

Government Chemist Programme Expert Group Meeting

Wednesday 12 May 2021

Via MS Teams

Attendees:

<p><u>PEG</u> Paul Berryman (<i>Chair</i>) Simon Branch Keneth Chinyama David Franklin Jonathon Griffin Chelvi Leonard Brenda McRory Declan Naughton David Pickering Sophie Rollinson Diane Turner</p> <p><u>Observers</u> Michael Adeogun Jenna Watts</p>	<p><u>BEIS</u> Maria Turner Eli Johnson</p> <p><u>LGC</u> Julian Braybrook John Black Malcolm Burns Paula Domann Selvarani Elahi Kirstin Gray Paul Hancock Chris Hopley Caroline Pritchard Elena Sanchez Bob Oswald (<i>Minutes</i>)</p>
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Apologies: Robbie Beattie, Roger Wood, Andrew Damant

1. Minutes/Actions

- 1.1 The Chair, Paul Berryman, welcomed all attendees. The Chair introduced Keneth Chinyama (Food and Drink Federation) and Jenna Watts (Which? - attending this meeting for the first time as an Observer.)
- 1.2 It was noted that Andrew Millman took early retirement just before Christmas and has therefore left the GC PEG.
- 1.3 The Chair reminded all those present of the usual housekeeping rules and reminded PEG members to make any necessary declarations of interest in relation to particular topics discussed.
- 1.4 Minutes from previous meeting (8 October 2020) were approved with one correction: under 4.6 the reference to 'Michael Burns' should read 'Malcolm Burns'. **ACTION 1: Bob Oswald** to correct and upload the non-attributive version of those minutes to the GC website.
- 1.5 All actions from the previous meeting were completed and closed:
 - **Action 1** re: *uploading the non-attributive version of the April 2020 minutes to the GC website.* Action completed and closed.
 - **Action 2** re: *Doodle poll for Spring 2021 meeting.* Action completed and closed.

2. BEIS Update

2.1 The BEIS update presentation summarised the following:

- Allocations for 21/22 have concluded and planning has started for Spending Review.
- The Government will publish a *Levelling Up* White Paper this year focusing on challenges such as improving living standards, growing the private sector and increasing and spreading opportunity.
- UK government to set in law ambitious climate change target, cutting emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels.
- The draft UK Measurement Strategy document is now available for consultation. The Strategy is due to be published this summer. The Strategy has 3 key themes:
 - The health and wellbeing of a growing population.
 - Managing and reducing our environmental impact.
 - Increasing prosperity and supporting innovation.In addition, there is an underpinning digital thread throughout the Strategy focusing on the digital infrastructure that will help the UK capitalise upon confidence in the intelligent and effective use of data and unlock the power of data in the UK economy.

2.2 The slides were circulated with these minutes. There were no comments or questions from PEG members on the update.

3. Government Chemist Update

3.1 Julian explained that COVID-19, EU Exit and UK Government Spending Review continue to shape the response of the Government Chemist team. All have dominated the political landscape; the first in terms of the increased recognition of the important role of measurement in diagnosis and treatment, and the latter two in terms of considerations for independent national regulation or processes.

3.2 The pandemic has meant fewer referee cases but the nature of some of those cases was quite different and challenging. EU Exit seemed to provide a more international focus and further referee cases relating to genetic modification of certain product types. This prompted us to produce analytical, interpretive and reporting guidance around the topic area to support enforcement laboratories and FBOs. Julian was asked if this guidance related to specific cases. He replied that it was general in its scope but that it had been developed in response to a number of cases the GC has seen on GM products.

3.3 The NML as a whole has maintained delivery through shift-style laboratory operation with desk-based working from home. Inevitably, this has meant prioritisation of certain projects.

3.4 Beyond the GC statutory function, the team has worked closely with sponsoring government departments, NGOs and industry to address strategic cross-department issues such as cannabidiol (CBD) and to provide independent scientific opinion on approaches for addressing issues in honey authenticity.

- 3.5 The GC continues to influence policy and regulatory decision-making by working with the CSAs for both FSA and Defra to provide UK leadership in emerging international standardisation activities, such as harmonised terminology for genome editing and standardisation of gene synthesis products - areas that are currently under intense scrutiny and debate.
- 3.6 The pandemic has also shaped much of the GC's advisory response. Julian has supported DHSC with their evaluation of diagnostic technologies for COVID-19, particularly as part of the Project Oversight Group evaluating the potential for clinical diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 by mass spectrometry. The uniqueness of the project has drawn international interest.
- 3.7 Furthermore, the pandemic has brought the opportunity to consider new delivery mechanisms. The GC team have established e-learning tools, the first of which under the GC umbrella will soon be trialled, using CBD as a pilot project. This will extend the value of the GC function beyond first-line stakeholders to wider sector benefit and builds on practical support given to re-shaping the formal qualification for UK Public Analysts and the continued growth in the joint KTN.
- 3.8 There were a number of comments relating to the GM cases and the recently published GC guidance:
- 3.8.1 One PEG member remarked that they would welcome the opportunity to work with LGC on GM issues and suggested discussing this further outside the meeting
- 3.8.2 Julian was asked whether he thought this area was likely to grow in the coming years. He replied that this was certainly a possibility but it would depend on what signals the UK government gives with regards to these types of products and how far the UK chooses to diverge from the EU.
- 3.8.3 One PEG member commented that the GC guidance had been very helpful. It was noted that, for now, the port Health Authorities continue to carry out sampling on rice products. Whether the UK retains any EU legislation in future will be a matter for the FSA to decide.
- 3.9 In response to a question from the Chair regarding the current situation at ports, it was noted that the team will have doubled in size by the end of year and as a result, a lot of time is being spent on training new staff.

