Consultation on the Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees – September 2010

Summary of Responses and Government Response to Consultation

Government Office for Science

Contents

Introduction

The Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees (The Code) sets out and promotes good practice in the operation of Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs) and the relationship between them and the Government. It was last revised in 2007 in response to recommendations in the Seventh Report of the House of Commons Science and Technology (S&T) Committee on Scientific Advice, Risk and Evidence Based Policy Making.

The Code was due to be reviewed again in 2012, but the 2010 publication of the Government's *Principles on Scientific Advice to Government* (the Principles) presented an opportunity to ensure that the Code reflects both the Principles and further developments in good practice guidance for SACs since 2007.

All Scientific Advisory Committees, however classified, are intended to be covered by this guidance. It applies equally whether a SAC is a formal Non-Departmental Public Body, a less formally constituted independent advisory body or a departmental expert advisory group. Although the Public Bodies Review conducted by the Cabinet Office will result in changes to the status of some Committees this is not anticipated to affect the practical application of the Code of Practice to them or other Scientific Advisory Committees.

The Code is intended for use by SACs – their Chairs, members and secretariats – and their "sponsor" Departments. The purpose of The Code is to provide detailed guidance on all aspects of the management and operation of the SAC and its relationship with government. In so doing it is expected to help translate the *Guidelines on Scientific Analysis in Policy Making* (most recently revised in June 2010) and now the *Principles on Scientific Advice to Government* (March 2010) into day-to-day practice.

The Code reflects a principle-based approach and puts emphasis on transparency and the use of all forms of evidence. It also aims to ensure that all parties:

- Plan ahead and clearly specify the issues on which scientific advice is required, where the evidence base is weak and could be strengthened and where public transparency and early engagement is required.

- Seek a wide range of advice from the best available sources, particularly when there is uncertainty, in terms of either policy development or implementation.

- Have transparent publication policies in place for evidence and analysis and relevant associated papers, and clear arrangements for communication of advice.

The public consultation has materially contributed to the review and revision of the Code, and has reinforced the Government's view that the Code remains broadly fit for purpose. That said, the consultation suggests that we should take the opportunity to make it more readily accessible and to provide clarity in areas identified as benefitting from more explicit direction.

Consultation Process

The Government Office for Science published a consultation paper on 17 September 2010, seeking views on further updating the Code in light of comments made during the development of the Principles. The consultation was published on the Business, Innovation and Skills website at http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/code-of-practice-for-scientific-advisory-committees-consultation-document. Respondents are listed at Annex A.

The consultation posed a number of questions arising from discussions about the Principles for Scientific Advice for Government related to matters covered more broadly by the Code. These issues included; the maintenance of the relationships set out in the Principles; the need for openness and transparency in the provision of advice; the engagement of the wider academic community to ensure the provision of the best possible advice; and succession planning for the SAC and it's secretariat. Respondents were also invited to offer additional ideas for issues to cover in the Code.

To supplement the consultation process a meeting of the SAC Chairs, led by the Government Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor Sir John Beddington, discussed CoPSAC in September. A workshop was held for SAC secretariats in October 2010 and a further workshop was held for non-governmental stakeholders in January 2011 (Attendees are listed at Annexes B (SAC secretariats) and Annex C (External Stakeholders)).

Consultation Responses

The consultation closed on 10 December 2010. Twenty seven responses were received, broken down as follows:

> SACs – 15
> Departments/ Agencies – 3
> Individuals – 1
> Research Councils - 1
> University – 1
> Learned Society – 2
> National Academy – 1
> Independent Science group – 1
> Professional Body – 2

The responses received and the input from the workshops were informative, detailed and suggested additional areas for inclusion and some areas for clarification in the Code. Some issues raised fall outside the remit of the Code but served to put the Code in a wider context. There remains overall agreement, as there was in 2007, that the Code is still a fundamentally sound document, that is should not be extended unduly, but that it could be made more readily accessible.

