape of SACs across government is extremely varied, not least because each SAC is designed to meet the individual needs of its sponsoring department. The workshops for SAC secretariats run by GO-Science offer a unique opportunity to draw out the nuances of these differing bodies, to discuss their experiences and to share good practice.

This report highlights key outputs from the latest series of SAC workshops, and I hope that you will find it helpful.

# Introduction

Government Office for Science (GO-Science) workshops offered SAC secretariats and, for the first time, lay committee members, the opportunity to informally network with their peers, share good practice, discuss key aspects of SAC working and challenge each other to come up with creative solutions to improve the flow of SAC advice to government.

The workshops focused on three key themes, each chosen by the SAC community:

1. Lay membership;
2. Openness, transparency and media engagement; and
3. The landscape of SACs across government.

While current SAC guidance such as the *Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees* highlights the added value that lay representatives can bring to SACs, practice differs across the SAC landscape. GO-Science convened a workshop in November 2009 in collaboration with the Food Standards Agency and its General Advisory Committee on Science to explore the role of **lay membership**.

A diverse group of attendees – both SAC secretariats and members - shared their experiences and highlighted a number of successes. These are explored in greater detail on page 15 and in case studies throughout.

The GO-Science workshop in February 2010 encouraged SAC secretariats to think creatively about how they might further embed the principles of **openness and transparency** in their working processes. Attendees were asked to consider how a new SAC could exemplify best practice in openness. All kinds of ideas ensued: a complementary youth committee working in parallel with the main SAC, active public engagement via social media channels and innovative appraisals of the SAC's life cycle to name a few. See more on pages 28 and 29.

Although most SACs have clear policies for **communicating with the media** and appointing media spokespeople few have formalised media engagement strategies. Discussion on this issue considered relationships with departmental and independent press officers, and the successful working of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution with the Science Media Centre.

While better engagement among the SAC community can be encouraged and facilitated by formal and informal networking opportunities, mapping **the current landscape of SACs across government** is important.

By mapping the landscape we mean knowing which departments have SACs, how many SACs there are and what, if any, relationships there are among SACs sponsored by the same department, and between their secretariats. It is

also important to think about how the SAC model might develop, what obstacles SACs might face in the future and how relationships across the SAC community might be improved.

A GO-Science workshop in March 2010 unpicked some of these questions using a horizon scanning technique, under the guidance of Dr Harry Woodroof from the Foresight Horizon Scanning Centre. Questions such as: what is your vision for independent science advice up to the year 2020, what are the dangers of not achieving your vision, and what needs to change to ensure your vision is realised, allowed attendees to take a long term view. A number of action points were then discussed with the aim of cultivating a more effective SAC community.

This report aims to summarise some of the key discussion points from all of the events mentioned above and suggest further areas for development or discussion by SAC secretariats and their sponsoring departments. We have highlighted some excellent examples of how existing guidance can be adapted to suit the varying needs of SACs and underline how, by sharing good practice, the SAC community as a whole can really add value.

**Name:** Rachel Haynes

**Committee:** [Gene Therapy Advisory Committee \(GTAC\)](#)

**Sponsoring department:** Department of Health

**Success:** “There are eight lay members on GTAC, which gives us a real voice.”

“There are technically eight ‘lay’ members on GTAC, although some of us have specific expertise which are required by the committee, for example, ethics or law.

I like to think of us all – along with all the medics and scientists around the table – as simply ‘members’. GTAC values everybody’s opinion and because we don’t view ourselves as two distinct factions there isn’t a need to actively support each other to contribute. By embracing a number of different perspectives and expertise on the topic, all of our opinions count.

That applies to the members that you might traditionally term ‘lay’. One for example has a son with cystic fibrosis. In this way he’s bringing his experience of living with that condition to the table, which has a number of interesting implications for gene therapy.

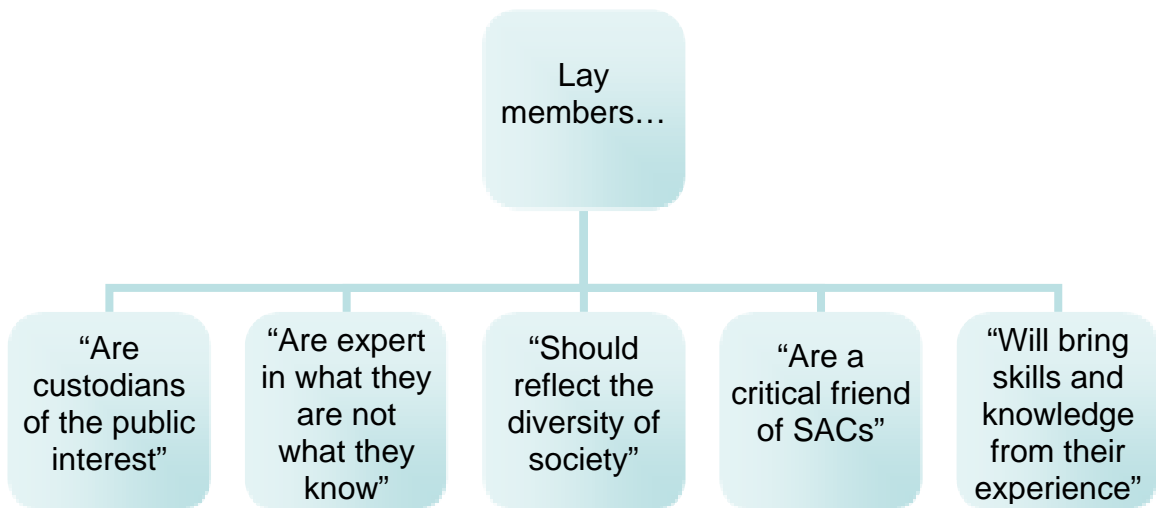
Our Chairman is excellent at highlighting each person’s expertise and valuing their contributions to discussion and I think cannot be underplayed. Being a Chair requires a particular skill.

I would definitely recommend having at least two ‘lay’ members on a Scientific Advisory Committee to avoid feelings of isolation. Because there is a range of expertise on GTAC and recognition that together the entire committee has a collective role, we are able to avoid these silos. This is evident even when we have lunch because everybody mixes together; it’s a real pleasure to be part of this committee.”

# Lay membership

## Who are lay members?

- 1 There are multiple connotations of the term “lay member”. In some cases, lay members are viewed as representatives of the public and may provide a general perspective to the work of SACs.
- 2 Although not experts in the particular scientific discipline of the SAC, lay members might be specialists in a different aspect of science or engineering, or an alternative field, for example: finance or law. In addition, there are instances whereby other SAC members may be termed lay representatives.<sup>1</sup> A number of descriptions of the role and possible expertise of lay members were suggested at the workshop. These are captured below.



## Lay representatives; a unique perspective

- 3 Lay representatives are often expected to have some understanding of the various processes of providing evidence based advice, for example: peer review.
- 4 Lay members can observe and input into the process of a SAC in the wider context of its operation. They can provide a useful challenge function, reality checking key decisions and asking questions that may not have been considered during the course of a very technical discussion.

<sup>1</sup> Science Advisory Councils (SA Councils) are often described as committees of experts as opposed to expert committees. This is an important distinction as it recognises that the range of expertise on an SA Council is extremely wide ranging. Whereas the members of Scientific Advisory Committees advising on specific topics, for example: hepatitis or pesticides will have expertise in that particular area. As the balance of expertise on SA Councils is much greater, it is possible to say that in these instances, scientific experts become lay representatives when the group discuss issues beyond their individual expertise.



**Name:** Pamela Goldberg

**Committee:** [General Advisory Committee on Science \(GACS\)](#)

**Sponsoring department:** Food Standards Agency

**Success:** "I volunteered to undertake a piece a work with an expert that was taken seriously by the committee."

"GACS was a brand new committee that had been established to challenge the FSA's use and management of science and provide support and challenge to the Agency Chief Scientist.

At the first meeting, it was agreed a high level overview of the way scientific research is commissioned, managed and communicated within the Agency be produced to serve as a picture of the current landscape. I volunteered to work on this with an expert, Professor Anne Murcott.

As Chief Executive of the charity, Breast Cancer Campaign, I have had some experience of working with scientists albeit in a different context. So even though I am a 'lay' member, I understood the sophistications of research processes which proved to be very useful.

Anne and I worked together really well because we shared responsibility evenly. We both signed off on everything, there was a lot of two-way communication and essentially, we were very open about the way we worked.

The project culminated with a presentation to the committee at the second meeting of GACS and it was used to frame the production of a future work programme.

