



23rd MEETING
7th February 2008, Aviation House, 125 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NH

Final Minutes

Chairman	Professor Alan Jackson
Members	Professor Peter Aggett Professor Annie Anderson Dr Paul Haggarty Professor Tim Key Professor Ian Macdonald Dr David Mela Dr Sheila Bingham Mrs Stella Walsh Mrs Christine Gratus Dr Anita Thomas Dr Anthony Williams Prof Peter Kopelman
Government	Dr Fiona Bissett (Scottish Directorate of Health and Wellbeing)
Observers and other attendees	Mrs Maureen Howell (Welsh Assembly) Dr Alison Tedstone (FSA) Mrs Gill Fine
Secretariat	Ms Lynda Harrop (FSA) Dr Elaine Stone (FSA) Mr Michael Griffin (FSA) Dr Sheela Reddy (DH) Ms Rachel Coomber (DH)

Closed Session

Folic acid/cancer Expert Working Group (SACN/08/02)

1. The Chair welcomed Members to the twenty-third meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) and explained the purpose of the closed session, which was to report back discussions of the meeting of the

Expert Working Group on folic acid and cancer that had been held on 21 January 2008, and to reach agreement on the way forward.

2. Members were reminded that the Expert Working Group had been convened in response to a letter sent to the FSA's Chair from the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), requesting SACN to further consider two papers (Cole et al, 2007¹ and Mason et al, 2007²) relating to folic acid and colorectal cancer (CRC) risk, which had been published after the SACN report.
3. The Expert Working Group was chaired by Professor Alan Jackson and comprised: Members of SACN (Professors Tim Key and Sheila Bingham and Dr Paul Haggarty); two cancer epidemiology expert (Professor Elio Riboli and Dr Peter Boyle); and two members of the Committee on Carcinogenicity (Professor David Phillips and Professor Alan Boobis). Dr Boyle and Professor Boobis had not been able to attend the meeting, however written comments had been received from Professor Boobis.
4. Members were informed that as well as the papers by Cole et al (2007) and Mason et al (2007), the Group had also considered additional information including another study which had investigated the effect of aspirin and folic acid on preventing colorectal adenomas (Logan et al, 2008³).
5. The Group had agreed that:
 - The study by Cole et al (2007) raised concerns as it suggests that folic acid at doses in excess of 1mg/day may increase the risk of developing multiple/advanced adenomas and consequently increase CRC risk;
 - There was no clear explanation for the increase in CRC incidence observed in the USA and Canada at around the same time as the introduction of folic acid fortification (Mason et al, 2007). Current knowledge is insufficient to conclude whether or not there was a causal link with folic acid; increased rates

¹ Cole BF *et al.* Folic acid for the prevention of colorectal adenomas. *JAMA*. 2007; 297:2351-2359.

² Mason JB *et al.* A temporal association between folic acid fortification and an increase in colorectal cancer rates may be illuminating important biological principles: a hypothesis. *Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev*. 2007; **16**:1325-29.

³ Logan RFA *et al.* Aspirin and folic acid for the prevention of recurrent colorectal adenomas. *Gastroenterology*. 2008; 134(1):29-38.

of CRC screening, higher intakes of folic acid at the time of fortification or other factors could have been responsible.

- A meta-analysis of cancer/precursor lesion incidence from existing intervention trials investigating the effect of folic acid on cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk could provide more information on the relationship between folic acid and cancer risk as these trials are also collecting data on cancer.
6. The Group had agreed, on balance, with SACN's recommendation that mandatory fortification should only be introduced with controls on voluntary fortification and guidance on supplement use. However, it was also agreed that the recommendation to restrict voluntary fortification should be strengthened if mandatory fortification is introduced.
 7. Members were informed that subsequent to the meeting on 21 January the Secretariat had corresponded with the B-Vitamin Treatment Trialists' Collaboration and learned that 90% of the data from CVD trials would be available at the end of the year. It was also reported that another trial in the USA, looking at the effect of 1mg/day of folic acid on preventing the recurrence of colorectal adenomas, is due to be published later this year.
 8. Members were asked to consider whether to defer judgement on folic acid and cancer risk until further data from these randomised trials became available and to make a decision on mandatory fortification after considering this evidence.
 9. It was noted that no intervention trial which had reported to date had shown a preventive effect of supplements of folic acid on cancer occurrence. All trials had shown a non significant increase apart from the trial of Cole et al which had shown a significant positive increase in prostate cancer risk.
 10. The Chair reminded Members of the main considerations in assessing further evidence:

- Dose – many studies have supplemented with folic acid doses above 1mg/day, the amount accepted as the safe upper level; it is unclear if there is a dose response or a threshold dose which may be associated with risk.
 - Study size – in the USA and Canada, an increase in CRC incidence occurred at around the same time as voluntary fortification of foods with folic acid. Although a significant effect on CRC incidence has not been reported in any folic acid trials this may be because the trials were too small to detect an increase of the magnitude observed in the USA/Canada; a summary effect of multiple studies may be helpful in indicating trends although even a meta-analysis may not achieve sufficient statistical power to detect an effect of this size.
 - Multiple supplementation – it will be important to consider whether folic acid was given as sole supplement or in combination with other supplements.
11. The Chair noted the measure of uncertainty regarding whether folic acid has a direct causal effect on the progression of colorectal polyps and that waiting for as much evidence as possible before making a final decision on mandatory fortification may be the most prudent approach. It was agreed to obtain statistical advice on the numbers required to attain sufficient power to come to clear conclusions.
12. It was agreed to try and obtain more information on CRC incidence in Chile following mandatory fortification and further information on CRC screening patterns in the USA. It was noted, however, that CRC incidence data from Chile are from a relatively new cancer registry and that increases in rates might be due to improvements in the completeness of cancer registration.

Action: Secretariat

13. It was noted that if mandatory fortification is introduced appropriate processes should be in place to monitor changes in CRC incidence in relation both to folic acid fortification and to CRC screening. Members were informed that pilot work for CRC screening had commenced in two areas of the UK about 5-6 years ago and was being rolled out nationally at the present time. It was agreed that the

coincidental introduction of mandatory fortification with increased endoscopy rates which will occur with the UK national CRC screening programme should be avoided so that it will be possible to ascertain whether screening was responsible for any increase in UK bowel cancer rates similar to those noted in the USA and Canada.

Action: Secretariat

14. It was agreed to defer judgement on cancer risk until further evidence from randomised controlled trials becomes available at the end of 2008 and to make a decision regarding mandatory fortification after considering this evidence.
15. In the meantime it was agreed to encourage renewed efforts to increase the use of folic acid supplements in women of reproductive age, particularly younger women in low income groups where supplement use is poor and the intake of natural folates from the diet is also low.
16. Members were informed that SACN's decision would be made public in the near future and that they would be informed of the communications strategy once finalised.

Action: Secretariat

17. It was agreed that when SACN's decision to delay making a recommendation about mandatory fortification is made public it would be crucial to communicate explicitly the fact that 400mcg/day of folic acid (the supplementary amount recommended for women who would become pregnant) has not been associated with a significant increased risk of cancer.

Open Session

18. The Chair welcomed observers to the open session of the meeting and stated that they would have an opportunity to ask questions at the end of the meeting, if time permitted.

19. Apologies were received from Dr Ann Prentice and Dr Naresh Chada. The Chair offered condolences to the family of the late Robert Wenlock and acknowledged his significant contribution to nutrition policy through the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Farming, Department of Health and Committee on Medical Aspects of Food.
20. Dr Paul Haggarty declared that he had been asked to advise Pharmaton on pregnancy study protocol and had received expenses but no payment for doing this.

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of previous Committee meetings

Minutes of 10 October 07 SACN main Committee meeting (SACN/07/min/03)

21. Members were invited to comment on the minutes of the meeting on 10 October 2007 (SACN/07/min/03).
22. The following amendments were noted and agreed:
 - Paragraph 59 should be amended to reflect that the Carbohydrate Working Group terms of reference had not yet been agreed;
 - Amend wording in paragraph 80 so that it is less negative.

Action: Secretariat

23. The remainder of the minutes were agreed as a correct record of the meeting on 10 October 2007.

Minutes of 11 October 07 SACN main Committee Horizon-Scanning meeting (SACN/07/HS/01)

24. Members were invited to comment on the minutes of the Horizon-Scanning meeting on 11 October 2007 (SACN/07/min/HS/01).