The Government is grateful to everyone who responded formally to the consultation, and to those who attended a workshop. The views expressed have been carefully analysed and will inform our approach to updating the Code. A summary of the responses received to the consultation, and the Government's response, is set out below.

Summary of responses by Question and Government Response

This section, sets out the themes and questions posed in the consultation on the Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees. After each question a synopsis of the responses is provided before setting out an initial Government response.

Maintaining Strong Relationships

Question 1: It is key that Ministers, sponsoring departments and independent scientific advisors develop and sustain effective working relationships.

a. **What role should be played by, and what expectations should the SAC Chair have with regard to relationships between:**

> i.   **The SAC and its Sponsoring Department?**

Summary of Responses

It was clear from responses to the consultation that openness on both sides – SAC and Department - is seen as imperative to maintaining strong working relationships. Open communication is seen as an active process, with agency required on the part of both Department and SAC.

The SAC Chair has a clear responsibility to engage with the Department on behalf of the SAC, and to maintain a good working relationship. Similarly, the Department has a responsibility to nominate a person for routine contact to enable regular communication between SAC and Department, in addition to less frequent but still regular meetings with the Departmental CSA and Ministers.

The Department should make available information, and provide briefing, on departmental activity, priorities and policy areas, so that SACs can ensure the relevance of their work plans. The Department should also provide direct access to departmental officials who are likely to be effected by advice, who can act as "intelligent customers" and help the SAC members understand the key issues that the department needs advice on to develop or implement policy as effectively as possible.

It may be helpful to both parties to reflect these relationships and roles formally, agreeing them explicitly with the SAC Chair and documenting them. Such agreements could include;

- Clear Terms of Reference for the SAC, which include the scope of expected departmental engagement, and support. These to be agreed by the SAC, Department and Departmental Chief Scientific Advisor.

- Clear reporting lines and processes to facilitate the communication reflected in the Terms of Reference so that understanding of accountability is common to all parties.

- SAC Work Plans aligned clearly to departmental policy areas.

Departments could consider inviting SAC Chairs to be independent members of the Departmental Board. Departments should not only ask for advice, but should also provide feedback to the SAC Chair on how the SAC's advice was used, and its value in subsequent

decision-making. Departments should actively seek further advice and clarification on all matters where scientific, technical or engineering input is likely to have a material impact on decision-making or strategy.

Government Response

The government welcomes the detailed responses received on how SAC and Departmental relationships can be maintained and strengthened. It considers open, transparent and supportive relations between members of the SAC and members of the Department to be critical to successfully meeting the aims of the SAC.

We welcome the observation that such relationships are set out formally in Terms of Reference for SACs, that are fully agreed by all parties involved.

ii.   The Minister or Departmental Chief Scientific Advisor to whom the SAC reports?

Summary of Responses

The majority of responses suggest that SAC Chairs should have regular one to one meetings with Ministers (annually) and Departmental Chief Scientific Advisors (at least twice per year). These meetings should be used to discuss SAC progress, emerging Departmental changes/ issues and possible alterations to the evidence base or SAC skills match that such changes might require.

The departmental CSA could advise SAC Chairs on possible membership of the advisory committee. The SAC should extend an open invitation to Ministers and the CSA to attend meetings. Ministers should routinely seek SAC advice as the *first line of enquiry* for any issue in a relevant area that requires science, technology and/or engineering evidence and input. There should be a presumption that if advice could be sought that it will be.

Neither Ministers nor SAC Chairs should make announcements on issues relating to SAC advice without communicating *in advance* with the other party. As for general Departmental interaction, the relationship and accountability of the SAC Chair, Ministers and the CSA to each other should be explicitly articulated and written into the SAC Terms of Reference. These relations should remain equal regardless of the formal status of the SAC and any changes to that status.

Government Response

The Government agrees that regular meetings, openness and trusting relations are the key to good working relations. The Principles of Scientific Advise to Government set out the agreed 'rules of engagement' between Government and those who provide science and engineering advice. These Principles, of clear roles, independence and transparency, should be reflected in the operation of the SAC and its engagement with its sponsoring Department. It is clear that regular meetings should be an important aspect of this process.

iii.   The Chairs of other SACs whose interests may overlap?

