



Tackling Obesities: Future Choices

Mid-Term Review

November 2008 – September 2010

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Executive Summary

Foresight's **Tackling Obesity: Future Choices** (TOFC) Report, published in 2007, produced a long-term vision and analysis to inform the delivery of a sustainable response to obesity in the UK over the next 40 years. It brought a cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach in analysing the future challenge of obesity.

The Report sets out the scale of the challenge, demonstrating that, without further action, the costs of overweight and obesity in England will rise to £50 billion per annum in England alone. The study called for more to be done, highlighting that the problem could not be tackled effectively by individuals alone, but required a societal response.

A year after the publication, Foresight reconvened the Project's High Level Stakeholder Group to review the report's impact in policy, research and elsewhere and to explore what other opportunities for follow-up might exist. The output of those discussions, the '**One-Year Review**' (OYR) - is published at www.bis.gov.uk/foresight. The OYR found widespread uptake of the Report findings. Notably, the Government drew very significantly on the study in developing its major strategy on tackling obesity; '**Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: a cross government strategy for England**' (HWHL). Also, in the year following publication, the report was also used by the Research Councils, in particular the Economic and Social Sciences Research Council, the Medical Research Council, and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, to inform their research programmes.

This mid-term Review (the Review) assesses the extent to which the Report has continued to influence and have an impact upon stakeholders in three years since the publication of the OYR. It contains the views of a range of stakeholders who contributed to the Project's development or its follow-up period. Responses were collected through a questionnaire and details on process are found at Annex A.

Whilst the Report had a major impact in its first year following publication¹, it has continued to influence stakeholders' perspectives and activities. The Report remains influential across

¹ This point is supported by the results from the meta-data gathered by the Review and made available in Annex B of this document.

several sectors; in Government, academia, public health, business both in the UK and internationally.

In Government, the Report continues to be cited by, and to influence, key policy makers and strategists; for example, in the follow-up to HWHL and the **Change4Life** campaign and in influencing the delivering public health at all levels.

The Report has informed two Research Councils; the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Medical Research Council (MRC). For example, the Project has helped shape the BBSRC's strategic plan (2010 to 2015) and the importance of the need for further research in this area and inform the development of MRC's strategic priorities for obesity research.

The Report has also remained an important source of evidence for organisations such as the **National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE)**, the **British Medical Association** and the **National Obesity Observatory (NOO)**. Specifically, NOO has found the study's conceptualisation of obesity as a complex system particularly insightful and useful in developing and communicating interventions, whilst the Project has influenced NICE's public health guidance.

Businesses such as **Tesco** and **PepsiCo** consider the Report to be an important reference point in helping make and support the case for action and in developing options for interventions to manage the challenge of obesity.

Impact has not been limited to the UK. The Report has received the close attention of policymakers and researchers in Australia, European Union and in North America. For example, the Report has informed policy development in the **Australian Department of Health and Ageing** and in the **Canadian Institutes of Health Research's** graduate and post-graduate training programmes

Notwithstanding the many areas where the Report has had a positive impact perhaps its greatest success is not in informing a particular document or initiative, but in how it has contributed to moving the field forward. Many of the respondents to this Review have commented on the Report's importance in setting a new benchmark for the discussion of obesity. This is likely to be seen as the major impact from the Project, as one respondent commented:

“[the Report] was a landmark report in shaping public policy on obesity...It was instrumental in creating a more balanced and informed discussion of obesity.”

This Review also considers the factors which might have constrained impact. Some of these issues, such as Foresight's finite budget and effect of staff turnover on partner organisations' engagement and understanding of the study, are generic issues which might apply to most Foresight projects. However, other factors, such as changes in policymakers' perspectives, for example, in rebalancing the respective capacities for effective individual and societal intervention and the sheer complexity of the issues, are more specific to this study.

I. Introduction

Foresight was recast in 2002 as a programme of major in-depth studies examining important issues up to 80 years in the future. These projects combine the latest scientific and other evidence with futures analysis to tackle complex issues and help policymakers think more systematically about the future.

Tackling Obesity: Future Choices (TOFC), the eighth Foresight project, reported in October 2007. It was sponsored by the Department of Health, the Department of Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Culture Media and Sport. It provided a robust evidence base which aimed to inform policy making, strategic thinking and research in addressing the challenges it raised.

Foresight reports present the evidence base to inform and catalyse action by bringing together the available scientific analysis, from a range of disciplines, with leading stakeholder organisations and policymakers from across Government,. This mid-term review (the Review) explores the activities of government and other organisations which have been influenced by the Project and also offers an opportunity to reflect on what more might have been achieved. This will provide valuable insights when developing strategies to maximise the impact of future Foresight projects.