25. Several typographical amendments were noted and agreed.

Action: Secretariat

26. Members queried the purpose of the horizon scanning exercise and how the matters arising would be taken forward to inform the work of the Committee. It was confirmed that horizon scanning was seen as an integral part of Committee activities and it was agreed that progress on the actions noted at the Horizon-Scanning meeting should be reported on at the October 08 meeting and that follow up should occur for any future Horizon-Scanning meetings. It was noted that agenda item 4 had arisen directly from the Horizon Scanning meeting.
27. The remainder of the minutes were agreed as a correct record of the meeting on 11 October 2007.

Minutes of SACN trans fat meeting on 22 November 07 (SACN/07/min/04)

28. The Chair reminded Members that a meeting had been convened in November to discuss the report *Update on Trans Fatty acids and health*, which had been prepared for the Committee by Reading University. The Committee expressed their appreciation to Professor Christine Williams's team at Reading and to the FSA for the work that had gone into producing this high quality report in such a short timeframe.
29. Members were invited to comment on the minutes of the trans fat meeting on 22 November (SACN/07/min/04).
30. Several typographical amendments were noted and agreed.

Action: Secretariat

31. The Secretariat reported that the FSA Board had discussed and agreed with the recommendations in the report. The Committee were informed that the FSA would continue to monitor food supply chain for *trans* fats.

32. It was noted that The Agency currently have a research requirement for some further research on *trans* fats. It was queried as to whether this research was still relevant since current population intakes of *trans* fats in the UK, as indicated by NDNS, have declined. In addition, levels of *trans* fats in foods have also been significantly reduced in the UK. The Secretariat agreed to give this further consideration.

Action: Secretariat

Matters Arising Action Check List (SACN/08/01)

33. The Chair reported progress on matters arising from previous meetings. Members were invited to comment.

SACN/7/27 – Agriculture Workshop

34. The Committee had been provided with an update paper on the implementation of the Curry report (SACN/08/10) and were also informed that the Agriculture Workshop would be convened later in 2008.

SACN/07/10 – Nutrition and Health Claims update

35. An update on this would be provided under agenda item 3.

SACN/07/02 – Committee Openness

36. The Secretariat would organise the June meeting to be held at the FSA's offices in Aberdeen.

SACN/07/05 – LIDNS report

37. Members were informed that a questionnaire to capture Member's comments on LIDNS was currently being put together and would be circulated in due course.

Action: Secretariat

SACN/07/12 – Carbohydrate Working Group

38. The first Working Group meeting is scheduled for 16 April 2008. The membership of the group had been circulated to Members. It was confirmed that external members would be co-opted on following the initial meeting and Alison Stephens was noted as a potential external participant. For consideration.

SACN/07/13, SACN/07/14, SACN/07/15 – NDNS papers

39. It was confirmed that this report would be published within the next two months.

SACN/07/16 – Selenium paper and dissemination

40. The Secretariat is continuing to work with the drafting group and it is expected that the report will be signed off by correspondence before the next meeting.

SACN/07/16 – COMS/dissemination strategy

41. Members were informed that an update paper on this would be brought to the meeting in June.

Action: Secretariat

SACN/07/26 – Infant feeding survey

42. The Infant Feeding survey report has been printed and will be published shortly.

Energy subgroup – Harmonisation with EFSA

43. Dr Alison Tedstone informed the Committee that discussions with The Agency's Chief Scientist and colleagues at EFSA had confirmed that it was desirable for a better liaison between EFSA and SACN but that currently no mechanisms for this existed. However, FSA officials would continue to build relations between the organisations.

Agenda item 9 – ANANF Working Group

44. The Secretariat informed the Committee that work on this group was moving forward and a meeting would be arranged shortly. Professor Alan Jackson, Dr Paul Haggarty and Dr Tony Williams would be the SACN representatives on this group.