Summary of Responses

In order for SAC Chairs to understand the nature and range of overlapping interests it is necessary for them to have a range of formal and informal opportunities to engage. The majority of responses see open and routine communication as being crucial.

In addition to on-going direct contact between Chairs of Committees whose joint interests are already recognised, other methods were suggested, such as;

- Sharing the agendas and minutes of meetings between related SACs.
- Secretariats of related committees to communicate and make links where business may overlap.
- Considering a formal mechanism to regulate and coordinate responsibility and formal communication between SACs.
- Developing efficient mechanisms for the transfer/ exchange of information between SACS, and
- Use of the GCSA's SAC Chairs meetings as a vehicle for wider coordination.

Government Response

Engagement mechanisms of these kinds are sensible and constructive and will be considered both in developing the current Code and in the ongoing work to develop the network of SACs. The Government is pleased to note that the GCSA meetings with SAC Chairs, now held every six months, are already recognised as an important part of the solution to on-going challenges of flexible communication and coordination.

b. What steps can be taken for SACs to maintain their independence and objectivity?

Summary of Responses

Responses to this question suggest many different ways in which independence and objectivity can be maintained and signalled. They range through all stages of a SACs activity, from establishment, to routine operation and publication.

From the outset it is recommended that recruitment of members follows an open and transparent process, following open competition and following the principle of Nolan/ OCPA guidelines for public appointments even when not formally required. It is also suggested that independence of membership is formally reflected in both SAC Terms of Reference and individual membership-role statements of requirement.

Members have a personal responsibility in maintenance of independence through declaration of interests that might be pertinent to the activity of the SAC. These interests, intellectual or financial, should be held in a formally maintained register, regularly reviewed, revised as appropriate and published annually in a SAC annual report. It has been suggested that appointment panels should not include current or recently retired politicians to avoid suggestion of undue influence or bias.

Departments also have a role to play in enabling SAC independence through their manner of support and engagement – external perception here being as significant as the internal fact. SACs should be free to set their own agendas, though recognising that they must reflect the reality of Departmental need as set out in their ToR. The appointments process should be managed in a way that ensures that awareness of advertised opportunities is raised amongst the full range of relevant stakeholders. Appointments should be made on the basis of individual experience and capability rather than links to stakeholder or affiliated interest groups.

The secretariat for a SAC requires resourcing by a department in a manner and to a level that enables sufficient support to be provided to enable the SAC to function properly. The secretariat support must ensure that the SAC can operate in a way that is free from any political or policy focused influence, enabling advice to be published freely. During the course of SAC meetings the invitation of external observers and the inclusion of 'lay' members should be the rule rather than the exception.

When producing advice and reports SACs should seek peer review, as they would in ensuring quality for any other technical or academic activity. Meetings and formal discussions should be minuted to ensure transparency and where possible distinction should be made in writing between established scientific fact (evidence), relevant analysis and interpretation (analysis), and judgement on its implications for the matter on which advice is provided (advice).

It is suggested that SAC advice normally should be published at the same time that it is presented to a department. SACs should be clear that they provide advice on the relevant interpretation of the (scientific and engineering) evidence base to a policy question, but they are not (unless specifically asked) commenting on, or providing, suggestions for policy decisions or implementation. The 'Principles of Scientific Advice to Government' (2010) should be observed in the operation of the committee and should be formally included in the Code of Practice.

Government Response

It is clear that the need for openness and transparency in all aspects of a SAC's activity, from recruitment through to the provision of advice, is seen as crucial to a SAC's independence and objectivity. The Government welcomes the range of processes and responsibilities clearly identified in the consultation responses and these will be carefully considered in revision of the Code.

The Government notes that responsibility falls on both sides – both SAC and Department should operate in a manner that facilitates a good working relationship without seeking to influence the role or position of the other. Careful consideration will be given to ensure that this two-way relationship is properly reflected when setting out proposals to promote good, open, working relations.

c. How might SACs best resolve disputes between members or with Ministers and/or sponsoring departments?