As GACS only meets every six months it can be difficult to build relationships with people across the committee, you almost feel as if you're starting from scratch every time. And cultivating that sense of trust won't happen overnight.

Undertaking this project afforded me the opportunity to get to grips with not only what my role was, but how it fitted into the broader structure of the Agency. I learnt about whom I should be speaking to and what was relevant which continues to be invaluable to me while I serve on GACS. But, perhaps most importantly, I trust it proved to the entire committee that I could make a valid contribution."

## Induction and training for lay members

- 5 Lay members should receive an induction that is common to other members of their SAC.<sup>2</sup> Further training might usefully be identified to meet the individual needs of all SAC members including lay members, for example: communications or media relations courses.
- 6 SAC secretariats might consider establishing informal networking groups with other SACs for their lay members to engage with, mentor and support each other. Arranging for incoming lay representatives to spend time with an outgoing counterpart could provide a vehicle for effective knowledge transfer.

## A key relationship: SAC secretariat and lay member

- 7 An effective and approachable SAC secretariat is crucial to developing and maintaining a good relationship with lay members. SAC secretariats have a key role to play in supporting lay members, as they do for all members. This can be achieved in a number of ways:
  - SAC secretariats might ask expert members to produce short briefing summaries on topics for discussion. This has the dual benefit of focusing their thinking and helping lay members to engage with the aims and key points of very technical discussions;
  - SAC secretariats could arrange briefing sessions with authors of meeting papers in advance of full SAC discussion;
  - SAC secretariats might arrange short introductory meetings with the SAC Chair in advance of meetings to allow lay members to develop their confidence in engaging with the subject area;
  - As part of explicitly communicating the role of each member of the SAC, SAC secretariats could harness the expertise of lay members when organising open or public meetings, in developing the agenda and tailoring items to suit possible attendees;
  - SAC secretariats could actively support the contribution of agenda items from lay members and work with them to develop their ideas to ensure maximum output if/when presented to the full SAC; and
  - SAC secretariats might develop and maintain a general briefing pack of key issues within the SAC's subject area with assistance from appropriate scientific experts. This could be shared with all members – but may be of particular use to lay members.

---

<sup>2</sup> For further insight into the induction of SAC members, see *Cultivating Community: Sharing good practice across SAC Secretariats*, page 3.

## Communicating lay expertise

- 8 It was recognised that different SACs used varying terms to describe lay representatives – for example, consumer member or stakeholder representative – and that the semantics of the various terms was not demonstrably clear.
- 9 A number of alternative titles were discussed, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. A breakdown of these can be viewed below.

- **“Public interest member”**

This recognises the important role that a lay representative plays in representing public interest and communicating the work of SACs to the public.

- **“Member”**

Alongside all other SAC members, lay representatives could simply be called “members”. This respects their unique contribution as equally valuable to the success of a SAC as that of scientific experts.

- **“General member”**

This distinguishes between the contribution of lay representatives and scientific experts clearly, while expressing the range of general expertise contributed by lay representatives. However like non-expert member, it does not communicate the individual specialism each lay representative might have.

- **“Consumer member”**

A precise label to outline the role of a lay representative on a SAC, that is especially appropriate for SACs providing advice on issues relating to food safety and consumption. However, it could be deemed inaccurate for other SACs.

- **“Independent member”**

Although this highlights the fact lay representatives are unlikely to have vested interests in the subject area of a SAC, all SAC members are independent of government and have a duty to declare all possible conflicts of interest prior to every discussion.

- **“Non expert member”**

Although a term that clearly demarcates a lay representative from scientific expert members, lay representatives are often experts albeit in different fields which could render this label derogatory. For example, lay representatives might be economists, lawyers or community engagement specialists.

- Specify individual specialism, for example: **“Vet”** ; **“Chemist”** or **“Economist”**

This approach outlines to all the discipline of the individual and may help with clearly defining the scope of their role on the SAC. However it could be unsuitable for lay representatives that are not specialists in a clearly defined discipline, for example: somebody with expertise in various aspects of community health work who is not a doctor, nurse or social worker.

10 SAC secretariats should continue to liaise with its members as to the best way to describe their position and these descriptions should be subject to regular review and refinement. However, it was agreed that when speaking generally using the term lay representative or member is acceptable.



**Name:** Ann Williams

**Committee:** Social Science Research Committee (SSRC)

**Sponsoring department:** Food Standards Agency

**Success:** "I've been able to make my committee more aware of real people outside the academic world."

For a number of years I've sat on a local research ethics committee, assessing the ethical implications of NHS research programmes. I also used to work for the Citizen's Advice Bureau and so came to the Scientific Advisory Committee network from a consumer perspective.

Working with academics can be challenging. Many of them have altruistic intentions but, in parallel, they often seem to be very focused on what they think is right and lack an awareness of real people and how their work is viewed by the wider community.

I've tried to provide that perspective, particularly in my role on the SSRC. Sometimes it can be a struggle and providing a challenge feels as if I'm continually chipping away at people. However, at other times the 'reality check' is very well received and encourages the committee to consider alternative viewpoints and perceptions.

A key example is when the SSRC were discussing undertaking the FSA food survey by telephone. I simply posed the question – where will we get the phone numbers from? The committee said they would take a random selection from the phone directory. I made them aware that a considerable number of people have no landline and only use mobile phones. In this way, it could not be a fully representative sample as we would automatically exclude some demographics from the study.

## Lay members: successes and issues

11 Among workshop attendees a number of successes of lay membership were identified. These included:

- Lay members having a positive impact on the adaptation of SAC communications to make them more accessible and user friendly. For example: minutes, press releases and briefing notes;
- SAC secretariats taking a proactive and involved approach to recruitment of lay members. For example: inviting them to attend meetings in advance of taking up a position and establishing informal mentoring schemes across SACs;
- The presence of more than one lay representative on each committee can afford a real voice to lay members;
- A lay Chair can help a committee achieve consensus while performing the role of a fully independent facilitator of discussion;
- Lay representatives can provide an objective reality check to committee advice and proposals; and
- Lay expertise can help scientists to think beyond the bounds of traditional scrutiny.

12 These successes are explored in greater detail through the case studies in this report. They are intended to be used as examples for harnessing the expertise and added value afforded to SACs through lay membership.

13 Several issues with lay membership were also identified. These included:

- Lay members are listened to but little notice or action is taken as a result of their contributions;
- Lay members can be made to feel they are present only because they tick a box;
- Lay members are not always valued for the unique contribution they make to the work of SACs;
- In some instances it is not clear to other committee members (and possibly the SAC secretariat) why a lay member is present. There is a risk that having a lay representative becomes a token position and/or the lay member becomes isolated; and
- There are issues with the varying connotations of the term “lay” and whether a more suitable label might be utilised in individual cases. [This is explored in greater detail on pages 12 and 13].



**Name:** Leslie Whitbread (Unit Head)

**Committee:** Medicines Act Advisory Committees \*

**Sponsoring department:** Medicines and Healthcare products

Regulatory Agency (DH)

**Success:** “We run a buddy system for lay members and professionals and give potential members an opportunity to see the work of a committee before they join.”

“The MHRA committees are very scientific and advise on the safety, quality and efficacy of medicines regulation. Lay members can therefore feel at a disadvantage being immersed in these very technical fields.

Initially there was just one lay member on each committee however feedback informed us that these representatives could feel isolated and unable to contribute. Each committee now has two lay members which enables them to support each other.

In addition to the normal induction for members both professional and lay, handbooks etc we also run a buddy system. Lay members are matched up with professional members (doctors/pharmacist/scientists) on their committees. This helps break down some of the jargon and encourages them to contribute to discussion.

We also have a lay forum for all lay members and this meets twice a year, providing members with an opportunity to discuss their contrasting experiences.

In addition, committee Chairs also hold short 5-10 minute briefing sessions with lay members prior to each meeting to help them understand some of the context around agenda items.

Potential lay and professional members are deterred from even becoming members of scientific advisory committees because they're not sure about what is expected from them. We encourage those we seek to appoint to attend meetings before they consider applying. This allows them to consider what they might be able to contribute to the work of a very scientific committee. All these initiatives are, of course, complementary to a comprehensive induction and ongoing training.”

\* = Commission on Human Medicines (CHM) & 11 Expert Advisory Groups  
Herbal Medicines Advisory Committee (HMAC)  
Advisory Board on the Registration of Homeopathic Products (ABRHP)  
Independent Review Panel for the Classification of Borderline Products (ARPBP)  
Independent Review Panel for Advertising (IRPA)

14 Plenty of ideas that might address some of the issues regarding lay membership were discussed and are outlined below. Some of these points outline actions that could be taken forward. Others outline that further discussion among a wider cohort of people involved in the working of individual SACs could be beneficial.

