

History of the COT

The first COT chair was Professor Paul Turner, who chaired the committee until 1992 when he was succeeded by Professor Frank Woods. Professor Ieuan Hughes took over as COT chair in 2002 followed by Professor David Coggon in 2008. The current chair is Professor Alan Boobis who was appointed on 1 April 2015.

The type of work undertaken by the COT has changed and evolved over time. In 1978 the committee was largely concerned with the approval of food additives and ingredients such as enzymes and colours. In the first year of the COT's life, the main component of the COT's work was reviewing the safety in use of food colourings at the request of the then Food Additives and Contaminants Committee (FACC). The COT report was annexed to the FACC report which was published in 1979.

The first COT meeting for which the minutes are available is December 1980, the Committee discussed a range of issues including nitrosamines, enzymes, biological assays for microbiological toxins, sweeteners, chlorine-treated flour and butyl acetate.

By 1988, the COT were still reviewing a lot of additives, though this was partly due to a second reappraisal of colours, as well as enzyme approvals and novel sweeteners but were also considering some more general issues (for example, the use of Acceptable Daily Intakes, the significance of forestomach carcinogens), as well as the implications of survey data and assessing levels of contaminants such as dioxins.

By 1998, with most approvals being done at an EU level, the committee reviewed only a few food additives, with surveys, contaminants and non-food issues taking up more of the COT's time.

The way in which the COT works has also changed substantially over the years. In the early years, COT advice was provided directly to Department of Health or MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) ministers and was not routinely published, though in many instances it would be annexed to published reports such as those by the FACC.

The first Annual Report of the COT was published in 1991. This was a joint report of the three sister committees COT, COC and COM and contained summaries of the work carried out over the year as well as listing the committee members and their declared interests.

Increased moves toward openness and transparency in government have meant that working papers and minutes which were previously confidential are now published on the COT website and meetings are held in open session (except where data are confidential through being commercially sensitive or pre-publication).

In previous years, new members with the appropriate scientific expertise were identified on an informal basis. This has also changed, with new members now joining the committee in response to adverts in the press and scientific journals and completing successful interviews. In 1998, the first lay COT member was appointed to represent and safeguard the consumer interest. The COT now has 2 public interest representatives.

Although the COT itself has evolved significantly during its life, the constant factor has been the expertise, commitment and hard work of its members, without which, none of it would be possible.