4. Referee Cases Update

- 4.1 The presentation summarised two cases that have been undertaken since the last meeting; one on honey authenticity and one on liposomal vitamin C (slides were circulated with these minutes).
- 4.2 One PEG member commended Paul and colleagues on the great work that they do and looked forward to reading the guidance papers.
- 4.3 Concerning the liposomal vitamin C case, which was referred to the GC by the ASA, the Chair wondered whether this potentially opened up an onerous new stream of work. Paul said he was aware that the ASA seems to be the lead on taking action on health claims in particular, so it is possible that they will come back with more work.

- 4.4 Paul was asked whether the honey evaluating reporting framework was only applicable to honey or whether it could be used for other products and approaches. He explained that the approach was valid whenever there are complex data sets with grey areas. It demonstrates a clear process for how you reach your conclusions.
- 4.5 A PEG member remarked that a lack of Quality Control seemed to be an underlying theme in referee cases. Paul replied that this was certainly the case with the food supplement. He could not conclude that there was a lack of QC across the board but there are certainly numerous instances of it.
- 4.6 Finally, Paul noted that the MChemA video is currently with the video company for editing and he needs to chase that up.

5. Programme Progress Update

- 5.1 The presentation (circulated with these minutes) gave an operational update in light of the evolving COVID-19 situation, then summarised the current status of each project in the programme.
- 5.2 Responding to a question about the glycidyl esters mini-project, Selvarani Elahi explained (via the Chat) that the project is focused on the development of a suitable method to determine glycidyl fatty acid esters 3-monochloropropane-1,2-diol (3-MCPD) and glycidol in oils and fats to meet lower legislative limits introduced by Commission Regulation (EU) 2018/290. Once the method has been validated, it will be applied to infant formula products (as limits have been lowered for these) likely to contain 3-MCPD and glycidyl esters on the market.

6. Programme KPIs and Dissemination Outputs

- 6.1 The presentation (circulated with these minutes) summarised some of the highlights of the last programme across areas such as research, trade and regulation, innovation and skills, and then considered priorities for 2020-23.
- 6.2 The Chair asked the reasons for the delay on the MChemA course. Paul Hancock explained that the decision had been taken by the APA Training Committee not to run it as normal due the COVID-19 situation. The Training Committee has now re-convened and is considering how best to deliver the course. In order to make it viable, it either needs to be made accessible to a wider audience, or it needs to be delivered in a different way. For example, two days in-person training followed by online sessions, or a tutorial style encompassing workshops followed by 1-to-1 sessions with a tutor. A decision will be made later this year.

7. CBD Project Update

- 7.1 Selvarani explained the objectives of the recent project, which was to develop publicly available methods for the determination of CBD and the determination of controlled cannabinoids in novel foods / cosmetics and thereafter transfer methods to UK regulatory (and other) laboratories via ring trial. Chris then went on to describe some of

the highlights from the ring trial results and outlined some conclusions. The slides were circulated with these minutes.

- 7.2 The Chair congratulated Chris and Selvarani on their hard work and for maintaining a high profile with government on this project via the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs.
- 7.3 It was noted that there had been discussions with the ACI about training on this topic for their officers and there will probably be three sessions running in June. One PEG member commented that, in their view, there probably wouldn't be much enforcement activity until July/August.

8. Discussion: Topics of interest for additional projects

- 8.1 John Black explained that we are expecting an upturn in referee cases this quarter. However, if this does not materialise, this could free up sufficient budget to formulate some new projects within the programme. PEG members were invited to suggest topics of interest for additional projects if this situation arises. Julian Braybrook added that any new projects would need to start around July.
- 8.2 It was noted that the FSA was currently undertaking its own prioritisation process, so could not put forward any immediate suggestions.
- 8.3 A number of topics were suggested:
 - Support for the tools, standards and guidance needed to facilitate effective testing for honey fraud honey authenticity
 - Titanium dioxide nanoparticles in food.
 - Point of use testing, particularly in the context of the UK 2025 Border Strategy
- 8.4 Paul Hancock presented a slide that LGC had prepared with a number of suggestions, including the three mentioned by PEG members above. **ACTION 2: John Black** to circulate this list to PEG members along with a scoring mechanism and ask PEG members to pick 2 or 3 priorities, or add further suggestions to the list.

9. Feedback and Questions

- 9.1 There were no further questions. One PEG member commented that the programme was looking very healthy with a lot of high quality work, which had been communicated very well. This was echoed by the Chair and a number of other PEG members, who thanked LGC colleagues for an interesting and informative meeting.

10. Next meeting

- 10.1 **ACTION 3: Bob Oswald** to send a Doodle Poll for the autumn 2021 meeting.