

Science Advisory Council

Governance sub-group (Quality Assurance and Peer Review)

Summary of Initial Work and Draft Terms of Reference

Paper: SAC (05) 13

Author: SAC Secretariat 27/06/05

Confidentiality status: For information

For members' use only- do not show to or discuss with anyone else

Not for publication- may be discussed with colleagues on a confidential basis

For information- may be shown freely or discussed with anyone

ACTION REQUIRED:

Agree proposed terms of reference and work plan for the group.

[Note that the next SAC-G meeting is on 19 July (day after SAC meeting), therefore members' suggestions on issues to explore will be very welcome.]

1. Background

- 1.1 At the Science Advisory Council (SAC) meeting in April, it was agreed that a sub-group should be convened to consider Defra's quality assurance and peer review programme, identifying current good practice and helping Defra develop its programme further (see paper **SAC(05)7** paragraphs 7.1 to 7.6). It was agreed that Professor Chris Gaskell would chair the sub-group.
- 1.2 An initial scoping meeting was held between Professor Gaskell, the Secretariat and Dr Iain Williams (Head of Defra's Science Quality and Priorities Branch) on 28 April 2005 to discuss possible work areas for the sub-group. Following this discussion, a scoping paper (**SAC-G(05)8**) was produced for the sub-group.
- 1.3 The sub-group has now been formed and convened for the first time on 6 June 2005. The work plan of the group was discussed and Dr Iain Williams gave members a detailed overview of Defra's quality assurance programme. This paper sets out the proposed terms of reference for the sub-group and provides an outline plan for future work.
- 1.4 Members of the sub-group are:
 - Professor Chris Gaskell (Chair)
 - Ms Anna Bradley
 - Professor Philip Lowe
 - Professor Thomas Meagher
 - Professor Richard Mithen
 - Professor John Shepherd
 - Mr Bob Irvine

2. Proposed terms of reference

- 2.1 The sub-group's proposed terms of reference are:

To consider Defra's quality assurance processes, including peer review; to identify and endorse good practice in Defra and advise the Department on how it could develop its programme further. The sub-group will:

 - Evaluate Defra's current peer review and quality assurance processes, including:
 - > peer review of research proposals and reports;
 - > quality assurance of the research; and
 - > audits of the laboratory agencies.
 - Consider Defra's processes when dealing with emerging findings or emergency situations where rapid use of research results is required.
 - Consider how Defra's quality assurance programme might be developed further.

3. Future work plan

- 3.1 During the first meeting of the sub-group, members identified two main areas for discussion: evaluation of Defra's current peer review and quality assurance process, and dealing with emerging findings and emergencies.
- 3.2 Members agreed that they would meet with Defra's four science coordinators who are directly involved with peer review of research proposals and programmes. Each science coordinator will be questioned separately during the course of the next SAC-G meeting to give their thoughts on the current peer review of proposals and

programmes, and their future development. This sub-group meeting with the science coordinators will take place on Tuesday 19 July 2005.

3.3 The third sub-group meeting will be split into two parts:

- Members hope to meet with staff from one of Defra's laboratory agencies to gain an insider's perspective of the agency audits (e.g. how the audits have been undertaken in the past and their value).
- In addition, members intend to discuss urgent peer review and Defra's procedures for dealing with emerging findings.

3.4 A fourth and final meeting is planned for September to discuss the content of the final report, which it is intended will be available for presentation to the SAC at its meeting on the 11 October 2005.

SAC SECRETARIAT