

4th MEETING

27th March 2002, Food Standards Agency, Aviation House, 125 Kingsway, LONDON

FINAL MINUTES

Chairman Professor Alan Jackson

Members Professor Peter Aggett
Professor Annie Anderson
Professor Sheila Bingham
Professor John Cummings
Miss Gill Fine
Dr Ann Prentice
Professor Andrew Rugg-Gunn
Dr Anita Thomas
Mrs Stella Walsh
Dr Anthony Williams
Professor Christine Williams

Government Assessors Mr Tom Murray (FSA)
Dr Jo Clarkson (Welsh Assembly)

Secretariat Dr Alison Tedstone (FSA)
Dr Sheela Reddy (DH)
Dr Adrienne Cullum (DH)
Mr Fayaz Aziz (DH)
Ms Rachel Elsom (FSA)

Chair's Introduction

1. The Chair welcomed Members to the fourth meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN).
2. The Chair asked Committee Members for items to add to the agenda under Any Other Business. Members were reminded to declare, when appropriate, any interests directly related to discussions at Committee meetings.

Apologies for absence

3. Apologies for absence were received from Ms Paulette Jones, Dr Timothy Key, Professor Peter Kopelman, Dr Martin Donaghy, Ms Imogen Sharp, and Dr Lisa Jackson.

Agenda Item 1: Minutes of last meeting (10/12/01) SACN /01/min 03

4. Members were invited to comment on the minutes of the previous meeting.
5. The Committee accepted the minutes with an amendment to Paragraph 37:

"Members highlighted that it was not possible to determine the risk of exposure to dioxins from the consumption of oily fish due to a lack of evidence, particularly for consumers with high consumption."

Action: Secretariat

6. The Committee discussed working arrangements for producing minutes and the timeframe for their placement on the SACN website. It was agreed that this process should be as quick as possible to ensure transparency of the work of the Committee for interested parties. The Committee commented that while it would be helpful to achieve a quick turnaround, it is important to ensure accuracy. Members noted that drafting and agreeing minutes within the one month target was sometimes difficult in the light of bank holidays and other disruptions. It was agreed that there was a need for some flexibility in the timing of this process for the next two meetings but that the Secretariat should endeavour to meet the one month target. The Secretariat agreed to identify and inform Members of the dates when minutes would be sent to them and when their responses would be required.

Action: Secretariat

Agenda Item 2: A Framework for Evaluation of Evidence that Relates to Food and Nutrients To Health SACN/02/02

7. The Chair introduced the paper and Professor John Cummings outlined the evaluation framework.
8. The importance of literature searches being conducted carefully was emphasised to ensure all relevant data was assessed and presented in a systematic way.
9. Members commented that "Causal Criteria" and "Confounders and effect modifiers" together with "Statistical Analysis" were generic to each section and should appear together at the beginning of section B to highlight their importance. They should also be added to the Guidance Notes together with other generic advice.

Action: Secretariat

10. The issue of including a scoring system for evidence had been discussed by the Risk Subgroup in detail. The Committee concluded that while a scoring system would be useful for discussion, other methods would be employed to ensure that data are presented in such a way that the full range of evidence is considered.
11. Members discussed which types of evidence should be included for review. Members agreed that, as a general rule, only peer-reviewed, published information and Government publications should be included for consideration. Judgements on the weight given to each type of evidence should be made on a case by case basis. It was stressed that a structured, formal and transparent approach was required for all assessments. It was agreed that "unpublished data" be removed from the Guidance Notes in Annex 1.

Action: Secretariat

12. Members considered how qualitative research should be assessed. It was noted that guidance is available and the Secretariat agreed to obtain it. It was suggested that the "Human Physiological Studies" section could include relevant psychological and sociological studies.

Action: Secretariat

13. Members commented that the framework would need to be piloted by the current Working and Sub Groups to test the suggested process and highlight potential problems.
14. The Committee commented that it was useful to have the relationship between SACN and other Advisory Committees clarified (Figure 1). Members requested a flow chart to show how all relevant Government committees relate to each other. Members also requested that they be kept informed of the proceedings and remits of other relevant committees, where nutrition is involved.