Summary of Responses

The principles for the resolution of disagreement, whether it is internal (between committee members) or external (between the SAC and its sponsoring department) are broadly the same;

- Discussion of the reasons for difference of opinion should be open, frank and professional.

- There needs to be a formally recognised and 'official' process by which to resolve or handle disagreement.

- Differences of opinion should clearly documented, setting out both alternative positions and rationale.

- Specifically for internal SAC disputes;

    o Discussion should generally take the assumption that a consensus position is desirable – minority reports can be produced but should be used by exception.

    o Where consensus is not reached written output should indicate the strength of minority and majority positions.

    o The level of expertise of those with differing views should be reflected in discussion/ documentation

    o The nature of the dispute – whether it relates to the facts themselves or opinion and judgements based on them – should be clearly specified.

- For disputes between SAC and Minister or Department;

    o Both parties should communicate regularly and remain realistic in their expectations.

    o A formal process for resolution of disagreements between a SAC and Department should involve the CSA, and potentially the Departmental Permanent Secretary in particularly complex cases.

    o Where differences of position remain after dialogue both sides must be free to state their positions in a professional manner, both privately and in public.

    o SAC members must not be pressured to agree with a Department's position. Where this (the Department's) position does not appear to conform to the advice provided by the SAC then a clear explanation should be provided by the Department.

    o The Department should allow advice to be published, but the SAC should also remember that Policy decisions are made on a range of information of which SAC advice is only a part.

Government Response

The Government recognises that there is a great deal of sensitivity around the link between SAC advice and departmental policy decision making. The government observes that this will, rightly, remain an issue that requires continuous management through good working relationships and clear, open, formal processes.

The Principles of Scientific Advice to Government now set out the broad "rules of engagement" between Government and SACs. Careful consideration will be given to the series of principles reflected in the consultation and workshop responses, alongside the agreed Principles, when developing the guidance contained in the Code in this sensitive area.

Openness and Transparency

Question 2: It is important for SACs to operate in an open and transparent manner whilst ensuring the need to protect sensitive information.

a. **In some cases, for example national emergencies, publication of advice in the public domain may not be possible in advance of government decision making. How can this process be best communicated and managed?**

Summary of Responses

The responses to the issue of SAC advice in the event of National emergency identified two main issues. While recognising that such events do not necessarily follow 'normal' procedure, it is clear that principles of both process and timing require explicit statement. It is suggested in several responses that SACs should have an agreed checklist of actions or agreed processes to be followed under emergency conditions, and that CoPSAC should set out the minimum requirements.

The Code already recognises that when urgent advice is required in emergency situations the SAC Chair can act on behalf of the committee. It is noted in the consultation response, however, that members should still expect all reasonable attempts to be made to contact them first. When under time pressure to provide input it should be made clear that early advice is made on a preliminary basis.

Where a committee needs to discuss matters that need to be treated confidentially the discussion should be held under "reserved business". The 'fact of' the discussion and the decision to reserve it should be part of the formal meeting record.

Where advice is provided in confidence to a department, either through timing (speed of required response) or classification (nature of information and situation), it is still considered necessary that transparency over the 'fact of' the provision of advice remains, and that a statement should be made about when advice will be made public, even if it is not until after the event at hand. Where advice is not published a clear explanation should be provided.

Government Response

The precise detail of emergency procedures or planning is likely to vary according to SAC remit. Consideration will be given to options for clarification to the Code where appropriate, reflecting wider Governmental arrangements for provision of scientific advise in emergencies.

b. **How can SACs ensure that non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) are used appropriately? In what circumstances are they appropriate?**

Summary of Responses

Responses on the need for, and use of, Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) were mixed in their view of appropriate arrangements ; some suggesting that they should be used only under very specific conditions, and then sparingly, while others felt that standard terms should be developed for use by all SACs as part of normal terms of membership.