SACN/07/29 – FSA update

NDNS Rolling Programme

45. A paper to update Members on the rationale behind the decision to use food diaries rather than 24-hour recall in the NDNS Rolling Programme had been tabled (SACN/08/10).
46. Members were also informed that the sample for the comparison study consisted of 1840 addresses in 80 randomly selected postcode sectors across England, Wales and Scotland as the intention was to sample the general population. The sample included some low-income households but there was no attempt to increase the weighting of the sample towards low-income areas or to specifically select low-income households. It was queried whether the response rates from the different groups in the comparison study were different and the Secretariat agreed to report back on this.

Action: Secretariat

47. It was also confirmed that the full report of the comparison study results (including doubly labelled water results) has been delayed due to preparations for the main survey but is expected at the end of March 08. Key results should be available by the end February 08.

Salt

48. Members had requested clarification on how much value obtaining sales weighted average data on salt levels in products would add above market basket analysis and a paper on this had been tabled (SACN/08/10).

49. Members queried why it was not possible to simply collect actual data on salt content from labels rather than use the self reporting system. The Secretariat agreed to come back to the Committee on this point.

Action: Secretariat

MRC strategic review of nutrition

50. Dr Alison Tedstone informed the Committee that the FSA and DH had been invited to comment on the review as stakeholders.
51. The Chair questioned how this review fitted in with other strategies and it was confirmed that this was the purpose of stakeholder involvement. The Secretariat agreed to circulate the terms of reference for the review and the membership of the group to the Committee.

Action: Secretariat

SACN/07/HS/01 – Cost effectiveness

52. Following a request at the Horizon-Scanning meeting about whether cost effectiveness assessments should be considered as part of the risk assessment process, the Secretariat informed the Committee that economists had attended the Folic Acid and Cancer Working Group meeting. The Secretariat would seek feedback from economists about how useful they found this involvement. In addition, the presence of an economist at the Carbohydrate Working Group was also being considered.

Action: Secretariat

SACN/07/HS/05 – Committee process

Committee process

53. The Chair reminded Members to ensure that they copied in all other Members when responding with comments on documents.

Risk assessment process

54. It was confirmed that a new format for the government updates, which included a section for evaluation, would be prepared for the June meeting. A template will be circulated to departments responsible for updates.

Action: Secretariat

55. DH agreed to circulate the scoping report for evaluation of Healthy Start. It was noted that this scoping report had already been seen by the Subgroup on Maternal and Child nutrition (SMCN). Members were informed that the plan was to now focus on a draft specification, which would be drawn up and circulated to SMCN in May 08.

Horizon scanning – Actions arising from appraisals

56. There were various actions arising from the appraisals that had been carried out in 2006 and Members were informed that these were ongoing.

Agenda item 2 – Folic acid modelling paper (SACN/08/04)

57. The Secretariat presented this paper, which summarised the latest modelling work that had been undertaken and formed the basis for discussions with industry on reductions in levels of voluntary fortification with folic acid. The key aspects of this modelling work were that there have been changes in the fortification levels of fat spreads, breakfast cereals and yeast spreads and therefore the data on folic acid intakes has been remodelled taking this into account.
58. The modelling work also included scenarios with caps on levels of folic acid in supplements and discussions were being held with the supplements industry. Members were informed that those in the lowest quintile for folate consumption in the population were not generally consuming supplements and a cap on supplements should not therefore impact on their intakes.

59. The Chair stated that this work sought to address the concerns SACN had raised over individuals with intakes of folic acid over 1mg/day.
60. The Secretariat informed Members that the Commission and Member States had been informally notified of this work and that although negotiations with industry were still in early stages, early indications that reductions in fortification levels would be made were positive.
61. Members encouraged the FSA to undertake detailed analysis before detailed changes. It was agreed to send Members further details of the quintile analysis.

Action: Secretariat

62. It was confirmed that folic acid intakes would continue to be monitored as would numbers of NTD-affected pregnancies and births. With regards to vitamin B12 deficiency, Dr Sheela Reddy confirmed that the Department of Health is currently looking at the issue and is preparing risk management options.

Agenda item 3 – Nutrition and Health Claims Update (SACN/08/04)

63. The Secretariat presented the Nutrition and Health Claims legislation update paper highlighting that the Agency received more than 2,500 claims that were evaluated in terms of the criteria for submission to EFSA, but not in terms of their scientific content.
64. It was asked whether herbal and plant claims were within the 2,500 and whether there was a category for oral and dental health. The Secretariat agreed to come back on these queries.