Achieving and recording impact is a crucial aspect of all Foresight's major projects. To this end, Foresight routinely undertakes a formal review of projects' impact during the year or so following their launch and, in TOFC's case, this was published as the 'One-Year Review' (OYR) in 2008. However, it has become increasingly apparent that the impact of many of Foresight's major projects plays out over a longer time scale. Therefore, Foresight is conducting a series of mid-term (3- to 5-year) reviews, of which this is one, to explore these longer-term impacts.

To help projects achieve impact, Foresight has set aside resource to disseminate reports and their findings and to catalyse action. This 'Follow-up Team' works with government and other stakeholders to help ensure that Foresight projects can inform their activities, especially in the year following publication. However, in order to capitalise on specific opportunities that arise in the longer term, Foresight may continue to direct additional resource for up to several years.

Whilst this Review has consulted a wide and diverse range of stakeholders, it does not intend to be comprehensive. As the Report is freely available online, it may have prompted impact beyond the areas that Foresight has knowledge of. The Report is also likely to have had indirect or intangible influence on people or organisations, which is also difficult to capture within the scope of the Review.

The Review provides an overview of the Project and its main findings (chapter 2), and a summary of the OYR (chapter 3). It also sets out the Project's impact by sector, the factors that may have limited its impact and general conclusions (Chapters 4, 5 and 6). The appendices outline the Review's methodology, an overview of its metadata and a list of contributors.

An important aspect of the Review is that it draws directly on contributions from the users of the report. Foresight does not speculate on its influence; rather it elicits feedback from organisations in their own words. Foresight believes this methodology allows for the most accurate representation of the Project's impact.

2. Project overview

Tackling Obesity was the eighth major report published by Foresight in its current guise. It was directed by the then Government Chief Scientific Adviser and Head of the Government Office for Science, Sir David King. The Project was sponsored by the Minister for Public Health who, at the time of the study's inception, was the Rt Hon Caroline Flint MP and later the Rt Hon Dawn Primarolo MP.

2.1 Aims

The Project produced a long-term vision of how the UK can deliver a sustainable response to obesity over the next 40 years. By bringing a cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach to looking at the future challenge of obesity, it:

- Examined scientific evidence from a wide range of disciplines to identify the broad range of factors that influence obesity, looking beyond the obvious;
- Created a shared understanding of the relationships between key factors influencing levels of obesity and their relative importance;
- Built on this evidence to identify effective interventions; and
- Analysed how the future prevalence of obesity might change and the most effective future responses.

2.2 Structure

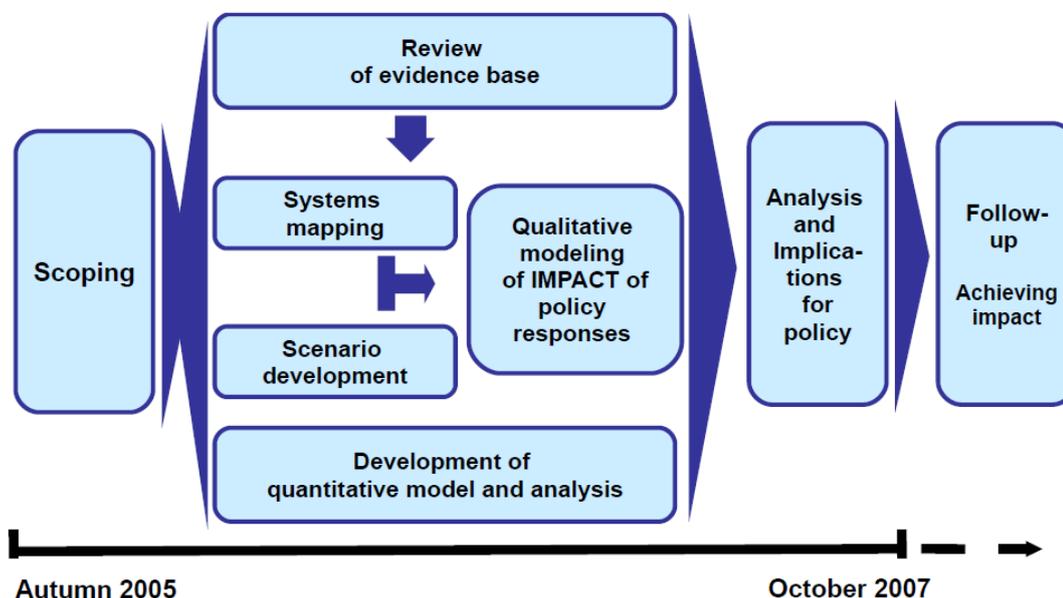


Figure 2.1: Project structure

Figure 2.1 outlines the structure of the Project, as well as the causalities in the process. This has become a standard methodology for all Foresight projects, which are based on: a thorough review of the existing evidence base, scenarios to help people consider alternative futures; systems maps to demonstrate the interconnectivity and complexity of the issue and oversight from leading academics in the field.