It was generally thought that the use of NDA's should ultimately be a decision taken by the SAC Chair in consultation with the department over the sensitivity of the information and issues being considered. It was clear from consultation responses that the underlying principle of protection of sensitive information should be understood as fundamental to SACs, and the spirit of such agreements should be the basic philosophy of SAC operation and activity.

Some responses indicated that obligation to protecting confidentiality of information should be captured in membership terms and conditions. Others, however, felt that there may be instances where information being considered may be so sensitive, or the commercial or public risk implications so significant that "normal" rules are insufficient. In such situations an NDA should be established on a case-by-case basis.

It was suggested that the Code should clearly define and set out the minimum requirements for NDA's, covering not only the nature of the material covered and the obligations of the recipients, but also defining the circumstances requiring them and the time period of their operation or validity. When NDAs are used it was felt important that the fact of their establishment should be recorded and the SAC should publish details annually of the number of NDAs entered into to retain openness of SAC operation but without disclosing the information itself.

Government Response

The government will consider how to build on and develop the guidance on handling confidential information in light of the consultation feedback. It will be important to reflect that arrangements cannot be prescriptive and must be sufficiently flexible to enable a range of circumstances to be covered and adaptable to a range of possible different Committee structures.

c. **What training could be provided to SAC Chairs and members to assist in their interactions with the media?**

Summary of Responses

It is clear from the responses that good media training is seen as essential for all SAC Chairs and members likely to play a role as an official spokesperson for a SAC, though it was not seen as necessary for all SAC members. It was viewed as important by most respondents, and recommended as mandatory by several.

It was recommended that the sponsor department should ensure that adequate training is available to those who need it – initially by the department's communications team, and if necessary through professional external media training. It was also suggested that training to deal with confrontational media would be particularly beneficial. For particularly contentious areas media handling experience or ability might be considered a specific criterion for selection.

The role of departmental press offices in reflecting the interests of their ministers and the department's policy decisions is recognised by a number of respondents to the consultation, and it has been suggested that access to independent media advice should also be available to SAC members to enable them to discuss or take advice prior to media engagement. It is noted that all training should focus on the communication of scientific information, and not relate to political discussion.

SAC Chairs should be free to talk to the media regarding their area of expertise without repercussion, but they also have a duty to liaise with the department on issues that relate to departmental policy interests.

Government Response

The government agrees that engagement is an important aspect of the work of SACs and that good media skills are necessary for effective presentation and transparent operation of SAC activity and advice. The Code will continue to reflect this important issue.

d. **What should the considerations in selecting a nominated spokesperson be, and should this be tailored to the programme of work, for example, is there a benefit in having a nominated spokesperson per project?**

Summary of Responses

Responses to this question were almost unanimous in that the Chair should have lead responsibility for acting as spokesperson for the SAC. It was also agreed that there may be certain circumstances, such as the immediate unavailability of the Chair when needed or superior direct expertise of a SAC member, that an alternative spokesperson is selected, with the agreement of the Chair and department.

Where the Chair is not the spokesperson the Chair should still be involved in discussions with the department. While maintaining independence from the Department, the SAC spokesperson should take care in planning their statements and engage with the department to understand their position.

Government Response

> The government welcomes this clear and robust reinforcement of the importance of careful consideration of the most appropriate spokesperson. Revision to the Code will reflect these views.

Engaging the Scientific Community and Succession Planning

Question 3: In order to maintain the effective provision of scientific advice to government, SACs need to seek feedback on the advice they provide, consider the ongoing need for their advice, and consider succession planning.

a) **It is important to have a balance of expertise between scientific knowledge and other areas on both SACs and their secretariat.**
   i)   **How can the balance of expertise on SACs between scientific experts, those from other professions and key partner organisations be determined?**

Summary of Responses

Responses indicate that the necessary skills balance should be subject to discussion and agreement between the Chair and department in advance of making appointments, and it should continue to be regularly reviewed on an on-going basis. It is important to ensure that members' skills match both current and anticipated future SAC needs, with appointment being made on a best fit basis. Members should typically be internationally recognised as 'expert' in their field. Both members and the sponsoring department should be fully involved in succession planning.