- SAC secretariats might usefully explore communicating the role of lay members more explicitly in each individual case to the entire committee. This tailored communication will ensure everybody understands their role and how their expertise will be harnessed to facilitate the successful operation of the SAC;
- SAC secretariats could help lay members cultivate relationships with individual SAC members, especially the committee Chair. These relationships will help them to feel valued and confident in their position;
- SAC secretariats could work with lay members to find ways to harness the individual expertise of lay members. For example, if they have knowledge of the media, community engagement or digital communications the SAC might utilise their specific experience for the benefit of the committee;
- Further discussion around remuneration for lay members, cost-effective ways of recruiting lay representation, ensuring full lay participation (including buy in from other committee members), training for lay representatives, communicating the value of lay membership, and balancing the hierarchy of expertise could be useful at the level of each individual SAC.



**Name:** Paola Cassanelli

**Committee:** Advisory Committee on Hazardous Substances (ACHS)

**Sponsoring department:** Defra

**Success:** “We have a Code on Openness.”

“During my time as secretary, in line with the ACHS Code on Openness, ACHS has had open meetings with only one exception where unpublished research work was discussed. We’ve published almost all our working documents on the website including draft opinions (but not confidential documents from stakeholders) and we have a mailbox that members of the public are able to contact us through.

The Code brings all ACHS activities on openness and transparency together in one place. It is very clear and encourages the strategic management of knowledge and information. It also enables stakeholders to be informed about the processes by which they might be able to access information which can reduce the administrative burden on the secretariat.

A particular example is when ACHS received a formal request from a representative of the British Union Against Vivisection (BUAV) for the committee to consider specific amendments to its statement on animal testing. Thanks to the Code, our open meetings gave stakeholders the opportunity to engage at all stages of the process and to comment on the draft opinions of the committee. BUAV representatives in particular, commented on the first revised statement and their comments were acknowledged in the second draft.

The Code allows us to engage with our stakeholders in a proactive way and we have experienced no difficulties or issues with it. We’ve also not received any Freedom of Information requests, perhaps an implicit demonstration of success.”

# Openness and transparency

“Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.”

*The Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles)*

## Why be open and transparent?

- 15 While it was recognised that in some circumstances being open and transparent might not always be possible, for example: when dealing with issues of national security, personal data or commercial interests, open and transparent working can increase public trust and credibility in the system of independent scientific and engineering advice to government.
- 16 A large proportion of attendees felt the public also had a right to know about the process by which independent scientific and engineering advice was provided to government and what form the advice took. These points are in line with established good practice as outlined in the *Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees* and *Principles of scientific advice to government*.

## Engagement

“Scientific advisory committees should develop a policy for the communication of their work to the public and other interested parties and for receiving feedback. There is a range of mechanisms that can be used such as: open meetings, public consultation, dialogue with interested parties and the calling of outside experts to attend meetings.”

Paragraph 99, *Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees*

- 17 Workshop attendees had different opinions over suitable levels of engagement between SACs and the general public. For some SACs, proactive engagement is extremely beneficial and has a number of clear benefits whereas for others, it may not be suitable. For example, the Human Genetics Commission advises the government on how developments in human genetics impact upon individual lives and one of its key roles is to listen to what the public has to say.
- 18 Some thoughts on possible advantages, disadvantages and key considerations emerged from the workshop, which are designed to help individual SAC secretariats manage the level of engagement undertaken by their SAC.

**Name:** Frances Pollitt (Secretary)

**Committee:** Committee on Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COC)

**Sponsoring department:** Department of Health/Food Standards Agency

**Success:** "COC is now communicating its advice using a revised system that is more accessible to the general public, as a direct result of a suggestion by a lay member.

"During discussion of the annual horizon scanning item, the secretariat proposed that a review on comparative risk assessment should be conducted that compared the carcinogenic risk of selected environmental carcinogens with a clearly defined exposure. The members decided that COC should work closely with another SAC, the Committee on Mutagenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COM) on this to improve the way that advice from both committees on the risk of chemicals is presented to the general public rather than just a technical audience. COC's lay member, Rosie Glazebrook initiated this last recommendation, owing to her membership of both committees.

"The committee discussed a number of possible approaches over several meetings and consulted a number of experts. The lay members were keen throughout for any approach used to be accessible to the general public. Unfortunately, this proved more difficult than it seemed because a comparative approach – where risks of carcinogenic chemicals could be compared with other, non-chemical risks, was decided to be unfeasible.

"However, as a result of this exercise, COC adopted the concept of "Margin of Exposure (MoE)" for use in risk communication. Under this system, the committee calculates a parameter from an animal carcinogenicity study which is compared with the estimated public exposure to the contaminant. Depending on the margin between the two, the risk is assessed in terms which, hopefully, are more accessible to the general public e.g. may be a concern, highly unlikely to be a concern.

"COC is now communicating its advice on contaminants using the MoE approach, thanks to the lay contribution. The committee has become more receptive to suggestions made by lay members as a result, but still recognizes that there can be limitations in meeting them."

## 19 Advantages:

- **Increased awareness and demystification of SAC issues**  
Active engagement of the public would raise awareness of the topics that SACs advise on. This might go some way to halt some inherent SAC concerns, for example: shrinking recruitment pools, a lack of diversity in SAC membership and of available experts. This would also ensure that SAC messages are communicated to the wider public and not just lobbyists.
- **Consistency**  
If a policy for the communication of SAC work to the public is established and embedded then it can improve the reputation of the committee and of independent science advice in general.
- **Encouragement for the SAC to do things differently**  
Ideas, suggestions and comments from an increased pool of stakeholders and interested parties may result in new ideas on issues or approaches for the SAC to consider. For example: it might give them the confidence to tackle particularly controversial issues knowing they have some public support, or the SAC might begin to embrace newer and more efficient modes of working to adapt to its fresh audience.
- **Helps to response effectively to Freedom of Information requests**  
If all the information that could be made public has been made public then Freedom of Information requests should require minimal resource because SACs could simply refer requests to their websites where the information had already been published.

20 A number of reasons might also restrict active engagement. A lack of resources to fund and manage open meetings and embrace open access technologies, for example: podcasting or video conferencing. SAC members might feel restricted in the voicing of their opinions during open meetings and the public may misunderstand the role of the committee and ask questions about areas that are outside the remit of a particular SAC. Increased engagement might also build up expectations that the particular concerns of members of the public will be dealt with, when this may not be possible.

## 21 Key considerations:

- **Developing a process**  
This may take a considerable time and resource investment initially but once systems are established, they should require minimal resource to be maintained. **See for example, the Advisory Committee on Hazard Substances Code on Openness – case study available at page 18.**
- **Adapting guidance to suit the individual needs of each SAC**

# SaBTO

## Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs

**Name:** Mike Rogers

**Committee:** Advisory Committee on the safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (SaBTO)

**Sponsoring department:** Department of Health

**Success:** “We’ve applied an alternative interpretation of SAC guidance and hold meetings with the public, as opposed to meetings in public.”

“Rather than watching members discuss complex issues at length as with normal open meetings, we were keen to do things a little differently to make sure we communicate with our key stakeholders in an interesting and engaging way.

“SaBTO also had to take into account that much of what they discuss includes commercially or medically sensitive information, and unpublished research findings. This would inevitably limit the amount of topics available for discussion in open session.

“So we decided to hold meetings with the public. These convey the issues in a way that promotes understanding and enables attendees to get actively involved. The format is usually a series of brief talks from members highlighting the major issues followed by a question and answer session. Any questions not answered on the day are answered afterwards and included in the public summary of the meeting.

“Our first meeting in October 2008 tackled the issue of variant CJD and blood, the second in October 2009 on blood donor selection. These were highly contentious issues but it is important to be brave in selecting a topic that will spark people’s interest. It is also crucial to not be afraid of those with opposing views because debate is what makes the meeting a success.

“You need to consider selecting a good venue, securing good public speakers, managing a targeted publicity campaign and inviting the right people which involves effectively engaging with stakeholders well in advance. Having a strong and confident chairperson is also vital; you definitely need somebody who will be able to respond to quickly changing circumstances.”

Ensuring any process is suitable for the needs of each individual SAC is also crucial. Guidance exists on openness and engagement but is not prescriptive. This allows SAC secretariats and members to consider the approach that best suits them. **See for example, the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (SaBTO) approach to open meetings – case study available at page 22.**

- **What are the issues for the public?**

There is a need to be aware of what the public's interest in the SAC's topic area might be – this is particularly important when dealing with strong lobby groups – so SACs can manage contributions from members of the public and ensure meetings run smoothly.