2.3 Outputs

The final project report contains a synthesis of the Project's evidence and analysis, and set out the study's key messages and findings. It describes the scale of the future problem, its causes and the evidence for its determinants and their associated uncertainties. It analyses the complexity of the obesity system through the development of a system map with multiple variables and intervention points. The report also describes how potential policy options were identified, using a scenario-based analysis, and developed to build a sustainable strategy.

Importantly, the study introduced new analytical methods and approaches to this major challenge. Foresight brought together a wide range of disciplinary expertise which included both the biological and social sciences. The distinctive multidisciplinary approach was essential

to develop a broad understanding of the diverse and inter-related environmental and biological factors that determine obesity.

Some of Tackling Obesities key messages include:

- Most adults in the UK are already overweight. Modern living has meant that every generation is heavier than the last.
- By 2050, 60% of men and 50% of women could be clinically obese. Without action, the costs of overweight and obesity will rise to £50 billion per annum.
- The obesity epidemic cannot be prevented by individual action alone and demands a societal approach.
- Tackling obesity requires far greater change, at multiple levels, than anything tried so far, including at personal, family, community and population levels.
- Preventing obesity is a societal challenge, similar to climate change. It requires partnership between government, science, business, and civil society.

The Project commissioned over 30 short reviews which examined the state of science in particular areas, to examine the current limitations of science alongside future possibilities. These were peer reviewed and published in 'Obesity Reviews', an Official Journal of the International Association for the Study on Obesity in March 2007. Foresight also commissioned and published extended reviews in specific areas to provide more in-depth analysis in the areas of lifestyle and behaviour change and the impact of the obesogenic environment.

Foresight also produced a systems atlas to complement the Report and help provide a visual representation of the issues tackled by the Project. An example of this can be seen in Figure 2.2. The systems work:

- Mapped the multitude of factors influencing obesity, taking as broad a perspective as possible
- Identified interactions between these factors
- Identified the degree of influence different factors have over levels of obesity (risk factors)
- Used this information to identify points of influence, conflict & intervention and areas for further in depth work.