It appears to be generally considered that lay membership of SACs is important not only to ensure transparency of process but also to inject fresh perspectives and potentially challenge views during panel discussion. Careful consideration needs to be given to the role definition and consequent appointment of lay members as they may need to be able to follow complex technical discussions. It has been suggested that "non-scientific" members with a strong reputation in a related, public-facing, delivery field could be considered a strength in a lay capacity, bringing a wider societal appreciation to debate.

The current Code is recognised as already referring to members 'skill' match, but it is suggested that this is broadened in include recognition of the level of experience and expertise – a balance is required between those with more theoretical knowledge and those with practical delivery experience. This also relates to comments about ensuring that members (and prospective members) have existing professional affiliations as these will typically serve to ensure a level of professional integrity and demonstrable competence, required for membership of professional bodies.

As well as being clear on the types of individuals required in a SAC, it has been suggested that greater clarity is set out on length of terms of membership. It is noted that professional institutions typically appoint committee members for around three years with the potential for extension to one additional period.

It was noted that beyond 'skill balance' the Code makes no overt reference to diversity in gender and ethnicity terms. Further, it was felt that arrangements for membership should be made as straightforward as possible so that recruitment of good members did not take too long.

Government Response

The Government welcomes the reiteration that membership should be matched to current and anticipated SAC remit, and that this balance should be regularly reviewed in consultation with members and the department. We are considering how to clarify guidance on the appointment process, including: length of membership term, the engagement of lay membership and the need to consider the diversity agenda in making new appointments, ensuring consistency with current OCPA and Cabinet Office guidance on public appointments and committee operations.

ii) How can the balance of expertise required for SAC secretariats be determined?

Summary of Responses

Like the SACs themselves, a fully functional secretariat is seen as needing an appropriate balance of skill and knowledge. In the case of secretariats the need is for scientific/ technically competent staff (to identify relevant information, understand discussions and draft reports accurately), and for good policy and/or administrative staff (to provide a clear link into the department's systems and structures).

It is seen as being the department's responsibility to provide the SAC with a suitable secretariat, but the SAC Chair should be involved in discussion and agreement of job descriptions, selection and interviewing. The Terms of Reference for Secretariat roles should include the requirement to provide impartial support to the SAC, and they should have the freedom to act independently of any departmental policy position.

Where a SAC wants to create a specific sub-committee, to address a particular issue in depth for instance, the SAC chair should engage with the department in advance of its establishment to discuss the implications for secretariat support and resource requirements.

Government Response

We welcome the recognition that SAC secretariats require a sufficient degree of dedicated support to be able to serve both the committee and the department to best effect. We recognise that departments need to provide support from within their own budgets and are pleased that the responses reflect the need for engagement by departments and SAC Chairs in agreeing these arrangements.

b) What steps can SACs take to ensure that expertise is maintained and future skills needs identified? What practical steps might be taken to broaden the pool of potential candidates?

Summary of Responses

A variety of methods were identified, some serving both to maintain or access current skills and knowledge and to simultaneously broaden the pool of possible candidates for membership. Members should remain in contact with professional bodies and continue

where possible to engage with their colleagues and departments from the disciplines or areas for which they are 'expert' to help them maintain networks and to engage with current thinking and practice in their respective areas.

Longer serving members could consider mentoring newer members and all members, especially those without experience in advising Government, should have access to training in understanding the policy process. To maintain skills over the longer terms there should be at least an annual review of the SAC's future work programme and the on-going skills profile of members should be matched against this. SACs should engage with both the sponsor department's and external horizon scanning organisations (such as Foresight) to develop a five to ten year view of anticipated skill and knowledge developments.

