

7TH MEETING

12th February 2003, Aviation House, 125 Kingsway, London

Chairman Professor Alan Jackson

Members Professor Peter Aggett (to Agenda item 9)

Professor Annie Anderson

Professor John Cummings

Miss Gill Fine

Dr Tim Key

Dr Ann Prentice

Professor Andrew Rugg-Gunn

Dr Anita Thomas

Mrs Stella Walsh

Dr Anthony Williams

Professor Christine Williams

Government Mr Tom Murray (FSA)

Observers Ms Danila Armstrong (DH)

Mrs Maureen Howell (Welsh Assembly)

Dr Jane Knight (Scottish Health Executive)

Secretariat Dr Sheela Reddy (DH)

Dr Adrienne Cullum (DH)

Mr Ben Walters (FSA)

Dr Alison Tedstone (FSA)

Mr Jeff Allder (FSA)

Chair's Introduction

1. The Chair welcomed Members to the seventh meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN).

2. The Chair welcomed a new member of the Secretariat, Ms Angela Inwood. The Chair also welcomed Dr Jane Knight, a part time public health advisor for FSA based at Aberdeen University, who represented the Scottish Executive at this meeting.

Apologies for absence

3. Apologies were received from Professor Sheila Bingham, Professor Peter Kopelman and Dr Elizabeth Mitchell.

Minutes of last meeting (03/10/02) SACN 02/MIN 03

4. Members were invited to comment on the minutes.
5. The second line in paragraph 27 was amended to read "...to assess the "Prevention...".
6. It was noted that the minutes had been placed on the website in the agreed time. The Secretariat agreed to keep a record of the time taken to place the minutes on the SACN website.
7. Members agreed the minutes.

Action: Secretariat

Matters Arising

Paper for information: Key dietary recommendations (SACN/02/26a)

8. The Chair drew Members attention to the updated paper on key dietary recommendations, tabled at the previous meeting. As requested, the paper now included the recommendations of the COMA report on Weaning and the Weaning Diet.
9. It was noted that second line of bullet 6 on page 3 should read "...clinical vitamin D deficiency still occur."

Re-appointment of Members

10. Members were informed that Dr Tim Key and Professor John Cummings had now been officially reappointed to the Committee for a further 4 years.
11. The Lay Member post had been advertised and interviews conducted. A recommendation for appointment would be sent to the Secretary of State for Health and the Chair of the FSA.

Other matters arising

12. The Secretariat confirmed that a paper presented at the last meeting entitled 'Nutrition Compositional Criteria For Various Healthy Eating Schemes' (SACN02/33 Annex 1) had not been placed on the SACN website due to considerations of commercial confidentiality.
13. Referring to paragraph 19 entitled Government update on nutrition related activities of FSA (SACN/02/31) presented at the October meeting, the Committee were informed that industry had been invited to participate in the on-going consultation on dietary survey questionnaires, which included a workshop which had been held in January .
14. It was agreed that a paper covering Matters Arising would be prepared for future meetings.

Action: Secretariat

Salt Subgroup (SACN/03/01)

15. The Chair updated Members on the Salt and Health report. There were 28 responses to the request for comment on the draft report; 15 in agreement, 2 part agreement, 4 had specific points and 7 disagreed with conclusions. The Salt Subgroup met on the 6th February to discuss how the draft report could be recast to take account of the opinions expressed. The revised draft report was being redrafted and was not currently available. Members were asked to comment.

16. Gill Fine declared an interest because of her industry links. It was agreed that she should stay for the discussion unless there was a clear conflict of interest. The Chair thanked her for doing this, and pointed out that this interest was one reason why she had been appointed to the Subgroup, and that the perspective she brought to discussions was appreciated.
17. Members agreed that the request to stakeholders for comments on the draft report had been a valuable exercise and it was hoped that the final report would be improved with the process. The summary paper on comments received provided by the Secretariat was clear and helpful.
18. Members commented on specific points. It was highlighted that some of the responses were related to risk management rather than risk assessment and therefore outside the remit of the Subgroup and SACN. It was agreed that the final report should be explicit about the remit of the Subgroup, the approach used in the risk assessment, and the implementation of the agreed risk assessment process.
19. Members were informed that further consideration had been given to the recommendations for children. The targets had been recast with age groupings which correspond with developmental stages and with those used in the Dietary Reference Values report and similar documents.
20. It was noted that the forthcoming NDNS data on salt intake will be included in the report if available in time. Members emphasised the importance to the report of having the most up to date data included. The possibility of including the latest NDNS data will be considered.
21. The processes for the redrafting and publication of the report were discussed. The Secretariat agreed to circulate a timetable to members. The report will be published by the Stationery Office and would also be placed on the SACN website.