Action: Secretariat

Agenda Item 3: Royal Society Report, 'Genetically Modified Plants for Food Use and Human Health – An Update' SACN/02/03

15. The Secretariat introduced the paper, directing the Committee to Page 7 where SACN is mentioned in relation to Infant Formula. Members discussed the Committee's role in the assessment of genetically modified (GM) foods. It was agreed that while SACN was not responsible for food safety, it was able to examine the nutritional impact of GM foods.
16. The Committee noted that the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA) published general guidance on the nutritional evaluation of a novel food – which may include a GM food - in *Guidelines on the Assessment of Novel Foods and Processes* (COMA, Report 38, 1991). However, these guidelines did not fully address the issue and may need to be updated. It was also suggested that the COMA *Guidelines on the Assessment of Infant Formulas* (Report on Health and Social Subjects No. 47; 1996) could be applied to all foods, subject to relevant modifications.
17. Members were also informed about the guidance produced by the Joint Health Claims Initiative, a voluntary scheme which assesses evidence for health claims on foods, including novel foods.
18. Members agreed that a strategic decision on the nutritional assessment of GM foods was needed and therefore requested the issue be highlighted to DH and FSA for formal consideration.

Action: Secretariat

Agenda Item 4: Food Advisory Committee, 'Review of Food Labelling 2001' SACN/02/04

19. The paper was introduced by the Secretariat and members were invited to comment. Although the consultation on the FAC Report on Food Labelling has now closed, the Secretariat agreed to forward Members comments on the report and the FSA's Action Plan on food labelling to the FSA's Labelling Division.

Action: Secretariat

20. Gill Fine declared an interest.
21. Members were reminded that nutritional labelling is voluntary unless a claim is made. However, the UK Government's position is to argue for mandatory labelling throughout the EU. Members were informed that the aim of Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs), given on some packaged foods, is to provide a consistent set of reference figures for daily intake of fat, salt and calories. These values are intended to help consumers plan a balanced diet. GDAs are based on the COMA Dietary Reference Values (1991) and only apply to adults.
22. Members noted that the definition of "eating out" in the FAC report only applies to restaurant meals, and that it may be more appropriate to consider all "eating out" occasions - including school meals, sandwiches, and takeaways. There was also some concern that the emphasis was on fat to the exclusion of other nutrients.
23. Members queried some of the recommendations. The example was given of the suggested blanket ban on the use of symbols on food labels which can be useful for indicating the presence of potential food allergens. Professor John Cummings declared an interest on this matter as a member of the Coeliac Medical Advisory Council of the UK.
24. Members also expressed surprise that the report recommended basic nutrition labelling as being only for energy and fat and not for salt. It was suggested that the Subgroup on Salt could consider this issue and the possible use of salt equivalents for labelling the sodium content of foods.

Action: Salt Sub-Group

25. Members advised that some form of assessment be made of the implications of the FAC's recommendations. They also stressed the need for a high profile campaign to inform and educate consumers once any decisions on labelling have been made. Members requested details of the FSA's Action Plan on Labelling. The Secretariat agreed to forward Members comments on both the FAC report and the action plan to the FSA's Labelling Division.

Action Secretariat

Agenda Item 5: Minutes of Salt Subgroup Meeting (25/01/02) SACN/Saltsubgrp/02/min01

26. The Committee noted the minutes of the Salt Subgroup meeting.

Agenda Item 6: Working Group on Iron (Oral Update)

27. The Chair of the Working Group on Iron informed members that the Working Group discussed and agreed the code of practice and working procedures. The Group intends to use the Framework developed by the Risk Subgroup to assess the evidence. Minutes of the first meeting will be circulated shortly.

Action: Secretariat

Agenda Item 7: FOS/GOS in Infant Formulae SACN/02/01

28. The Chair introduced the paper and Members were invited to comment on the EC statement on FOS/GOS.
29. The Committee noted that guidelines were required to ensure that the process to approve foods is transparent. In relation to infant formulae, the tabled papers gave the impression that FOS/GOS have been approved by the EC for addition to infant formulae. In fact, the detail of the EC report indicated that the evidence-base for these additions is insufficient and more research is needed.
30. The Committee concluded that no action was required at present. The addition of FOS and GOS to infant formulae should be considered when the overall composition of infant formulae is reviewed.

Agenda Item 8: Government Update on Nutrition Related Activities SACN/02/05

31. An update was given on relevant initiatives being undertaken by the National Assembly for Wales. Differences between the fruit scheme in Wales and the National School Fruit Scheme (NSFS) in England were highlighted. The NSFS provides all 4-6 year old children with a free piece of fruit during the school day. In Wales, schools are given small grants through their Local Education Authority to help establish fruit tuck shops. It was hoped that this initiative would be a sustainable means of increasing children's access and consumption of fruit in the long term.
32. An update was given on the nutrition related activities of the Department of Health. Members were informed that the review of the Welfare Food Scheme had previously been placed on the COMA website, but had been archived. DH agreed to consider placing the review on the website or sending members a copy.