- **Who is the end user?**

Of paramount importance is considering who the end user is. Advice should be provided in a way that allows Ministers to make informed decisions.

- **Adapting to specific audiences**

Changing the SAC approach may be necessary to appeal to certain groups that might not ordinarily feel welcome at an official meeting. For example, holding special meetings could be more productive than open council meetings to engage with students or young mothers, for example. **See for example, the Gene Therapy Advisory Committee (GTAC) special schools day – case study available at page 24.**

- **Publicity**

Open meetings need to be advertised well and in advance. Awareness of who the SAC would like to engage with is also crucial. Consider advertising in mainstream newspapers or via online forums and not just specialist publications.

- **Use free or cheap technologies to engage people**

Webcasting can be expensive but SACs could use cheaper technologies, such as mobile phone texting to accept questions from interested members of the public. Videos could be posted on YouTube or SACs might use Twitter to advertise meetings or publications.

- **Think local**

Engaging at a local level, for example through local radio or TV stations can prove extremely beneficial because these channels often have more time to engage in discussion and debate.

- **A strong Chair**

The success of meetings in public or meetings with the public often depends on the skills of the SAC Chair. It is imperative they have strong communication and interpersonal skills to manage the audience and engage with them in the correct way.

# What is Gene Therapy?

This event for **A-Level** and **GCSE** students will help you to:

- ✓ **Learn more** about this fascinating science
- ✓ **Meet** top gene therapy scientists
- ✓ **Ask** difficult questions
- ✓ **Explore** a first class university lab
- ✓ **Become** interested in gene therapy

BIRKBECK COLLEGE • MALET STREET • BLOOMSBURY • LONDON • WC1E 7HX

**Name:** Halina Pounds

**Committee:** Gene Therapy Advisory Committee (GTAC)

**Sponsoring department:** Department of Health

**Success:** “We ran an education day targeted at young adults to increase awareness and understanding of gene therapy.”

“GTAC’s 2007 public meeting was a first for the Committee. Rather than targeting interested individuals the Committee ran a ‘school day’ targeted at young adults aged between 16 and 18. A total of 7 schools signed up for the day bringing around 150 young adults.

“The morning was spent with 10 different speakers each giving a presentation on their area of expertise. These included a general introduction to gene therapy and how it works, followed by more specialist topics such as: cancer gene therapy, gene therapy for retinal degeneration, cystic fibrosis and cardiovascular disease. The talks extended to ethical and social considerations of gene therapy, including around issues of consent, and the possible future of gene therapy. An extensive Q&A session also gave rise to lively debate. In the afternoon, each school group was given the opportunity to visit a working gene therapy laboratory in a London University.

“We received excellent feedback on the event with 78% of attendees saying it had had helped them with their studies and 72% affirming it had changed their perception of gene therapy. The logistics of running an event of this scale were not without difficulty. It took a lot of work to approach suitable schools within easy travelling distance, coordinate members’ presentations and organise the lab tours. In all, the secretariat (which I joined in mid 2007) spent about a year developing the event. Although it was a huge success and an original way of engaging the public in the work of gene therapy, a great deal of goodwill went into its production and organising a similar event might be beyond the resources of some secretariats.”

## Measuring the success of engagement

22 It is important that SAC members and secretariats, as well as the SAC's sponsoring department, measure the success of active engagement and its added value. This might be done in one or more of the following ways:

- The number of hits on the SAC website;
- The amount and nature of feedback received;
- Increased response to consultations or other active engagement work;
- Increased attendance at open meetings;
- Accurate and favourable press reporting;
- Increased uptake of publications, for example: annual reports or advice documents and increased demand for and engagement with news and updates on SAC activities such as newsletters;
- Increased awareness of the SAC model as independent of government and their sponsoring department(s) and of the provision of independent scientific and engineering advice to government;
- Positive reaction from and between SAC members;
- Increased skills of SAC members, Chairs and secretariats as a result of the opportunity to test and realise their abilities, for example: public speaking, communication and stakeholder management skills; and
- Mutual understanding and respect between SAC and public augmented which leads to reduced antagonism and an increase in constructive contributions from attendees due to a well managed and communicated engagement process.

**Name:** Peter Grimley (Secretary)

**Committee:** Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC)

**Sponsoring department:** Department of Health, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Food Standards Agency

**Success:** "SEAC is an example of transparency in action."

"The Phillips inquiry into BSE and vCJD in 2000, highlighted issues around the independence and transparency of scientific advice provided to Government. Since then, SEAC has been committed to maximising the transparency of its discussions and its advice to Ministers.

"The key tool that we use is our website: [www.seac.gov.uk](http://www.seac.gov.uk). The site receives around 2000 hits per month from users worldwide. We use it to advertise our meetings – all of which are held in public – and to publish agendas, papers, minutes and statements along with details of members. Our meetings are also recorded and audio copies of public discussion are available on request.

"The only exception to public attendance at meetings is 'reserved business', when SEAC discusses material that would not be available to it if it were made public. This can include, for example, unpublished research results, or material subject to commercial or patient confidentiality. However, any such material that does eventually enter the public domain is published on SEAC's website as soon as possible afterwards.

"The independence of our website and of our secretariat allows us to clearly demarcate ourselves as an independent advisory committee.

"Currently, the main challenge for the future is handling a reduction in the level of business brought to SEAC by government. It is likely that SEAC will undertake more work in correspondence in the future, and protocols will be introduced to maintain a high degree of openness and transparency."

## Being transparent

“Scientific advice to Government should be made publicly available unless there are over-riding reasons, such as national security... for not doing so.”

*Principles of Scientific Advice to Government*

“Adopt an open and transparent approach to the scientific advisory process”

*Guidelines on the use of scientific and engineering advice in policy-making*

- 23 Transparency is about the making the process that led to a government decision clear and allowing the information about all stages of that decision to be accessible.
- 24 Workshop attendees explored the related issues of transparency of advice, transparency in publication, recruitment transparency and the SAC life cycle, in line with current guidance. As with engagement it is important to balance the effort required to achieve transparency and the benefit to the public.
- 25 SAC secretariats have a responsibility to seek follow up reactions to advice provided by SACs from the relevant department it was supplied to. Feedback on whether the advice was accepted and, if it was not, the other reasons that may have been taken into account should be made available by the department.
- 26 Transparency throughout SAC recruitment processes is extremely important to uphold the values of open and fair competition while being consistent with guidance issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.<sup>3</sup>
- 27 Managing the lifecycle of a SAC poses particular problems when there may be a limited number of experts in a given field; SACs may have difficulty securing fresh insights and perspectives. SAC Chairs and secretariats have key roles to play in deciding lengths of tenure of SAC members. To secure continuity, they might consider staggering terms to avoid all accrued expertise being lost within a short period of time.
- 28 Annual appraisals of all members and a system of formal review for SACs are useful in monitoring individual contributions and the overall need for SAC advice, which may change over time. See for example, the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) which is adapting its working processes in line with reduced demand for advice – case study available at page 26.

---

<sup>3</sup> [www.publicappointmentscommissioner.org/](http://www.publicappointmentscommissioner.org/)

## An ideal SAC

29 While attendees considered guidance for SACs to be sufficiently robust, there are inevitably a number of issues that affect the working processes of SACs on an ad-hoc basis, for example: financial constraints, emergency situations or a lack of available expertise.

30 To encourage SAC secretariats to think laterally about solving some of these issues, participants were invited to envisage the creation of a new SAC and provide information about how it might be developed. The aim was to develop some new and innovative ideas which might not be for immediate application but which could help stretch and challenge understanding of how SACs could operate both now and in the future.

31 Workshop attendees were given the following brief to consider and examples of some of the ideas floated are below:

“The Secretary of State of a government department has appointed you to oversee the establishment of a new Scientific Advisory Committee. The SAC must exemplify best practice in openness and transparency. Develop a plan that illustrates how you would go about meeting this brief.”

### ***Safety of Boiled Sweets Advisory Committee (SOBSAC)***

- Has its own website with links to social media applications, for example: facebook and twitter;
- Facebook is a key tool to engage with the general public on key issues and data collection. Facebook mini-site hosts short surveys on sweets and unique rating and voting bars on the home page to engage with the general public;
- Regularly review need for the SAC;
- A comprehensive events programme – in collaboration with other SACs advising on public health and food related issues; and
- A twitter feed where members of the public can post comments for SOBSAC to note.
- An example comment below:

“I like boiled sweets but I want to be safe too.”