Action: Secretariat

Agenda item 4 – Presentation from the Human Genetics Commission

65. The Chair welcomed Dr Christine Patch, a genetic counsellor from the Human Genetics Commission (HGC) to the meeting. Following a suggestion from the horizon-scanning meeting in October 2007, Dr Patch had been invited to give a presentation on the work of the HGC with regards to direct to consumer genetic testing.
67. Following the presentation the Chair invited questions and comments from Members and the following points were noted:
- There is a growing tendency towards individualisation and optimisation of nutritional advice and because of this there is a growing amount of genetic tests being offered ‘direct to the consumer’;
 - Members were concerned about the scope for confusion over the proper interpretation of test results and the communication of disease risk in relation to nutritionally relevant genotypes.
 - Genetic testing could be useful at population level and in research studies but knowledge of nutritionally relevant genotype is likely to be of little practical value to the individual given our current understanding of gene-nutrient interactions.
68. It was agreed that the current information available to the public was unbalanced with the majority of the information available to the public about genetic tests, and their interpretation, being produced by the companies providing the tests. It was therefore agreed that it would be appropriate and timely for SACN to produce a statement in collaboration with the HGC, which would articulate the scientific validity of these tests in terms of risk, as a point of reference. The Secretariat agreed to consider the most efficient way forward for this.

Action: Secretariat

Agenda item 5 – Working Group updates

Sub Group on Maternal and Child Nutrition (SMCN)

69. The meeting in January had been postponed as the Subgroup's report *Influence of maternal, fetal and child nutrition on the development of disease in later life* was not yet complete. Members were informed that work on this report was now underway and a draft would be presented to the sub group at the next meeting on 19 May 2008. The Secretariat also intends to bring the report to the Committee in June.
70. Members were informed that the NICE Maternal and Child Nutrition guidance is due to be published on the 25 March 2008. It was noted that Members had already had the opportunity to comment on the draft guidance and that once published, the Secretariat would forward the final guidance to Members for information.

Energy Working Group

71. Work on the energy report is progressing and is expected to be completed by the end of 2008.

Carbohydrate Working Group

72. An update on the progress of this group had already been reported under agenda item 1, Matters Arising. It was however noted that the Food Standards Agency is currently commissioning a review on fibre, which will feed into the work on carbohydrates. The fibre report would be brought to the June meeting and would also be used by the Agency to formulate its opinion on fibre in preparation for the Codex meeting in the autumn.

Nutrition Professionals Confederation (NPC)

73. The Chair informed the Committee that the next meeting of the NPC would be held in March and following this meeting the ongoing responsibilities for this activity would be clearer.

Iron

74. It was noted that it is hoped progress on the iron report can continue now that commitments on folic acid have decreased.

Agenda item 6 – Government updates on nutrition related activities

FSA (SACN/08/05)

75. Dr Alison Tedstone gave an update of FSA activities highlighting in particular:
- In April the FSA would be commencing the field work for the NDNS Rolling Programme;
 - The Agency published its strategy on reducing saturated fat and achieving appropriate energy intakes on 5 February 2008. It was agreed to circulate the saturated fat strategy;

Action: Secretariat

- Research has recently been commissioned with Newcastle University on catering standards within Care Homes.
 - Work in Northern Ireland around a programme of peer support for older people.
76. A query was raised about whether collection of DNA for analysis of nutritionally relevant genotypes in NDNS had been considered. It was confirmed that this had been considered and would be kept under review, as there were many factors to take into account such as cost and ethics of collecting such data. It was also noted that collection of this type of data might create a barrier to participation.
77. It was queried whether the FSA's new *Good Life* leaflet could be obtained from different sources other than through the Agency's website or the Agency directly. The secretariat will look into this.