Action: Secretariat

Iron Working Group

22. The Chair of the Working Group on Iron, Professor Peter Aggett provided an oral update on the Groups progress. The Group had met once since the last SACN meeting and had been working on draft sections for the report, which the Group would discuss in May. Around 20 key public health questions had been identified; these would be circulated to SACN for information and comment.

Subgroup on Maternal and Child Nutrition (SMCN)

23. The Chair of the SMCN, Dr Tony Williams, gave an oral update on the work of the Subgroup. The Subgroup met for the first time on the 22nd January; the minutes of the meeting will be placed on the SACN website in due course. The discussion included:
 - the Secretariat and SMCN Chair will prepare a paper, which will outline the main points which would fall within the interests of the SACN on the effect of nutritional exposures during early life on later disease for the Subgroup to consider. Although the on-going reviews by the MRC and WHO would provide information of value it seems unlikely that they will cover all of the issues which are likely to be of importance to SACN.
 - recent reports which suggest there has been an increase in the prevalence of vitamin D deficiency.
 - relevant sections of salt and health report.
 - in response to a letter from the Infant and Dietetic Food Association, the Subgroup confirmed that all children, whether or not they had a family history of allergy, should not consume weaning foods containing gluten before 6 months of age. The IDFA also asked whether oats could be introduced before 6 months of age. The Subgroup adopted the precautionary principle that oats should not be introduced before 6 months of age due to a lack of evidence on the safety of the consumption of oats in people with coeliac disease in this age group. There is a risk of oats being contaminated with wheat. The Secretariat will draft a response to the IDFA in discussion with Professor Cummings.
24. In response to a question from Gill Fine, who declared an interest, it was noted that gluten is the component of wheat that is antigenic for coeliac disease. All children should avoid foods containing wheat and foods containing gluten before 6 months of age. New labelling regulations will require both gluten and wheat to be labelled on infant foods.

Scientific Committee Review (SACN/03/02)

25. Ben Walters informed Members that the FSA had initiated a review of the advisory committees that help the Agency with its business. The review shows that, as a relatively new committee, the operations of SACN met with many of the review's recommendations, but there are several issues that Members may wish to consider: more business to be conducted in public, agreed forward workplans and active declaration of interest by Members. Members were invited to comment.
26. It was noted that the report provides an opportunity for the views of Members from a range of committees to be considered by the Agency, DH or Cabinet Office.
27. Members agreed that it would be appropriate to produce an annual forward work plan.
28. Members recognised the importance of declaring their interests and requested clarification. Members questioned whether the document referred to all interests or only "material" interests. It was noted that Members, in their professional capacity, may be asked for advice from a range of NGOs, many on an ad hoc basis. Registering such contacts would be inappropriate and keeping track on a weekly basis could be difficult and time consuming.
29. Members requested a framework for declaring interests, more information on how interests would be collected more frequently, and clarification of the boundaries for interests. The key issue was whether what was being suggested was appropriate or disproportionate. The Secretariat agreed to provide members with the guidance as to what counts as an interest.
30. Members were in favour of openness and supported having the yearly open meeting and discussed options for increasing openness. However, Members reiterated that holding more of their meetings in public should not result in a significant departure from their usual ways of working and frank discussion should not be inhibited. Members had found the 2002 open meeting an unusual experience, though this may have been due in part to the layout of the room and the novelty of the experience. Member's views on the 2003 open meeting will be evaluated.
31. Clarification of the objective of holding more open meetings, particularly in relation to SACNs risk assessment work, was requested. Members also requested information on the practices of the FSA Board. Members were informed that issues such as BSE had led to an increased need for openness. The FSA Board conducts all of its substantive discussions in public. While it does not discuss policy in private, it may be briefed in private on the background and technical details of issues.
32. One approach suggested was that meetings be alternately open or closed to allow an objective assessment of committee behaviour under the two circumstances. The Chair concluded that while it was important to consider being more open there was a need to be clear about what this meant in practice, the purpose of the proposals, and how best to meet perceived objectives. Members agreed to revisit the issue after they had had time to reflect on the points raised and had considered their experience of the next open meeting in June 2003.
33. The Committee discussed the appraisal of Members in relation to a number of comments made in the document. Members are formally appraised by the Chair once every year. It was requested that the criteria for appraisal be circulated to Members.
34. Members asked about the purpose of seeking feedback from them about the way the Committee operates. It was explained that this was intended to be a mechanism to improve the performance of committees by identifying any issues that should be tackled locally or generically.
35. Members requested clarification of recommendation 18 that "the Agency should make employers aware of the valuable contributions made by committee members". Members were informed that this related to senior FSA staff highlighting the Agency's appreciation of the input of organisations staff to the work of the Agency, as and when the opportunity arose.
36. It was noted that many organisations do recognise their staff's input. However, the report did not fully recognise the time members devoted to committee work, the volume of work involved and the impact on their other duties. It was concluded that there was a need to more fully recognise individuals' contributions to such committees using transparent, consistent mechanisms.