### ***Committee on Invasion of Aliens (CIA)***

- Consultation on membership (make-up of members);
- Clear terms of reference;
- Varying initial terms for members;
- Wide range of views of members – e.g. sceptics, media;
- Open meetings;
- Be clear on uncertainty;
- Ensure the committee is asked a clear question;
- Review the committee on a regular basis to ensure it is still relevant;
- Controls its own research budget;
- Has a clear endpoint that will be reviewed and may change over time; and
- Has its own website where it offers webcast report of meetings.

### ***Advisory committee on Environmental Climate Change***

- Consult on future work programme on a regular, rolling basis;
- Receive feedback on advice from department following every report;
- SAC Chair invited to departmental board meetings to see advice in action, where appropriate; and
- Review need for the committee annually.

Engage stakeholders by:

- Social networking / podcasts;
- Regional / local meetings;
- Live web chats – including experts;
- Publishing findings where appropriate;
- Roadshows – including experts;
- Its own website with unique URL;
- Education packs for schools;
- Expert stakeholder meetings;
- International collaboration networks;
- A connected but ultimately separate youth committee that sits in parallel with the main committee. Benefits include the cultivation of expertise in potentially resource-short scientific disciplines ;
- Environmental song / themed competition on policy;
- ... and much more.

### ***Advisory Committee on the Life Cycle of Plants (ACLCP)***

- Established for 3 years and every year will be reviewed as to its efficacy and whether the advice it provides is still required;
- Use public engagement to define terms of reference, structure of committee and expertise of members;
- Has its own website with a special advice line feed that highlights where advice is at any given time. For example: whether it is still being considered by a committee or if a Minister has received it. Notes, videos, comments and questions can be attached to any component of the feed.
- Updates that people can subscribe to outlining advice that has been provided. Available in scientific expert and general public options. Also available in text form;
- Receives questions from general public via text that appear in a Twitter live feed; and
- Members can be rated as to their contribution to meetings and can be nominated for eviction by a select group of key stakeholders.

32 Some of the key points and recurring themes are:

- **Active and informal consultation**

The principle of simple and readily accessible ways for the general public, experts and partner organisations to voice their views, comments and queries about SAC working. This can be of particular benefit to SACs when undertaking horizon scanning activities or developing their future work programme, for example.

- **Utilisation of digital channels and other emerging technologies**

Although some SACs have, in the past, experimented with web-casting and concluded that the interest did not justify the large cost, SACs undertaking active engagement work could utilise free web based applications to promote their stakeholder work more widely.

- **Increased transparency**

The principle of being transparent about the stages that advice provided goes through and where particular pieces of advice are at any given moment in time. This might simply take the form of web announcements about when particular reports will be published.

- **Awareness of the SAC life cycle**

Each of the theoretical SACs developed in this exercise recognised the necessity to periodically consider the *need* for the SAC's advice. This might not take the form of a formal review of efficacy but alongside production of an annual report, for example, SAC secretariats might consider the advice that has been provided by the SAC and the extent to which it has been used.

## Engaging with the media

“Scientific advisory committees should decide on who should represent them to the media e.g. departmental press officer, independent press officer, Chair...”

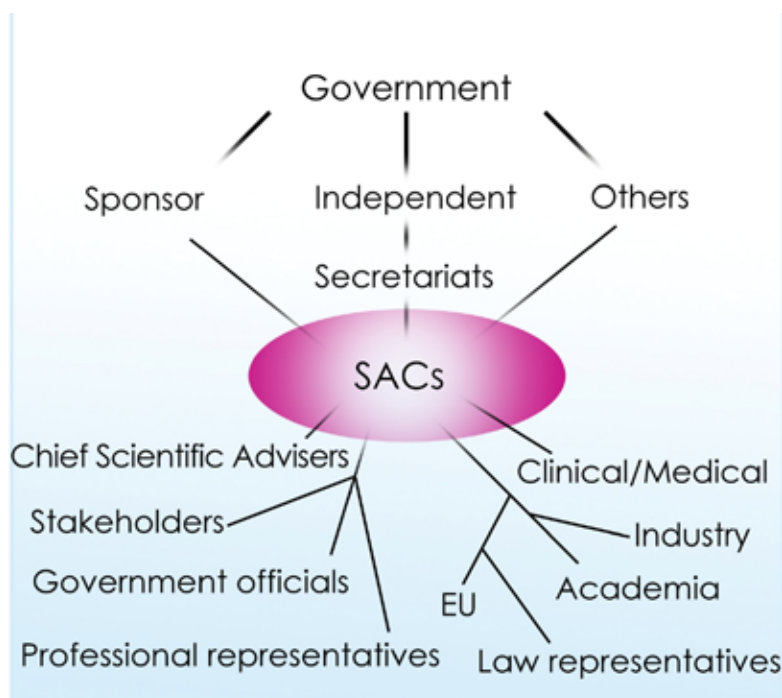
Paragraph 106, *Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees*

- 33 A key aspect of openness and transparency for SACs is engaging with the media. A crucial and sometimes determined stakeholder, the media is the vehicle by which numerous members of the public receive information about government decisions.
- 34 As with all communication, it is important to consider how the information may be received. For example, SAC’s might ask themselves, “is this something the media will find interesting?”
- 35 It is useful for SAC secretariats and press officers (whether departmental or independent) to work together proactively, providing an opportunity to promote positive news stories rather than simply reacting to incorrect or negative coverage.
- 36 SAC secretariats and the designated SAC spokesperson need to be realistic about the potential for negative coverage when stories move from the specialist scientific press to news and political media.
- 37 Although a large number of SACs have informal policies or approaches to communicating with the media, many do not have formalised media engagement or communications strategy. Producing a formal strategy would facilitate effective and timely engagement with the media, develop a strategic approach to media communication – including the training of SAC Chairs or the equivalent media spokesperson, allow SACs to accurately measure their progress against projected targets and facilitate knowledge sharing across the SAC landscape.

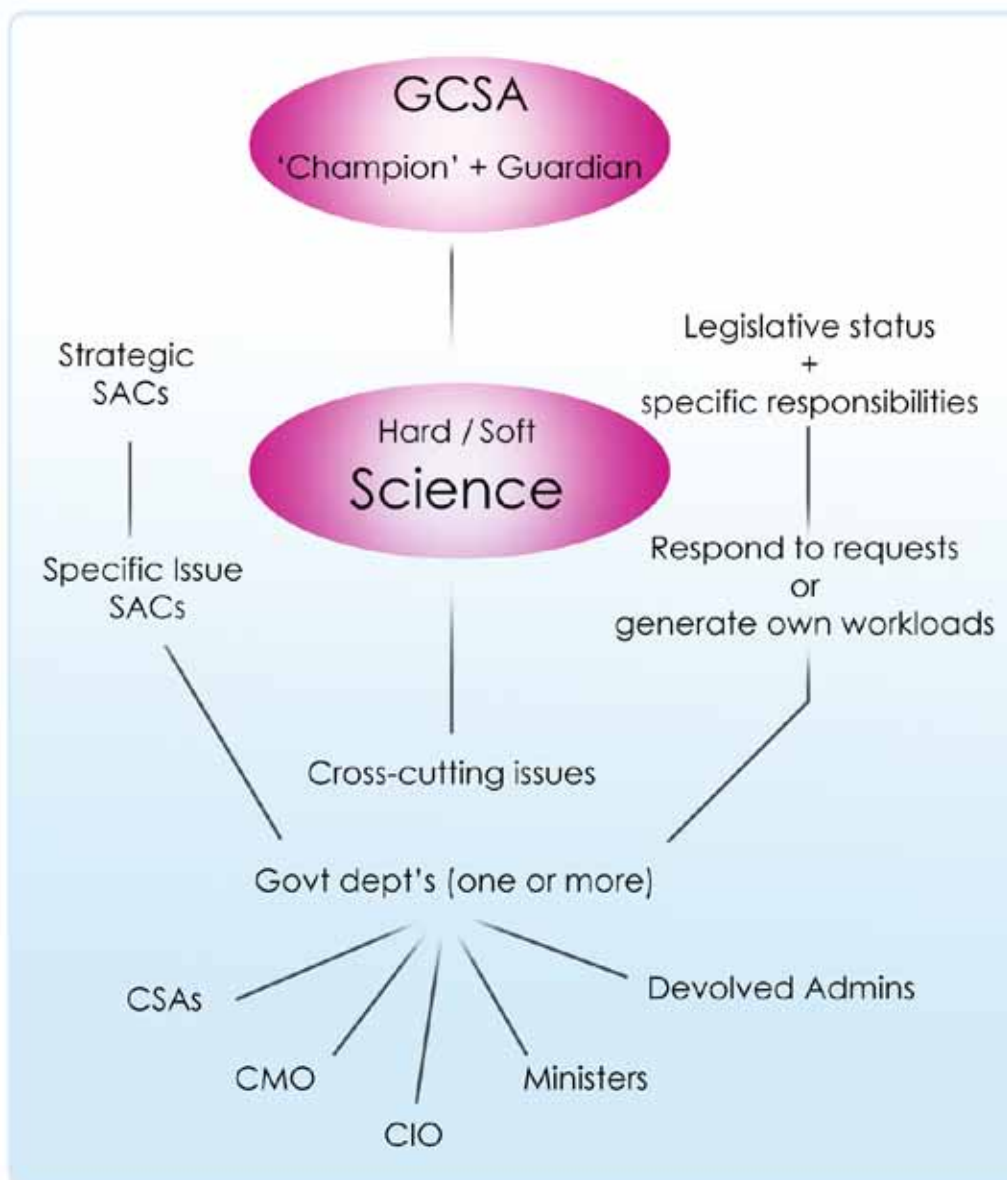
# The Landscape of SACs across Government