Action: Secretariat

78. It was confirmed that the results from the signpost labelling research would be available at the end of 2008.

DH (SACN/08/06)

79. Dr Sheela Reddy gave an update of DH activities:
- The cross-government obesity strategy *Healthy Weight Healthy Lives: A Cross-Government Strategy for England* has now been published and copies have been circulated;
 - National Child Measurement Programme - the Department is currently establishing the most suitable system and format for feeding back children's results to their parents;
 - Promotion around Healthy Start scheme is planned to encourage increase in take up, with 30,000 retail outlets now accepting Health Start vouchers;
 - DH are developing supporting PR activity around infant feeding policy and have engaged a PR firm to assist with undertaking these activities;
 - The Cabinet Office Strategic Unit work has published their first report *Review of Food Policy*. The second stage is also now in progress and will look at the challenges the UK faces in responding to these nutrition issues.
80. Members welcomed the Government's *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives* strategy. Members noted that it is important to consider this initiative across local Government and Health sectors and to have clear directive communication messages about obesity in order for it to be fully successful.

Devolved Health Departments (SACN/08/07)**Northern Ireland**

81. Written report only. No additional comments made.

Wales

82. Maureen Howell gave an update on Welsh activities:
- Currently consulting on Health and Nutrition with over 500 responses received;
 - The Appetite for Life Action Plan, which aims to improve food and drink across the whole school day has been launched;
 - Work is underway in hospitals to raise awareness of importance of food and fluids.
83. It was confirmed that the outcome of the Appetite for Life Action Plan would be evaluated in terms of the impact on what children are consuming throughout the day and at home and also to look in general at children's understanding and how healthy they are.
84. In response to a query about whether there existed mechanisms to harmonise the numerous interventions that were underway in schools, it was stated that in Wales there is a Welsh Network of Health Schools Scheme who exchange information and draw together different strands of work.

Scotland

85. Dr Fiona Bissett gave an update on Scottish activities including that Scotland is currently reviewing policy in relation to growth charts, which is part of ongoing work in the UK that has followed the work of the joint SACN/RCPH group on growth charts.

EFSA (SACN/08/08)

86. Written report only. No additional comments made.

DFID (SACN/08/09)

87. Members were informed that DFID had been invited to the SACN meeting to provide an update, as requested previously by the Committee, and has been notified of the date in advance. However, due to heavy travel commitments in January and February a representative was unable to attend the meeting on this occasion. the Secretariat agreed to continue liaising with DFID and invite them to the scheduled Committee meeting on the 23rd October.

AOB

Item 1 – General Advisory Committee on Science (GACS)

88. The Chair informed Members that this new Advisory Committee, whose remit is to provide independent advice on the Agency's governance and use of science, was established in December 2007 and the first meeting will be held on 11 March.
89. GACS comprises of an independent Chair (Professor Colin Blakemore), four independent expert members, two lay members and the Chairs of existing FSA scientific advisory committees, who are members of GACS in an ex officio capacity.
90. The Chair took this opportunity to confirm that Professor Peter Aggett was still content to continue as Deputy Chair and that he would take on GACS responsibilities, when needed.

Item 2 – Fish sustainability project

91. The Secretariat presented this item, explaining that in light of the Agency's commitment to sustainable development and in response to comments from stakeholders (including a recommendation from the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution), the Agency is reviewing the sustainability aspects of its advice to consumers on fish consumption.

92. The project will bring together the nutritional/safety evidence and the sustainability impacts of the Agency's current advice to eat two portions of fish a week, one of which should be oily. The aim is to produce sound dietary advice that takes into account nutrition, safety and sustainability evidence.
93. The Secretariat informed the Committee that the FSA would be seeking their views on their initial findings by correspondence around April 2008 with full discussion and final advice being sought at the SACN meeting in June.

Item 3 – SACN website

94. Members were informed that the redesigned SACN website would go live within the next couple of weeks and Members were encouraged to feedback any comments to the Secretariat.

Action: Members

Item 4 – Scientific Advisory Group on Pandemic Influenza

95. The Chair informed Members that a Scientific Advisory Group on Pandemic Influenza has been set up and that membership has been broadened to include representatives from different advisory committees. The Chair considered it important that SACN engage with this Group and had agreed to attend the first meeting and to feedback to the Committee in due course.

Next meeting

96. The next meeting is scheduled for 12 June 2008 in Aberdeen.
97. The Chair asked the general public observers if they had any questions and thanked members and observers for their attendance and closed the meeting. No questions were raised.