Action: SACN Members/ Secretariat

Update on DH activities (SACN/03/07)

37. This agenda item was brought forward to enable Ms Danila Armstrong to introduce the paper. Members were invited to comment.

38. In relation to a question on vitamin D, Members were informed that vitamin preparations are available on the Welfare Food Scheme. It is intended that such provision will continue as part of the reform of the Welfare Food Scheme, though preparations may be reformulated. Consideration is being given as to how best enable mothers to access the formulations.
39. In response to a query, it was agreed that the values given for undetected hypertension in the Health Survey for England (HSE) 2001 should be checked.
40. It was noted that it would be helpful for evaluation of the National School Fruit Scheme (NSFS) to assess the impact on families as a whole. Members were informed that an impact assessment was being considered for both the NSFS and the Five a day community initiatives. There is also yearly monitoring of consumption through the HSE.
41. It was queried why the use of the Five a day logo was being expanded to include foods with added ingredients such as fat and sugar. It was pointed out that increased consumption of processed foods is a feature of modern lifestyles and the key target group for the Five a day programme - low income consumers - may be particularly likely to eat processed foods. DH is taking a pragmatic approach on this issue and is setting up a technical group to consider appropriate criteria for the use of the logo on composite foods.
42. Members welcomed DH led action on the Food and Health Action Plan arising from the Curry Report, which provides an opportunity to address the implications and interactions between sustainable food and farming on nutrition and health. It was recognised that there is a substantial literature on the complex relations between food production systems and the nutritional well-being of the population, which are likely to be of relevance to the considerations to be addressed by the Action Plan. SACN could be of some help in this respect. It was highlighted that an important role of SACN is to bring emerging scientific issues to the attention of Government and other bodies. It was proposed that the issue be considered during horizon scanning.
43. In response to a query, it was confirmed that the Food in Schools programme was food rather than nutrient based. The Programme will build on existing evidence and focus on implementation issues and sustainability. The findings will be shared with SACN when available.
44. It was agreed that future updates should indicate whether initiatives apply to England or the UK as a whole.

Action: Members and Secretariat

Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes Opinions: phytosterols (SACN/03/03)

45. The Chair introduced the paper and invited Members to comment. The papers illustrate concerns about reductions in beta carotene levels in people consuming phytosterols. However, Members highlighted the limitations of blood carotene concentration as an indicator of status.
46. Members noted that the number of applications for foods containing phytosterols have been higher than anticipated.
47. Members queried whether the full range of risk assessment issues had been fully considered, including the long term health outcomes of high levels of consumption. There was also concern that the addition of an ingredient to a high fat food in order to reduce the level of cholesterol in the blood was at odds with evidence on the effectiveness of a low fat diet per se on the levels of cholesterol in blood. It was noted that children may be more likely to consume the ingredient as it is included in more foods with time. However, the impact of phytosterols on carotenoid status in children is uncertain. This issue highlighted that the mechanisms for the approval of health claims for such products also need to be considered.
48. How the assessment of the nutritional impact of novel foods is managed in future needs to be considered. Members agreed that the procedures for assessment of novel foods proposed by COMA be revisited.