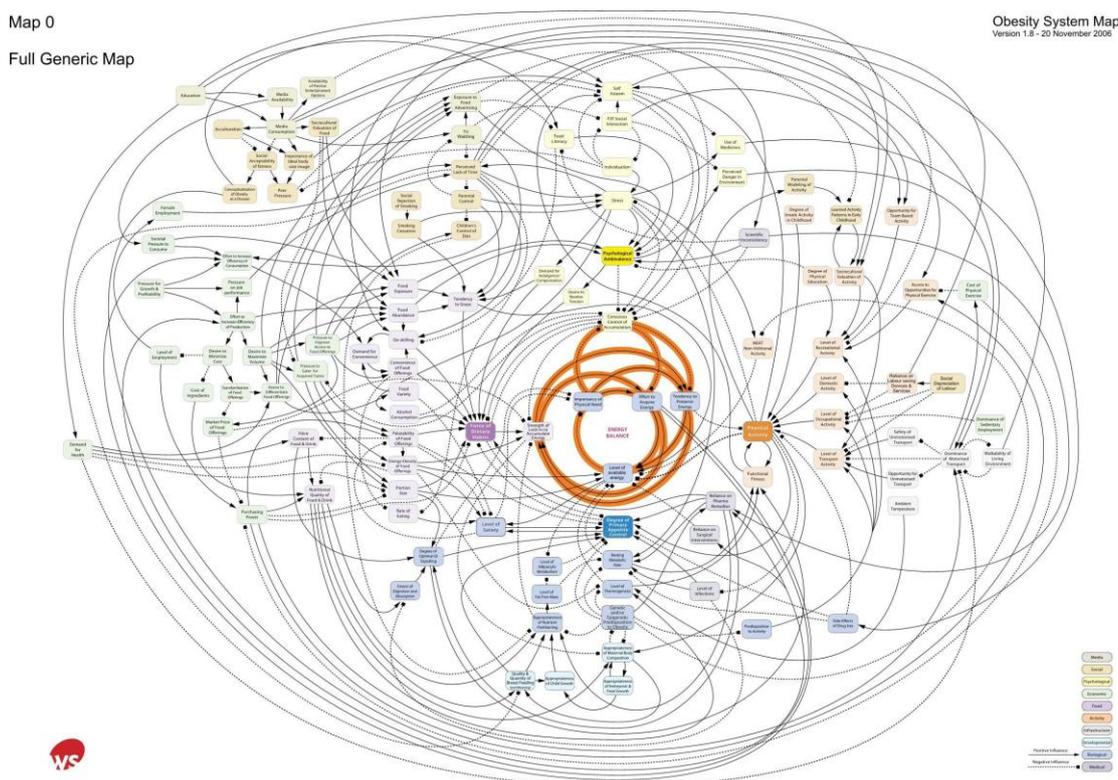


Figure 2.2: Obesity system map

The Report was also supported by a set of four scenarios and a quantitative modelling exercise. The scenarios were developed around two major areas of future uncertainty; namely, whether society would grow along collective or individualistic lines, and whether managing obesity would tend towards the anticipatory or the reactive. Project experts then identified 17

areas of potential policy intervention and explored how effective each would be under each of the scenarios.

The modelling exercise was commissioned to project the growth, or otherwise, of obesity rates through to 2050 and to predict the consequences for health, health costs and life expectancy. The findings of this were published as a separate report '*Tackling Obesity: Future Choices – Modelling future trends in Obesity and the impact on Health*'.

3. Summary of One Year Review

The One Year Review (OYR) assessed the Project's impact during the first 12 months following its publication. The OYR found that the Report had a substantial impact within Government and amongst non-governmental stakeholders, including the research community, education, business and internationally.

One of the Government's major responses to the report was through the development of *'Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: a cross-government strategy for England'* (HWHL), published in January 2008. HWHL represented a new cross-government approach, recognising the diverse medical and social determinants of obesity, and drew substantially on the Report. The Report also influenced the work of the Scottish Government and other Devolved Administrations and organisations such as the Food Standards Agency.

The Report had a particular impact on Research Councils. The Economic and Social Sciences Research Council, the Medical Research Council, and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council all developed new research strategies or programmes that have in part been influenced by the Foresight Report.

The OYR sets out how a diverse range of other leading organisations also used the report. Business in Sport and Leisure and the Central Council of Physical Recreation viewed the Report's key finding as the need to increase physical activity to combat obesity and to maintain a range of varied activities to encourage physical activity. The British Medical Association found that the report provided renewed impetus in the field and highlighted the importance of tackling obesity in early life.

The Report's impact was international from the outset. Overseas, the EU Commission's Directorate General SANCO (Health and Consumer Affairs) was briefed on the Project's findings and the report was at the centre of an EU obesity workshop held in London. The Canadian Institute for Health Research used the systems map to help develop a strategic approach to its research effort. And several organisations in the USA, such as the National Business Group on Health and the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, used the report to inform their work.

The report also proved a useful educational resource, informing work on training and capacity raising, strategic thinking and education in organisations such as the Royal College of Physicians, the National School of Government and the Open University.

The full text of the OYR and more information about the Foresight programme is found at:
<http://www.bis.gov.uk/foresight/our-work/projects/current-projects/tackling-obesity>

4. Impact

Tackling Obesity has continued to have impact in a wide range of areas following the publication of its OYR. This section reviews impact across six different sectors: Government; stakeholder; academia; research councils; business and commercial; and international. After setting out the Project's impact in these various sectors, the Review considers the nature of the impact, recognising its intangibility in some areas. Before offering overall conclusions, the Review considers factors which may have limited impact and lessons which might be drawn.

The majority of the evidence and quotations provided in this section are responses to a questionnaire circulated to stakeholders who were involved in the Project either pre- or post-publication. Further details on the methodology used can be found in Annex A of this Review.

4.1 Impact by sector

4.1.1 Government

Since the publication of the OYR, the Report remains influential in Government and a major point of reference on obesity. Respondents to the questionnaire commented that the Report is “[continuing] to act as an important benchmark to go back to in all policy discussions”² and that, “the various strands have helped make the case for investment, guided strategy development, stakeholder mapping, generation of new policy ideas and the approach to surveillance and monitoring.”

The Report's major impact in central Government has been with the Cross-Government Obesity Unit and the Department of Health (DH). In particular, the Report has had a direct and significant influence on the development of *'Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: a cross-Government strategy for England'*, published in 2008. This £372 million strategy's ambition was to make the UK the first major nation to reverse the obese and overweight population by ensuring that everyone is able to achieve and maintain a healthy weight. By 2020, the Strategy aimed to reduce the proportion of overweight and obese children to 2000 levels. The progress towards these aims is outlined in the Department of Health review of HWHL document published in March 2010, *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: Two Years On*, which also continues

to reference the Foresight report. In addition, the DH published *'Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: a cross-Government research and surveillance plan for England'* (2008) which set out the government plan for the development of additional research and surveillance focused on obesity overweight and their determinants in England. The DH published a review of progress against this plan in 2010.