## Visualising independent science advice

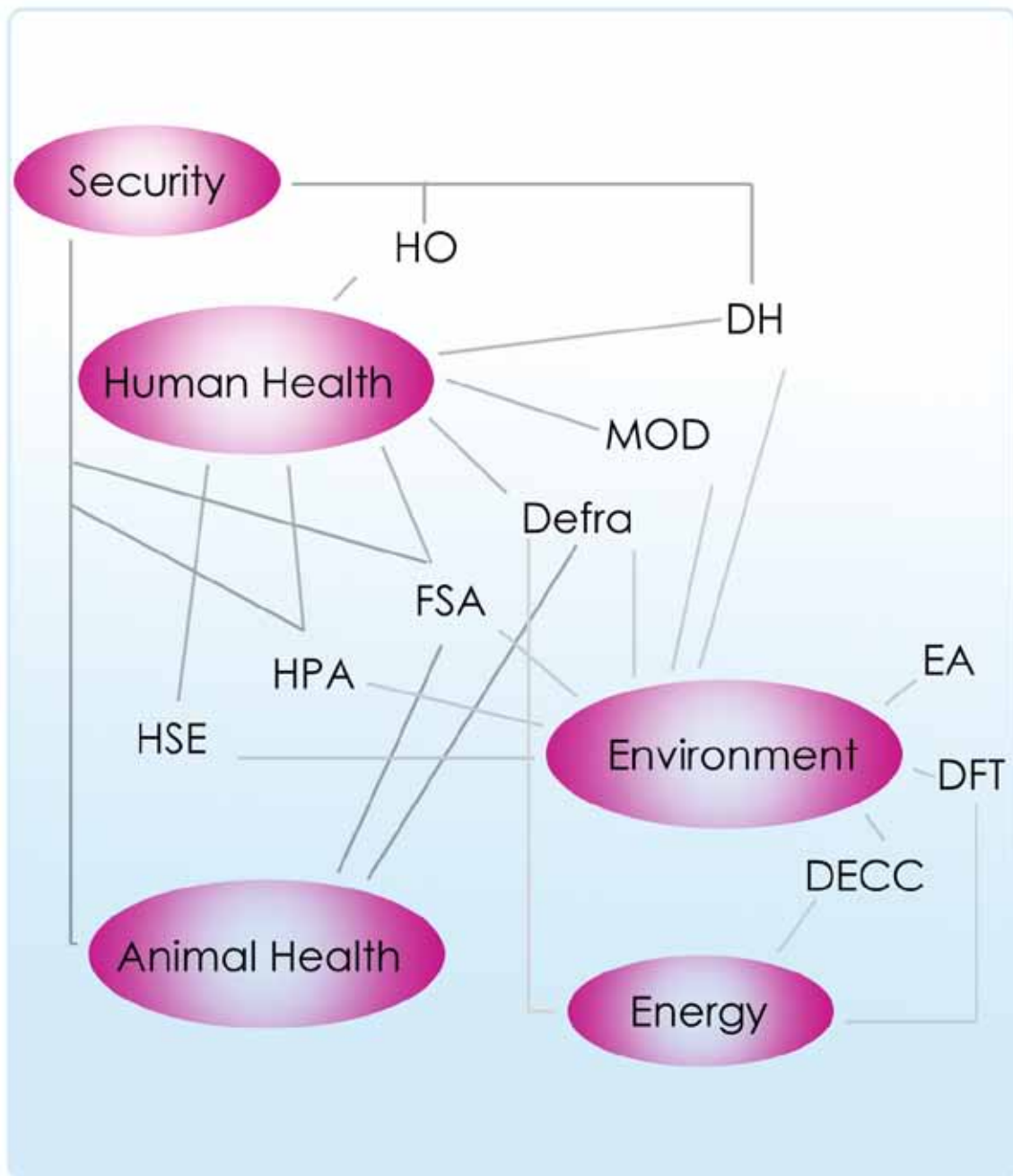
- 38 SACs vary in their role and remit according to the individual need of their sponsoring department(s). SACs might report to government, engage with stakeholders and interest groups and generate their workloads in different ways. Some have statutory roles and some are focused on providing risk assessment advice whereas others provide advice on policy options.
- 39 To reflect the varying models of SACs, each group was asked to visualise the system of independent science advice to government. A deliberately broad brief, this task encouraged attendees to share their different experiences of SAC working processes and present a version of their discussion to the workshop. These are displayed below and on the following pages.



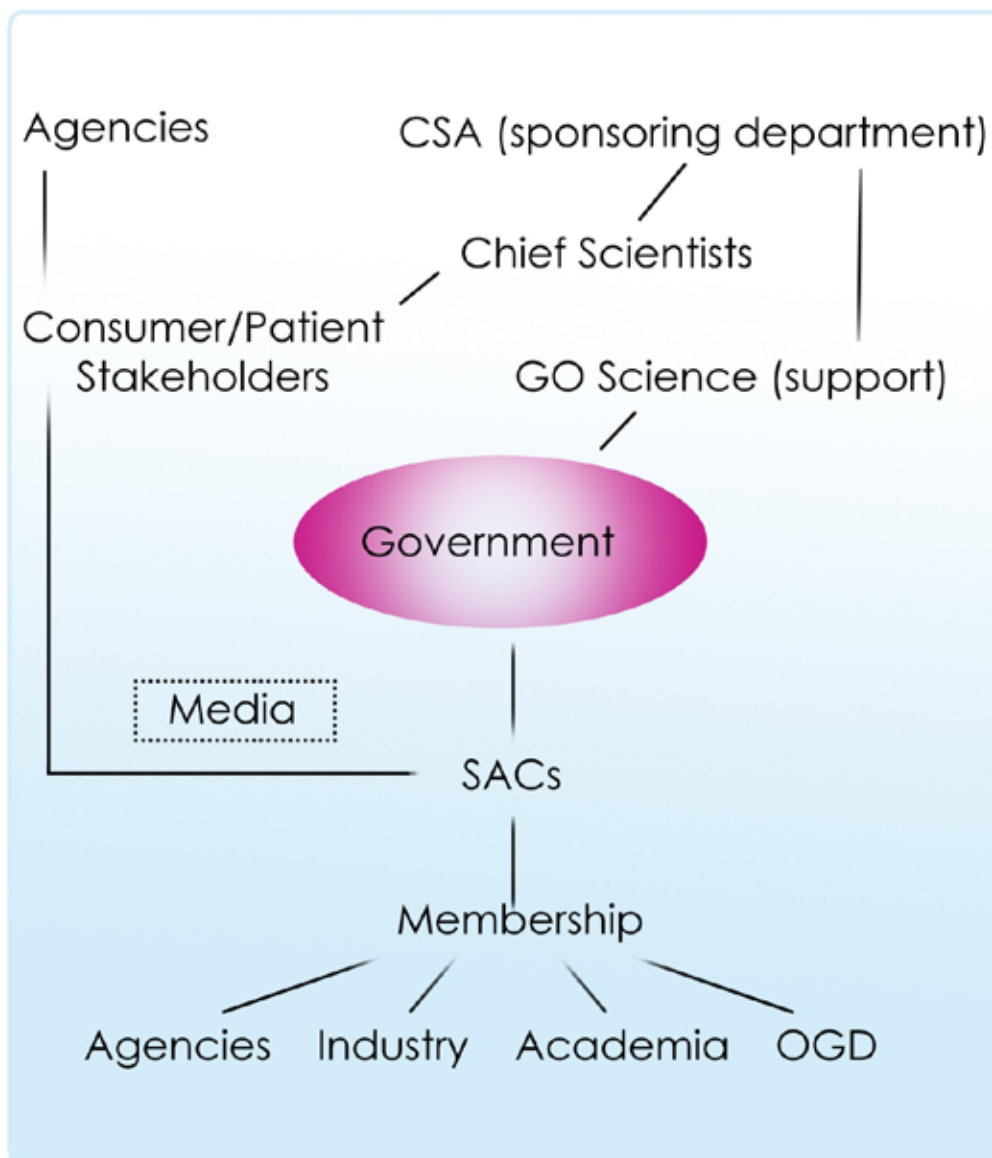
In this diagram, SACs are placed at the heart of science advice in government. This reflects the central role played by SACs in providing evidence for many of the decisions undertaken by government regarding scientific issues. Some SACs also produce their own work plans as well as responding to requests for advice from government departments.