Action: Members and Secretariat

Phytoestrogens: SACN advice to COT (SACN/03/04)

49. Members were informed that COT had fully incorporated SACN's advice on phytoestrogens and had stated that there was no unique medical indication for the use of a soy protein based breast milk substitute.
50. It was highlighted that if women choose not to breastfeed, only the currently approved breast milk substitutes is an infant formula which is based on either cow's milk or soya protein. The only other formulae

available are either follow-on formulas (for the second half of infancy only), or foods which are specified for use in special medical circumstances.

Horizon Scanning Workshop (SACN/03/05)

51. Members agreed to a horizon scanning meeting in the summer. The Secretariat agreed to forward members suggested dates and venues.
52. The exercise would focus on the science rather than SACN procedure and some of the discussion on committee procedure. The objectives and focus of the meeting will be clarified at the SACN meeting in June.
53. Members proposed a number of issues for consideration, in addition to those suggested. These included adolescent nutrition, new research on genotype, interaction with ACNFP, and progress on attainment of dietary recommendations (as indicated by new NDNS data).

Action: Secretariat

Government Update on Nutrition Related Activities

Update from FSA (SACN05/06)

54. Mr Tom Murray gave an update on FSA activities. He highlighted that the feasibility stage of the Low Income Survey had been completed but due to a lower than anticipated response rate, further work was required before the fieldwork stage could be progressed. The survey is a priority issue for the Agency but it involved substantial funding and the adequacy and robustness of the data had to be assured. FSA are in discussion with the survey contractors as to how best to proceed.
55. Members raised concern that this important survey might not be undertaken. While it was acknowledged that there was the danger that a low response rate might result in the data being biased, it was important to weigh the value of some information upon which policy options could be based, rather than having no information at all.
56. Members requested an update of the work of the Health Development Agency at future meetings. The HDA is funded by DH and has been reviewing the effectiveness of interventions and the means of putting evidence into practice.

Action: Secretariat

Update from Devolved Departments (tabled paper SACN/03/08)

57. Members were informed that the Welsh Action Plan, a joint FSA Wales and Welsh Executive initiative, was to be launched the following day. The aim of the cross departmental activity was to tackle food poverty in Wales and outlined work for the next 3-5 years.
58. Members were updated on the Health Education Board for Scotland's (HEBS) Healthy Living campaign. The high profile campaign, which encouraged small step changes in lifestyle, had been well received. A formal evaluation is being undertaken. Members welcomed the HEBS evaluation and hoped that the report would be made public.
59. It was agreed that more information would be given to Members on whether nutritional guidelines were considered when funding breakfast club schemes.
60. Members noted that whereas Scotland was still considering fortifying alcoholic drinks with thiamine, this appeared to be at odds with EU legislation currently under discussion in Brussels. It was agreed that Members would receive more information on this move.
61. Members agreed that further discussion of fortification issues per se would be useful and could perhaps be included on the Horizon Scanning agenda.
62. Members noted that it would be helpful to be provided with a commentary on the various "action plans" and targets established by the FSA and devolved Health Departments.

Action: Secretariat

Annual Report Structure (SACN/03/09)

63. Members were asked to comment on the proposed Annual report. The draft report will be circulated to Members in due course; the final report will be circulated at the Open Meeting.
64. The Secretariat agreed to check whether the obesity "quick think" took place in 2002. It was noted that no mention had been made of the folic acid discussion at the Open Meeting and reference should be made to the optimal duration of "exclusive breastfeeding" rather than "breastfeeding".

GM Foods: Chairs Correspondence (SACN/03/10)

65. Members were informed that the Chair had written to the FSA on the extent to which a formal evaluation of nutritional safety had been carried out on any GM foods, as had been recommended by the Royal Society in its Report on GM foods. Members noted that the response had a focus on safety assessment, which did not include an adequate characterisation of nutritional safety, and in this regard was not entirely satisfactory. The FSA agreed to consider this further. Members were of the view that this issue highlighted the need for more formal links between committees.

Action: FSA

AOB

66. Two papers were tabled for information:
 - ACNFP marketing of iodine enriched eggs (SACN/03/11)
 - Commission proposal for addition of minerals to foods.(SACN/03/12)
1. Members were informed that the European Food Safety Authority was now operational. It would be important to ensure an adequate flow of information between the Authority and SACN (General 14).
2. Members were reminded the next meeting would be open and would be held on 12th June at Skipton House in London.