The Report also continues to have an impact across other areas of Government. Examples of this include the policy work on healthy built environments, which largely arose from the report findings. Additionally, the Department of Health's Change4Life campaign has also been influenced by the Project. Change4Life is a social marketing campaign to encourage adults to exercise more and have better diets and to promote behavioural change amongst children:

"The Project's science reviews and key messages have been a core input to this [Change for Life] campaign".

The NHS and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) have found the findings from the report useful. As a result of the Foresight process, PCTs have:

"begun to grasp the mantle of obesity prevention with interest generated by Public Health Directors". For the NHS, "the quantitative modelling continues to give the most recent line on future prevalence and costs to the NHS and society" and "the report had a direct (and unexpected) impact on commissioning of weight management services".

More widely, the report has influenced continuing work at the Office for Communications' (Ofcom). The organisation "found it – particularly the Obesity System Causal Map – a useful way of explaining to interested visitors (including many overseas policy makers) the complex web of factors that bear upon obesity, and the limited (though not insignificant) impact of the media".

In addition to the national impact outlined above, the report has also been used at a regional and local level. In the North East, for example, it has been used to help inform the implementation of a regional health strategy. A stakeholder made the general point that the report has been used "at a local and regional level - Foresight thinking and messages are

² Herein, all quotations should be assumed as given by an anonymous respondent to the questionnaire, unless

critical components of many local strategies where it is cited as a key reference and the 'systems thinking' formally adopted as a way to organise strategy. A good example of this is in Tower Hamlets”.

4.1.2 Stakeholders

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has used the report as a basis for developing several of its own publications. For instance, it is developing public health guidance: *'Preventing Obesity – a whole system approach'*. The scope for this work quotes directly from the report and Dr Susan Jebb, one of the Project's lead experts, chairs the Programme Development Group. The guidance is due to be published in March 2012 and the report is also listed as one of a number of key policy documents that the guidance aims to support.

Tackling Obesity has informed other public health guidance being developed by NICE, including the Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease (published June 2010), Preventing pre-diabetes among adults in high-risk groups (due June 2011) and Spatial planning (due December 2011).

Findings from the Report also continue to have impact on the work of the British Medical Association (BMA) which is:

“greatly concerned at the rising levels of obesity in the UK, particularly among children, and the significant health impact on the population. The Foresight report has provided renewed impetus in this field by offering a new way of viewing the problem of overweight and obesity. It has helped inform our work on obesity and has provided a comprehensive source of obesity data and statistics. It has been a helpful tool in exploring the main challenges and devising policy to address the issues, and prevent and treat obesity in the future”.

The Project has significantly influenced the work of the National Obesity Observatory (NOO) which *“grew out of involvement with the Foresight project”*. NOO was established to provide a

single point of contact for wide-ranging authoritative information on data and evidence related to obesity, overweight, underweight and their determinants.

NOO advised that:

“The findings and outputs of the project underpin the vast majority of the work we do within NOO.

The main impact has come through the conceptualisation by the Foresight project of obesity as a complex system problem. We have used the system map as a template to identify the topics for us to address, and as a basis from which to build data and evidence maps. We have also used the approaches described within the report to characterise the nature of the problem and appropriate mechanisms for addressing it.”

The Report has helped to further develop modelling work used by the National Heart Forum (NHF). As a result of its involvement with the Project, the NHF drew heavily on the report to develop a toolkit that provides guidance and advice for local initiatives to deliver healthy weight. The NHF also runs an Obesity Learning Centre, to assist frontline professionals in tackling obesity:

“It provides real time information on policy, strategy, applied research and action in particular capturing the learning from natural experiments such as healthy towns as well as providing distance learning facilities. The work is closely coordinated with the work of the National Obesity Observatory.”

“There continues to be significant high level international interest in the Foresight report and its approach which the NHF is actively engaged in. The Foresight review architecture and the environmental and ecological public health analysis is being utilized by the NHF in its work with policy makers and academics in applying the lessons to the prevention of other chronic diseases.”

“The quantitative modeling work undertaken by the NHF on behalf of Foresight has flourished, [and] the team has continued to refine the model. [The NHF] has undertaken similar work for the US Government and is exploring opportunities in other countries as well as working with local area data in England, a Lancet series on obesity modeling is in preparation for publication in mid 2011. The methodology is being applied to other areas such as tobacco.”