In the more immediate term, ad hoc members could be invited to contribute to single or a short number of meetings to bring in specific skills or knowledge not otherwise well represented. In addition to supporting current members this also serves to introduce potential new candidates to the work of the SAC. Members could be encouraged specifically to encourage mid-career colleagues to consider taking on a committee role – either in an ad hoc capacity as discussed or possibly involving them on short-term working groups initially.

The external peer review of the committee's discussions and decision-making could also provide additional input to, as well as further independent verification of, any advice offered. This may produce time delay and appear onerous, but should serve to increase both SAC and departmental confidence in the advice provided.

Government Response

The government is grateful for this helpful range of measures that might assist in maintaining skills and engaging new people. It is planned to incorporate these perspectives in a new section on SAC activity management in the revised Code, to offer more detail in an area where there was limited previous guidance.

c) **How might the broader scientific and engineering community feed into the work of SACs, the consideration of future work priorities and any potential refocusing of priorities?**

Summary of Responses

It has been suggested that a rolling programme of SAC activities could be published that invites timely input to enable a wide range of perspectives and information to be drawn on. When communicating the SACs activity it will be helpful to clearly indicate why certain advise is required, who it is being provided to and how it is likely to be used.

In addition to 'calls for information' SACs could hold open meetings, ensuring as wide an invitation extended as possible, including an "evidence gathering" session at intervals if appropriate. These could be further followed up or supplemented through formal workshops and web-based consultations.

In addition to relatively open approaches, some more targeted approaches were also suggested to ensue that key stakeholders are engaged by design rather than opportunity. These include;

- actively seeking the views, advice and input from professional institutes and societies.
- The co-option of relevant stakeholder contacts onto short term groups, to establish a wider network of contacts who understand SAC requirements.
- SCA Chair and members to attend industry and stakeholder events and conferences to actively seek additional perspectives and contacts.

Government Response

The government welcomes these suggestions to ensure that SACs have guidance on a range of specific passive and active options to further enhance their networks and base of experience. The government will consider how these sensible and practical options, many of which are already used be SACs at the moment, should be reflected in the relevant sections of the revised Code.

Additional Comments and Information

Question 4: Is there any other information that could be usefully included in the Code of Practice?

Summary of Responses

Clear guidance on the provision of advice in relation to policy decisions or options is necessary as there may be circumstances where departments seek advice on matters that relate to technical implementation of decisions rather than underpinning knowledge that helps inform those decisions. In such cases a simple divide between "science/ technical advice" and "policy decision" may be complicated by nature of the decisions being made.

Some comments suggested alterations to the Principles of Scientific Advice to Government, in addition to suggestions that the Principles should be clearly referenced in the Code.

A number of the respondents suggested that some formal process should be put in place to ensure compliance with the Code, that SAC performance should be monitored in a standardised and independent manner and that the relationship between SACS and departments is being managed effectively. Of particular concern was the ability of Chairs to be able to formally escalate concerns about SAC operation and the role of CSAs in providing some level of formal oversight.

Explicit guidance or definition was also sought to specify what is meant by "providing scientific advice" and "providing advice on scientific issues". A number of very specific comments on the wording of particular paragraphs in the 2007 Code were also made and these will all be individually considered in redrafting.

Government Response

The government recognises the complexity and sometimes overlapping boundaries that arise with some kinds of advice departments seek, particularly when the policy options are themselves science or technology reliant. SACs and their sponsoring departments will need to operate discretion in agreeing areas where advice can and should be provided.

The Principles now set out the key issues around the relationship between Ministers and those that provide independent scientific and engineering advice. We do not propose to

make any changes to the Principles at this stage, given that they were agreed and published relatively recently. Given the relationship between the Principles and the Code we do propose to incorporate the Principles more directly into the Code.

The Government recognises the concern and interest in the implementation and operation of the Code and is aware that there is variation amongst Committees in direct uptake of the detail of the Code. It is anticipated that a number of GCSA and GO-Science actions, such as the twice per year SAC Chair's meeting, will go a considerable way to addressing these concerns.

Request for information: In updating the Code of Practice we will be reviewing the publications signposted in the document. We would appreciate suggestions for documents that might usefully be referenced in addition to/other than those in the reference section.