Action: Secretariat

33. The Department of Health was currently producing two leaflets, *How to Breastfeed* and *How to Bottle Feed Safely*. Members queried whether the inclusion of 'safely' in the title of the second leaflet might influence people's views on bottle-feeding. It was clarified that the term "safely" was being used in the context of hygiene during the preparation of formula.
34. Members were informed that the Public Accounts Committee Report on Obesity was now available on the DH website.
35. Members requested information about the "simple measure" of physical activity currently being developed by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Action: Secretariat

36. Members requested that the Scottish Executive Health Department provide them with an update on how food initiatives outlined in their paper will be evaluated in terms of their contribution to change in dietary intake carried out and how any changes in behaviour in target groups will be evaluated.

Action: Scottish Executive Health Department

37. Current nutritional activities in the FSA were outlined. The Committee was informed that the Action Plan on Nutrition has been presented to the FSA Board and could be found on the Agency's website (www.food.gov.uk). The Agency was also continuing to review its nutrition research programme and

disseminate research findings through various workshops and reports. Members requested that they be kept informed of future workshops and that reports of each workshop be circulated. This will ensure that relevant outputs could feed into SACN's deliberations.

38. Members discussed the FSA Advisory Committee on Research (ARC) and requested more information on the committee's role, membership and its anticipated interface with SACN.

Action: Secretariat

39. The first meeting of the joint FSA / DH Nutrition Forum (12 March 2002) had been attended by a wide cross-section of stakeholders and a record of the meeting would be placed on the DH and Agency's website. The recent FSA / DH Stakeholders Meeting on Folic Acid (18 March 02) was well attended.

Action: Secretariat

40. The Agency reported that a healthy eating campaign will be launched in the late summer 2002 and will be aimed at young people (aged 14-18 years). SACN would be provided with more details at a future meeting.

Action: Secretariat

Agenda Item 9: Food Standards Agency Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey (LIDNS) SACN/02/06

41. The Agency outlined the aims and design of the survey. Ethical approval for the feasibility study has been given. A research project, comparing different methods of dietary intake data collection, was commissioned and is due to report in June 2002. An interim report of this project was fed into the design of LIDNS
42. Members raised concerns that lack of an appropriate reference population for comparison could cause confounding particularly for the younger and older age groups where contemporaneous data from NDNS will not be available. By surveying the most deprived wards in the country there could be confounding factors due to ethnic breakdown of the survey population. Different methods to assess dietary intake than in previous surveys were also being used. Consequently, differences in results between this survey and previous NDNS surveys could be due to methodological differences or ethnicity as opposed to low income. Members also highlighted the fact that the elderly represented the largest low income population, and asked for clarification on how the elderly cohort would be selected.

Action Secretariat

A.O.B

Paper for Information: The presence of gluten in baby foods before 6 months

43. Members were invited to comment on the correspondence relating to whether gluten should be included in the diets of babies aged 4-6 months and its association with coeliac disease and autism. Gill Fine declared an interest and noted that Sainsburys had previously sought clarification on this issue.
44. It was noted that there was continued debate on whether the late introduction of gluten defers the presentation of coeliac disease. Members also agreed that the evidence of an association between the early introduction of gluten and autism was limited. Given the lack of evidence, the Committee agreed that it would be prudent to continue with the 1994 COMA recommendation that:

"Where there is a family history of atopy or gluten enteropathy, mothers should be encouraged to breastfeed for six months or longer. Weaning before four months should particularly be discouraged and the introduction of foods traditionally regarded as allergenic should be delayed until six months at the earliest".

"To prevent coeliac disease the cereals given to infants less than 6 months should preferably be gluten free, such as rice or maize".

Department of Health. Weaning and the Weaning Diet. Report on Health and Social Subjects 45. London: HMSO 1994.

45. Members requested copies of the MRC review on Nutrition and Autism.

Action: Secretariat

Paper for Information: The Optimal Duration of Exclusive Breastfeeding: A Systematic Review WHO 2002

46. Members were provided with the WHO's Review on the Optimal Duration of Exclusive Breastfeeding and were invited to comment. Members agreed that the available evidence did not support the theoretical concern that between 4 –6 months, breast milk was inadequate to support normal infant growth.

Working Group on Child and Maternal Nutrition

47. The Committee was informed that a call for membership of the Working Group on Child and Maternal Nutrition would be placed on the website. A list of proposed members would be drawn up by the Secretariat for the Committee's approval at the next SACN meeting.

Action: Secretariat

Committee Fees

48. Members were informed that Committee fees had been increased by 3% to £92 for attendance and £24 for reading per meeting.

Next meeting

49. Members were informed that the Committee's next meeting would be an open meeting held in London on the 20th June 2002. Interested parties would be able to observe proceedings and be invited to comment and ask questions at the end of the meeting. A briefing paper outlining procedures would be sent to Members before the next meeting.

Action: Secretariat