4.1.3 Research Councils

The Report has influenced the work of two UK Research Councils: the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Medical Research Council (MRC). It has also had a wide impact across BBSRC's remit. During the period of this Review, the Project has *"increased awareness of obesity as a health issue and recognition of the potential impact BBSRC science may have in the area."* The BBSRC Strategic Plan for 2010 to 2015 included three strategic research priorities. One of these priorities, Basic Bioscience Underpinning Health, focuses on driving advances in improving quality of life and was influenced by findings from the Project: *"The Report helped identify obesity as one of the key health issues where improvements across the lifecourse can be made through understanding basic bioscience, and helped identify areas such as mechanisms of dietary choice, and the role of physical activity in affecting development and health."*

The Report has also widened the scope that BBSRC gives to biological research in the field. Therefore, *"rather than having a narrow specific obesity focus, research funded by BBSRC relevant to obesity covers a wide breadth of the BBSRC remit. As such, obesity can be seen as one of several challenges contributing to the need for research areas such as; the overarching BBSRC research priority Ageing Research: Lifelong Health and Wellbeing, and several research programmes at the BBSRC Institute of Food Research."* This is coupled by further work that BBSRC is doing with UK Sport *"to promote science in the areas of neuroscience and musculoskeletal research to aid athletic performance."*

BBSRC also noted the Report's wider impact across the organisation. Some impact has been seen in *"many areas of BBSRC; from our responsive mode priorities, training in research relevant to obesity (such as studentship projects), to wide areas of institute funding and our support for in vivo physiology, through the four Integrative Mammalian Biology Centres awarded in part by BBSRC."* However, the BBSRC raised the issue that it is difficult to imply direct causality, as obesity is only one of the issues impacting upon research in these areas.

For the MRC, the Report *"has provided part of the backdrop to [its] review of what work it is funding in obesity and what its strategic priorities in the area should be. Without TOFC, it is arguable whether MRC would be giving quite the same focus to obesity."*

4.1.4 Academia

As with other sectors, it is not possible to make a comprehensive record of the Project's impact on academia; however, *"there has been considerable interest in the research community – Foresight is cited in a number of papers and projects (both positively and negatively)."* An overview of some of the places where the Report has been cited can be found .

The Obesity System Atlas has been identified as a particular tool that has aided both academic teaching and research. The following contribution from Canada's National Institutes for Health Research underscores this:

"The Tackling Obesities report and the obesity system map has had significant impact on my work as a researcher, teacher and an advocate for change. I have analyzed the system map and published a paper and several abstracts on it, I used the map and report as the basis for a new upper level/graduate course on obesity developed for my department in the spring of 2010 and I often use the map and the reduced map we developed from it (see the journal Obesity Feb 2010) in presentations to various types of groups and organizations. I also have used the map as the basis for a chapter on complex systems science and obesity which will be published in a new book on the Social Science of obesity."

In particular, contributors to the Review were asked whether the evidence base used in, and provided by, the report was still relevant, or whether the science has moved on substantially since the publication of the report. The responses were largely positive; the broad consensus being that the bulk of the report remained relevant, for example:

"Yes, it's still relevant. Advances have not nullified the findings."

"Still relevant - there has not been a step change in knowledge since publication."

However, responses did also raise areas where the science had progressed since the publication of TOFC. Comments here covered a range of areas:

“Evidence on psychological morbidity has moved on a pace in the last 5 or 6 years. This requires updating. Psychological morbidity, distress and disparity are under-represented in the model and seriously influence people’s willingness and capacity to affect change.”

“Genetics is of more widespread influence across the systems map, but this is easy to take account of, at the moment.”

“The science is continually in flux, but the expanding knowledge of the critical stages of foetal development and the way in which endocrine disrupting chemicals are implicated in the aetiology of obesity needs to be revisited urgently.”

“Most substantial policy relevant changes has been the recognition of sedentary behaviour as an independent risk factor, the start of a body of evidence around community interventions and cost effectiveness. There are a number of other developments but most are not yet 'big enough' or clearly substantiated to be actionable by policy.”

Changes in specific areas of the science are, of course, inevitable. In responses to the Review though, commentators were more inclined to take a wider perspective on the position of the report in the scientific literature on obesity:

“The value of TOFC is the emphasis on the problem rather than specific scientific approaches.”

“The fundamentals of TOFC have remained the same.”

“[It is] inevitable that reviews will have a shelf life but Foresight still seems to be the most up to date piece looking right across obesity prevention apart from the recent reviews compiled for the US Whitehouse report on child obesity.”

“I am not aware of any new evidence which fundamental disagrees with the work Foresight did or change the interpretation of old evidence.”