Summary of Responses

No additional documents were specifically referenced for inclusion, though the insertion of additional instruction or information was suggested on occasion throughout the preceding answers. The Code is not intended to be prescriptive, but individual comments will be considered when addressing redrafting of the specific paragraphs referred to.

Next Steps

Stakeholder comments (written and workshop) are currently being considered in detail and drafting amendments are being made to a restructured version of the Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees. It is intended to circulate this to Departmental Chief Scientific Advisors, SAC Chairs and participants in the consultation process for further comment before finalising the proposed revisions.

Feedback from this stage of the Code's revision will be quickly incorporated into a final draft for Professor Sir John Beddington and David Willett's consideration and clearance. Any further observations will be accommodated before submitting to Cabinet Committee in late Spring/Summer for approval. Once Ministers have indicated approval of the 2011 revision of the Code it will be published on the BIS website and drawn to the attention of all Government Departments and their SACs. All external stakeholders who have expressed an interest will also be alerted to the publication.

Annex A – List of Respondents

Order of listing reflects order of receipt

1. Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (Department of Health)
2. Science Advisory Council to Defra
3. Advisory Committee on Pesticides (HSE)
4. Animal Procedures Committee (Home Office)
5. (Scientific Advisory) Committee of Toxicity in Chemicals in Food (FSA)
6. Advisory Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infection (Department of Health)
7. Social Science Research Committee (FSA)
8. Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (Defra)
9. University of Leeds
10. Food Standards Agency
11. Air Quality Expert Group (Defra)
12. Secretariats to DH SACs at HPA
13. RCUK
14. Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (DH)
15. Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (Home Office)
16. Administration of Radioactive Substances Advisory Committee (HPA)
17. Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (FSA)
18. Engineering Professors' Council
19. Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (FSA)
20. UK Deans of Science
21. Society of Biology
22. The Royal Academy of Engineering
23. Science Media Centre
24. Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
25. Mr Hardison (independent)
26. Advisory Committee on Hazardous Substances (Defra)
27. Royal Society of Chemistry

Annex B – Attendees at SAC Consultation Workshop

5 October 2010

Kenny Chigbo, Mandy Jumnoodoo and	FSAC, NDNADEG Secretariat, Home Office
Stephanie Cossom,	ACAF Secretariat, FSA
Julie Shroff,	COT Secretariat, FSA
David Sherlock,	ACRE Secretary, Defra
Ana Delgado,	Defra
Sheela Reddy,	SACN Secretariat, DH
Elaine Stone	SACN Secretariat, FSA
Catherine Hegarty	IIAC Secretariat, DWP
Patrice Mongelarad	ACHS Secretariat ,Defra
Tony Meredity	JCVI Secretary, DH
Amy Glasswel	ARHAI Secretary, HPA
Louise Fraser Committee, HPA	Administration of Radioactive Substances Advisory
Jan Chandaman	Medical Policy Casework and Advice, DVLA
Alison Asquith	Novel Foods Branch, FSA
David Brown	Secretary for SAC on genetic modification, HSE
Laura Pleasants	RCEP

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Annex C – Attendees at External Stakeholders Workshop

20 January 2011

Selina Chen	British Academy
Eva Sharpe	Biosciences Federation.
James Tweed	Sciencewise-ERC
David Townsend	Natural England
Imran Khan	CaSE (Campaign for Science and Engineering)
Richard Ploszek	Royal Academy of Engineering
Ana Padilla	Parliamentary Office of S and T
Leonor Sierra	Sense about Science
Jack Stilgoe	Royal Society
Stephen Toole	Royal Geographic Society
Nancy Lee	Wellcome Trust
Oliver O'Hanlon	Science Council
Dougal Goodman	Foundation for Science and Technology
Robert Doubleday	University of Cambridge
Javier Lezaun	University of Oxford
Rachel Newton	House of Lords S&T Committee
Christine Salmon-Percival	House of Lords S&T Committee
Steve Hill	RCUK