This diagram highlights the role of the Government Chief Scientific Adviser in championing science and demonstrates that under his leadership science is central. Individual departments, including the Devolved Administrations and key officials such as departmental Chief Scientific Advisers, Chief Information Officers and the Chief Medical Officer also have a key role to play in ensuring the application of science throughout government.



Selected scientific issues are the focus of this diagram. Some of the government departments and delivery agencies that work in these areas are outlined.



Government is at the centre of this diagram. Both the receiver and user of independent science advice, departments – with the support of GO-Science and Chief Scientific Advisers – manage the life cycle of SACs and provide a secretariat to support its function.

40 Interestingly, each diagram highlights a different aspect of the SAC landscape as central to the provision of independent science advice to government. Clearly underlining the fact that no one size fits all model is suitable for SAC working, the diagrams represent the views of individual workshop attendees and are simply an iteration of discussion. They are not suitable for wider application.



**Name:** Jalal Ahmed

**Department:** Food Standards Agency

**Success:** “We have a working group of SAC secretariats and have developed good practice guidelines with the SACs that expand on CoPSAC.”

“The FSA established a working group for SAC secretariats about three years ago to provide a forum for the

discussion of SAC related issues, including governance, appointments and joint working between SACs.

“Bringing the secretariats of the 10 SACs that advise the FSA together improves communication between committees and creates the opportunity for discussion of issues that cut across or fall between the remits of individual SACs.

“The FSA Chief Scientist Andrew Wadge attends the meetings to ensure he is kept abreast of SAC developments and to provide a link to how the advice is used and applied by the FSA Board. The Chief Scientist’s Team provides the secretariat for the working group but the agenda is very much driven by the SAC secretariats themselves. At meetings we go around the table and each secretary outlines some of the current work programmes and any issues they might be facing. This cultivates an informative and collaborative approach that we really pride ourselves on.

“The group complements the cross government network of SACs because it provides the immediate and local support required to ensure consistency and to manage secretariat resources as strategically as possible. For example, the working group has identified opportunities for collaboration across SACs.

“In 2007, the committees also developed Good Practice Guidelines to provide a common framework for SACs that advise the FSA to operate within. It is based on CoPSAC – produced by the Government Office for Science – but aims to give more detailed, practical advice on how this guidance can be applied effectively, and consistently, across SACs in developing their advice to the FSA.”

# The future of independent science advice

Horizon scanning is...

.... the **systematic** examination of potential **threats, opportunities** and likely developments including but not restricted to those at the margins of current thinking and planning. Horizon scanning may explore novel and unexpected issues as well as persistent problems or trends.”

*(Chief Scientists Advisers Committee, 09/04)*

- 41 To develop ideas for improving engagement among SACs across government, workshop attendees were invited to consider what the future might hold for independent science advice to government using a horizon scanning technique, seven questions.
- 42 Seven questions is a technique normally reserved for one-to-one interviews with key individuals regarding the future however, on this occasion they were used to facilitate discussion within groups. The seven open-ended questions prompt those being interviewed to think aloud, placing themselves in the future, processing and communicating their ideas about the future of independent science advice to government in real time. See a summary of answers at Annex A.

## Seven questions:

Q1: If you could speak to an oracle about independent scientific advice to government in the year 2020 what would you ask?

Q2: What is your vision for the success of independent science advice up to and beyond the year 2020?

Q3: What are the dangers of not achieving your vision?

Q4: What needs to change (systems, relationships, decision making processes or culture, for example) if your vision is to be realised?

Q5: Looking back 10 years, what are the successes we can build on, and the failures we can learn from?

Q6: Looking forward, what needs to be done now to ensure that your vision becomes a reality?

Q7: If you had absolute authority and could do anything, is there anything else you would do?

# Acting to cultivate a community of SACs

43 Taking the ideas about the future of independent science advice to government, workshop attendees were asked to focus on the outputs of question 6 – **looking forward, what needs to be done now to ensure that your vision becomes a reality**. While that question encouraged the articulation of strategic goals to aim for, the task was to consider what real steps could be taken, or begin to be taken, now.

44 A summary of the key themes and ideas suggested are below:

## Facilitation

- Induction for SAC members should set the context of independent science advice and make clear what is expected of them. Key documents include: the Nolan principles of public life and the universal ethical code for scientists;
- SACs should be given the opportunity to think laterally as much as possible, including undertaking horizon scanning activities; and
- A beginner's guide to SACs might be produced that brings together key information on SACs into one place, for both internal and external audiences.

## Engagement

- Where it does not already happen, SAC secretariats might consider attending the meetings of other SACs to facilitate the sharing of good practice and avoid duplication;
- Engagement between SAC Chairs, especially those in related disciplines, should be actively encouraged;
- Engagement between SACs should also be informal as a peer support network as well as via formal workshops and meetings; and
- SAC secretariats should increase their engagement with the Government Science & Engineering (GSE) community and use its infrastructure (ie. members discussion boards on website) as a resource network for professional development and to share good practice and any issues.

## Evaluation

- Regular feedback from SAC members should be sought on SAC working processes and the efficacy of the SAC Chair and secretariat; and
- SAC secretariats should actively seek feedback from the SAC's sponsoring department(s) and act as a broker of relations between government and the SAC, reminding both sides of their roles and responsibilities.

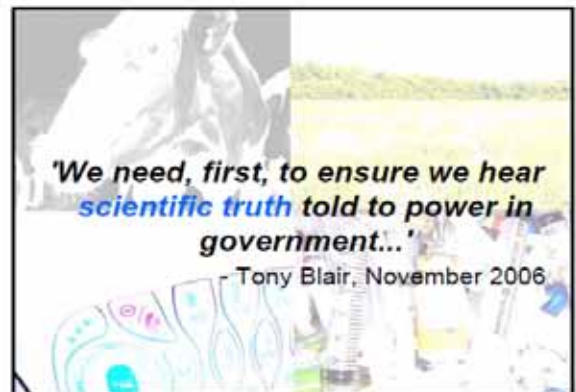
# What next?

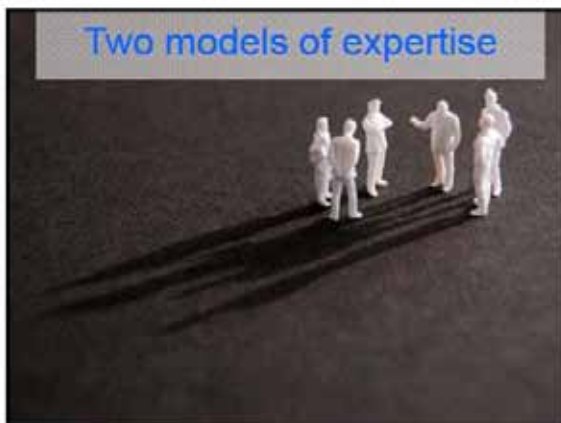
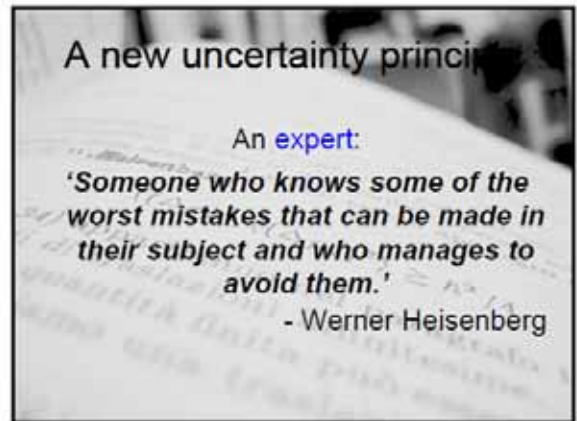
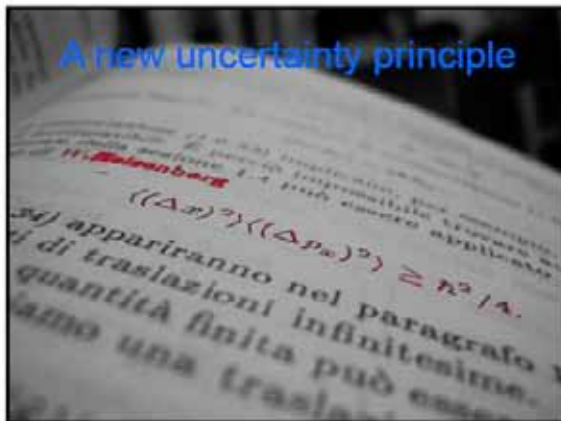
The value of the SAC workshop series is clearly conveyed by the overwhelmingly positive feedback we have received from attendees at all events. Comments on how useful interaction among SACs has been highlight the extent to which we have been able to respond to the needs of the community and facilitate greater engagement across the SAC network.