4.1.5 Business

TOFC involved a wide range of commercial organisations during the Project, many of whom were represented on the Project's High Level Stakeholder Group. Organisations such as the Food and Drink Federation, Weight Watchers and Business in Sport and Leisure have all used the findings from, and/or contributed to the development of, TOFC in some way.

Tesco, as a member of the High-level Stakeholder Group, was closely linked to the Project. It found the report *"a useful addition to the available evidence and for assessing the key areas for new measures and partnership."* Tesco also noted that *"the value in TOFC is to give a comprehensive scientific base from which stakeholders can consider the best approach to tackling obesity."* Furthermore, it found *"some of the biggest impact in showing that action is necessary rather than necessarily following specific policy recommendations in the report."*

Also, a senior PepsiCo representative stated that: *"The report has a major impact on [the] work at PepsiCo...the conceptualisation of causes; the role of various players and the strength of interventions"*

These two organisations are exemplars of how the Report has not only played into their work, but also across the food industry in the USA.³

4.1.6 International

Since the publication of the OYR, the Report has not only had impact in the UK, but also internationally. In Australia, the Report has been taken up by various governments and agencies; for example, the Australian Department of Health and Ageing, and the New South Wales Department of Health. It has also had an impact on academia in the country, particularly at the University of Sydney where it is *"one of the elements informing planning for the new Centre for Obesity, Diabetes & Cardiovascular Disease"*, a new AU\$385 million biomedical centre to be built by 2013⁴. The Report has also served as a factual basis to *"provide information (more than we have available here), to show projections and to then focus activity."*

³ See, for example: Yach *et al.* *Globalization and Health* 2010, 6:10
<http://www.globalizationandhealth.com/content/6/1/10>

⁴ <http://www.usyd.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=2915>

The Report has also had an impact in the USA, in particular “on a new multi- industry effort, the Healthy Weight Commitment that involves over 60 companies, NGOs, sports groups and the US Army in tackling obesity in the USA.”

4.2 Nature of impact

This section summarises the nature of the Report’s impact, in particular since the One Year Review. It is intended to build upon the previous section, which documented impact in specific areas. However, from the responses given to the questionnaire circulated for this Review, it is clear that they contribute evidence for only part of the of Report’s impact post-publication.

Several respondents commented upon how the Report served to move the discussion on obesity forward. The publication of the Report resulted in many sectors viewing the issue of obesity differently, with the analysis serving as a new benchmark. This status is acknowledged by several of the contributors to this Review:

“The maps have been extremely useful as an illustration of the complexity and links across the determinants of obesity. The fact that Foresight happened at all and that it come out with such an excellent report really helped to shift obesity on the agenda. Apart from the maps, there was nothing of high novelty but that is not the point – someone of importance was taking the issue seriously and coming out with a very comprehensive and sensible analysis and recommendations.”

“Well done Foresight. If all countries had done this we would be in better shape.”

“It was, and remains, a most useful, seminal document.”

“TOFC has moved the field on; it’s still not right, but it moves us in the right direction in solving a complex problem.”

“TOFC was a landmark report in shaping public policy on obesity. It has also had an impact on researchers (especially whole systems thinking) and succeeded in engaging stakeholders in the commercial sector, especially the food industry. It was instrumental in creating a more balanced and informed discussion of obesity.”

“The report continues to provide the scientific backdrop against which many of the arguments and proposals for action are played out.”

The breadth of the Report's impact since the One Year Review is further demonstrated through a cursory search of the internet. This reveals references in articles or blogs from a [Polish expatriate site](#), a [national cancer charity](#) and [African news website](#) as a few of the places where the report has been referenced in the last few months. Similarly, it remains frequently cited by the national media, with references in the [Guardian](#) and [Telegraph](#) this year indicative of the report's continuing value as a point of reference.

These quotations and references themselves are not definitive indicators of impact. They do not point towards specific policies or initiatives which the Report has helped to facilitate. Rather, they serve as testaments to the wider change in thinking which the work led to in some areas and demonstrate that as well as the tangible impacts listed in the previous section, the Project has also had a level of impact which is less tangible, but equally valuable to note.

5. Conclusions

Since the publication of the OYR, the Project has continued to have impact across a wide range of areas. Whilst several of the Report's major impacts were realised in the first year following its publication⁵, it nonetheless continues to be viewed as a highly important document in the field.

This review sets out the substantial and marked impact that the Report has had in government and in many organisations from the business and research communities in the UK and internationally. However, a review such as this can never be considered to be comprehensive because this and other Foresight reports are freely available on the internet, and also widely distributed in hard copy. Therefore, the full level of dissemination and uptake of the Project's findings cannot be easily known and assessed. This review indicates the wide range and flavour of the multiple actions which the Report has catalysed. However, as with all Foresight reports, the balance of impact shifts from the direct to the indirect with time; in particular, as stakeholder consideration of the Report is considered in tandem with new analyses and evidence.

