

Recommendations following COT quinquennial review and COT response

The review commends COT on good practice in 9 areas and made 10 recommendations. The COT has considered possible changes to its procedures in the light of the recommendations

Recommendations following review	COT response
<p><i>Recommendation 1 – “The horizon scanning process and the process for determining the work programme should be improved and forward work plan published with proposed timescales for the work”</i></p>	<p>Members noted that there appeared to be some confusion in the review report between horizon scanning and forward planning.</p> <p>With respect to the forward work plan, the rationale for recommending publication of proposed timescales was unclear. The “forthcoming COT meetings” page on the COT website already included a list of ongoing and future topics to be discussed. Members considered that providing more detail on the forward work plan would improve transparency and assist Members’ planning, but that it should not be too prescriptive with respect to expected dates for discussion of particular items. It was agreed that the forward work plan should contain a broad outline of probable topics of discussion with an indication of timescale but not specific dates.</p> <p>The COT work plan already includes an annual horizon scanning discussion. Members agreed that it would be useful for the Committee to receive information on the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) approaches to horizon scanning, which might give pointers to possible improvements.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 2 – “Completed work should be summarised in terms of outcome and impact achieved. This should be updated to track outcomes and impacts over time.”</i></p>	<p>Currently outcomes and impacts from the Committee’s work are communicated in 3 ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • verbal reports under “matters arising” at subsequent meetings; • an annual update paper presented at the first meeting of the year, accompanying the draft Annual Report. • Members are e-mailed relevant press releases citing COT advice. <p>Members considered this recommendation was principally for the benefit of the public rather than the Committee. It was agreed that it might be useful for the impacts of Scientific Advisory Committee activities on policy to be summarised in their annual</p>

	<p>reports, and the Chairman would raise this with the General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS).</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 3 – “The Committee takes greater steps to show evidence of scientific rigour by using the FSA Good Practice Guidelines and Science Checklist more explicitly and also routinely consider whether peer reviews are appropriate for work on which the Committee’s decisions are based.”</i></p>	<p>In considering the draft text of the COT Annual Report, Members are routinely invited to comment on the extent to which COT evaluations have complied with the Good Practice Guidelines, and if appropriate to make suggestions for future improvements. In addition, Members are asked to complete an annual self-assessment form, judging the COT’s performance against the Good Practice Guidelines.</p> <p>COT statements always highlight uncertainties that could impact importantly on conclusions, but Members felt that tick box confirmation of compliance with the Science Checklist in every COT statement would not be appropriate.</p> <p>Much of the evidence on which the Committee’s decisions are based comes from peer-reviewed studies in the scientific literature, which are summarised by the Secretariat, and the Committee then peer-reviews the work of the Secretariat. In other circumstances, the Committee is invited to review unpublished research, and itself performs the peer-review function. In such circumstances, the critical review achieved through the combined expertise of the Committee is likely to be more effective than that by one or two individual reviewers as commonly used by scientific journals. When needed, the Committee invites external experts to assist its discussions, and this is recorded in the minutes and statements.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 4 – “The Committee should explore whether there might be mutual benefits from developing links with other, non-FSA bodies in the toxicological arena”</i></p>	<p>Individual members already have links with other professional bodies through membership of scientific committees and panels, and of organisations such as the British Toxicology Society and Royal College of Pathologists. In addition the COT works with other committees such as the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) and the Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP) when appropriate. However, Members considered that since the COT is an independent advisory committee, its links to other organisations should normally be on an informal basis.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 5 – “The Secretariat should prepare a brief</i></p>	<p>The COT Secretariat has addressed this recommendation by providing information on specific roles and responsibilities of each of the members of the Secretariat as part of</p>

<p><i>information paper outlining the specific roles and responsibilities of each of the members of the COT Secretariat.”</i></p>	<p>the tabled list of attendees. Members agreed that it would be useful to receive information in this form at each meeting.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 6 – “The FSA should consider having a core Secretariat team in attendance at each meeting with other members of its Secretariat attending on an “as and when required” basis.</i></p>	<p>In addition to input in taking minutes and presenting papers, attendance of members of the Secretariat contributes to the professional training and development of toxicologists and exposure assessors in the FSA. Members confirmed that they did not feel overwhelmed by the presence of non-Committee members, and concluded that no action was needed in response to this recommendation.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 7 – “The Chair and Secretariat should consider Secretariat resources in terms of scientific expertise and amount of resource available when planning COT’s work programme and identify and address any gaps as appropriate.”</i></p>	<p>Members considered the scientific expertise of the Secretariats and did not perceive there to be a gap, with the possible exception of epidemiology in some papers provided by the Health Protection Agency (HPA) Secretariat. The HPA has addressed this gap by enlisting the assistance of an epidemiologist at Imperial College, as part of the HPA Toxicology Unit.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 8 “It is recommended that new Members have an induction meeting with the Secretariat”</i></p>	<p>Members agreed that a formal induction meeting was of limited value, and that the best form of induction is to attend a Committee meeting to see at first hand how it worked. It was agreed that in the future, new Members would be invited to observe a meeting before the start of their term of office, followed by a brief introductory meeting with the Secretariat and Chairman to discuss the way the Committee functions.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 9 “There is a need to clarify who the Committee’s assessors are and the role and responsibilities of assessors and officials.”</i></p>	<p>Meetings of the Committee may be attended by Assessors, who are nominated by, and drawn from, the Agencies and Departments that sponsor the Committee, receive its advice, or have other relevant policy interests. In principle all Government Departments and Regulatory agencies could send an assessor to COT, but in practice only one or two attend regularly. Information on the role of the assessors will be published on the FSA’s</p>

	website.
<i>Recommendation 10 “COT should continue to consider whether additional working groups would be appropriate when considering the most appropriate approach to addressing items on its work plan”</i>	It was confirmed that the Committee had formed sub-groups or working groups in the past and would continue to do so as and when required.