But more can still be done. It is our ambition to provide a further series of SAC workshop events in future and, to ensure they continue to be as relevant and helpful as possible we are keen to receive input from you.

Requests for further information on the work of GO-Science and possible ideas for future workshops should be sent to: [GO-Science@bis.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:GO-Science@bis.gsi.gov.uk)

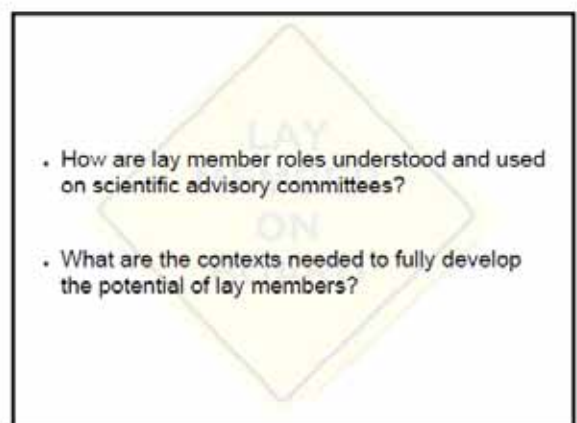
# ANNEX A – Presentation to Lay Members’ workshop from Dr Jack Stilgoe





Two models of expertise

Old	New
• Closed	• Open
• Homogenous	• Diverse
• Hubristic	• Humble
• Demanding public trust	• Trusting and engaging the public
• Expecting consensus and prescription	• Expecting plural and conditional advice
• Managerial control	• Distributed control
• Presenting the evidence	• Presenting evidence, judgement and uncertainty





Legitimising expertise,  
Challenging expertise,  
Contributing expertise

- Witnessing scientific advice
- Communicating with the public
- Social grounding
  - Challenging expertise
  - Complementary experts

(Source: Jones and Irwin, forthcoming)

Witnessing scientific advice

*'A representative of the people who can actually say, 'I'm separate from the decisions that this group makes, but I confirm that this group operates in a legitimate way.'*

Communicating with the public

*"I have memories of one of the lay members saying, 'look, I need us to explain what you mean' and it's good then because they make sure that everyone understands."*

Social grounding

*" an interpreter of the public domain."*

*"I think that the questions the public ask either need to be seen as relevant or, even if they're not relevant, be answered and explained why they're not relevant... lay members are part of a wider constituency of tools for making your science advice, or your science policy advice, relevant. '*

Challenging expertise

*'My job is to ask awkward questions, questions that experts can't. I can ask the 'why' questions. Experts are often afraid to reveal their lack of knowledge. I'm allowed to be ignorant.'*

## Complementary experts

*'You need to be aware of the psychology and the ethics and so on. In the past you would have some people say 'oh, we all, we all have got ethics, you know, we've talked about values', but now it seems in certain contexts, very useful to have somebody who's an expert in that kind of thinking and questioning.'*

*'You should actually look round the table; there are many subjects on which I would be very wise to keep my mouth shut... And so I'm an expert on some things and non-expert on many things... I hesitate to use the word 'lay' because I'm also a lay person.'*

## Tensions and challenges



## Tensions and challenges

- Group dynamics
- Opening up vs. Taking care of business
- 'Evidence' vs. Something else
- Is 'lay' the right word?

# ANNEX B – Summary of answers to Seven Questions

*From the workshop on the Landscape of SACs across Government*

## **Q1: If you could speak to an oracle about independent scientific advice to government in the year 2020 what would you ask?**

How many SACs are there? What is their relationship to government?

Are we better at communicating science and uncertainty?

How do SACs engage and communicate with each other. Is it through workshops, meetings or even an annual conference?

How is the life cycle of SACs managed?

Is SAC advice used in the policy making process?

How often is SAC advice accepted by government?

How do SACs receive feedback on their advice from their sponsoring department(s)?

How can SACs regain public trust in the face of negative publicity?

## **Q2: What is your vision for the success of independent science advice up to and beyond the year 2020?**

Science advice is valued across government and is enshrined in the policy-making process, alongside financial and legal advice.

There is a strong emphasis on public engagement and the communication of the added value of science to all.

SACs play a key role in planning for and communicating uncertainty.

There is no duplication of work across SACs – the SAC community is joined up and aware of what other SACs are doing.

Everyone, including government, SACs themselves and the media is clear about what a SAC is and their various roles, especially that they are independent of government.

The public is more involved in – or at least aware of – the decision making process. Decisions that do not prove to be the best ones are not covered up, nor are they blown out of proportion.

Communication between SACs and their sponsoring department(s) is excellent. Feedback on all advice is provided and if the advice is not accepted, the reasons why not are communicated openly.

Diseases or scientific issues are eradicated so the work of SACs is done.

### **Q3: What are the dangers of not achieving your vision?**

Government policy is not based on good evidence. Decisions taken refute scientific advice and prove harmful to people and/or the environment.

There is a loss of public confidence and trust in independent scientific advice. SACs are no longer asked to provide advice.

There is a lack of collaboration or willingness to engage between SACs. SACs therefore provide conflicting advice and/or duplicate work.

There is an unwieldy number of SACs which are rarely reviewed in light of ongoing need.

SACs have difficulty recruiting top-quality scientists with expertise in the right disciplines.

There are poor relationships between Chief Scientific Advisers and SACs. SACs feel they have nobody to turn to if they have problems.

A series of disasters occur which means SACs become reactive rather than proactive as they do not have the time to think strategically and long-term.

### **Q4: What needs to change (systems, relationships, decision making processes or culture, for example) if your vision is to be realised?**

Government systems and processes (and those of external regulatory bodies such as OCPA) need to be adaptable and able to evolve over time.

Government and ministers in particular, need to have a better understanding and appreciation of the value of science.

Processes by which advice is turned into or used in the policy-making process need to be more transparent.

The media needs to be more informed about science and to appreciate long-term approaches – issues cannot be solved overnight.

There should be a clear structure for communication and co-operation between SACs that might include presentations from SACs to other SACs, shared membership, resource sharing secretariats and work shadowing.

The roles and terms of reference of SACs should be reviewed and if there is no longer a need for a SAC it should be discontinued. Equally where there is a need for SACs, they should be established.

## **Q5: Looking back 10 years, what are the successes we can build on, and the failures we can learn from?**

Successes:

The efforts SACs have made to be open and transparent, to engage better across the SAC community.

The increased engagement between the Government Chief Scientific Adviser and SAC Chairs.

Workshops to share good practice have helped SAC secretariats get to know their peers.

Policy is increasingly underpinned by good evidence but there is always room for improvement.

## **Q6: Looking forward, what needs to be done now to ensure that your vision becomes a reality?**

There needs to be a real emphasis on the recruitment of good quality SAC members. Good practice on this should be shared across SAC secretariats and SAC members should have appraisals on a regular basis.

Media training should be offered to SAC Chairs and/or spokesperson.

SACs should be assessed by their sponsoring department against the continuing need for advice on their topic.

SAC monitoring and evaluation exercises should be focused on the health of SACs, for example, areas of resource concern and examples of good practice.

Chief Scientific Advisers and their officials need to be aware of what SACs are sponsored by their department and should cultivate good working relationships with them.

SACs need to communicate their impact better, including proactively seeking better feedback on advice provided and how it has been used.

## **Q7: If you had absolute authority and could do anything, is there anything else you would do?**

Set up two oversight bodies to ensure:

- a) Government uses and responds to SAC advice; and
- b) SACs do their jobs properly.

The need for SACs should not be presumed. Limit the life cycle of every SAC to 5 years – after this they would have to put a business case on why they should operate for longer.

Establish a work shadowing programme among SAC secretariats.

Ensure every SAC member and Chair is appraised every year.

Make government publish the reasons why they reject advice at all times.

First published June 2010. URN 10/1012