In Government, the report continues to be cited by, and serve as an influence to, key policy areas such as the follow-up to Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives and the Change4Life campaign. The Project remains influential for the health service at all levels; from quantitative modelling within the National Health Service to regional health strategies, in particular in the North East of England.

Within the wider public health sphere, the Project has impacted on the public health guidance issued by NICE. The BMA have found that TOFC has offered them a new way of looking at the problem of obesity, whilst NOO has found major value in how the Project outlined obesity as a complex systems problem.

Industry continues to use the findings from TOFC. Tesco have found that TOFC provides a scientific basis which they can continue to draw from. In the USA, the Project has helped informed a multi-stakeholder Healthy Weight Commitment, involving over 60 companies, NGOs

⁵ This point is supported by the results from the meta-data gathered by the Review and made available in Annex B of this document.

and the US Army. Internationally, TOFC has also managed to have an impact in Australia, informing work in academia, the Australian Department of Health and Ageing and the New South Wales Department of Health.

The Project has influenced two Research Councils; BBSRC and MRC. Principles from TOFC have influenced BBSRC's strategic plan and has led to the importance of recognising biological research in this area to be underlined.

Within the wider field of academia, the scientific basis of TOFC remains relevant as a point of reference across the field. Despite advances in some parts of the science – such as psychological morbidity and genetics – these developments have not led to the core messages from the Project being distilled or contradicted.

A lot has been achieved. However, some respondents have also commented that impact might have been further enhanced. In particular, stakeholder inertia in adopting more accurately informed perspectives of the roles of the individual and of society can hinder the development of strategies and interventions to manage the current and future obesity epidemic. Also, commentators have highlighted other factors to improve impact which would include: the better co-ordination of local healthcare services; increased political commitment and funding; movement towards cross-sectoral discussion, consensus and long-termism on tackling the obesity challenge.

Finally, the lasting impact of the Project may not be through the schemes and projects initiated on the back of the findings from TOFC, but through the change in attitudes that it prompted instead. Many of the responses to the Review drew attention to how the Project was responsible for moving the field forward, and that how it provided a new benchmark in policy work on obesities.

Appendices

Appendix A – Methodology

The main input for this review has been through a questionnaire sent out to individuals and organisations who have been involved at some stage of the report's process. Recipients were asked to provide responses to the following questions:

- If the report has had further impact on your organisation, since the publication of the One-Year Review, what form has this taken? Please give as much detail as you can.
- Have there been any barriers to TOFC having a greater impact than it has had? Please give details.
- Is there anything which could be, or have been, done to increase the impact that TOFC has on your work?
- Do you know of any other areas or organisations where TOFC's findings have catalysed or continue to catalyse action?
- Is the science evidence-base from TOFC still relevant? Or has the science moved on? (Please only answer this question if appropriate to your field of work)
- Please provide any other comments or thoughts about TOFC and its impact.

Respondents were also asked three further questions, to which they were asked to assign a score between 1 and 10:

- Following the publication of the Tackling Obesity: Future Choices (TOFC) report in 2007, how useful have you found the report in your work (1 being of no use, 10 being of great use)?
- Since the One-Year Review for Obesity was published in November 2008, has TOFC had any further impact on your work, or the work of your organisation (1 being of no impact, 10 being of great impact)?

- Do you think that TOFC will continue to impact upon your work in the future (1 being not at all, 10 being greatly)?

These data gathered from the responses to these is used in Section 5 to provide a broad overview of the past and future impact of TOFC. Responses came from a range of organisations across Government, healthcare bodies, research and business.

All responses have been anonymised to ensure that the responses given were not prejudiced through the publication of their origin.

Appendix B – Metadata

The Review collected a series of metadata on the effectiveness of TOFC post publication. Three questions were asked, with respondents asked to allocate a score out of 10 for each one:

Following the publication of the Tackling Obesity: Future Choices (TOFC) report in 2007, how useful have you found the report in your work?

This received an average score of 8.4 from 22 responses, with a 10 representing most useful.

Since the One-Year Review for Obesity was published in November 2008, has TOFC had any further impact on your work, or the work of your organisation?

This received an average score of 6.5 from 21 responses, with 10 representing a great impact.

Do you think that TOFC will continue to impact upon your work in the future?

This received an average score of 6.5 from 22 responses, with 10 representing the greatest future impact.

Appendix C – List of contributors

Foresight wishes to thank the following organisations and individuals which contributed to this Review:

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