

Government Chemist Programme Expert Group Meeting

Wednesday 11 May 2022

Hybrid (LGC Teddington & MS Teams)

Attendees:

<p><u>PEG</u></p> <p>Robbie Beattie Paul Berryman (<i>Chair</i>) Keneth Chinyama David Franklin Jonathon Griffin Kasia Kazimierczak Chelvi Leonard Brenda McRory Declan Naughton David Pickering Sophie Rollinson Diane Turner</p> <p><u>Observers</u></p> <p>Michael Adeogun</p>	<p><u>BEIS</u></p> <p>Ben Baker Karen Greengrass Maria Turner</p> <p><u>LGC</u></p> <p>Sara Babahami John Black Julian Braybrook Malcolm Burns Paula Domann Selvarani Elahi Kirstin Gray Paul Hancock Bob Oswald (<i>Minutes</i>) Caroline Pritchard Elena Sanchez Tejal Soni-Khamar</p>
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Apologies: Roger Wood and Simon Branch.

1. Minutes/Actions

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed all attendees and reminded all those present of the usual housekeeping rules. He also reminded PEG members to make any necessary declarations of interest in relation to particular topics discussed.
- 1.2 Minutes from previous meeting (1 November 2021) were approved with no corrections.
- 1.3 There was only one action from the previous meeting, which was completed and closed:
 - **Action 1** (*item 9.1*) re: *Doodle Poll for Spring 2022 meeting*. Action completed and closed.

2. BEIS Update

- 2.1 The BEIS presentation (slides circulated with these minutes) summarised the following:
 - Spending Review: Three-year settlement was published on 14 March 2022 (£375M over three years). This allows BEIS to continue funding all NMS programmes, with a 5.5% inflationary uplift and at the correct price, as well as continue funding for all in-flight programmes, such as Analysis for Innovators (A4I). However, it does not allow BEIS to fund any new programmes or continue the Measurement for Recovery (M4R) programme.

- UK Measurement Strategy publication was delayed pending the outcome of allocations, but it is now finished and pending approval to publish. BEIS has started a review of metrics with a number of stakeholder workshops that have involved PEG members and analysts from within BEIS and other organisations. A cross-Whitehall Chief Scientific Adviser event is planned for June 2022.

2.2 There were no comments or questions from PEG members on the update.

3. Government Chemist Update

- 3.1 The Government Chemist reported that, following the appointment of Euan O'Sullivan as CEO of LGC in September 2021, there are now seven main business units, of which National Laboratories & Science is one.
- 3.2 LGC has acquired Rapid Genomics, a provider of mid- to high-density Next-Generation Sequencing (NGS) kits and services for genotyping in the agri-genomics market. Rapid Genomics are based largely in the US but with some overseas laboratories.
- 3.3 The 2021 GC Annual Review has been submitted for ministerial sign off. We anticipate publication in late spring/early summer 2022.
- 3.4 Sara Babahami was introduced, who recently joined the team to work on the GC impact evaluation. Sara will be conducting telephone and online surveys with stakeholders, asking questions which will enable us to understand the impact of the GC programme. This ties in with the review of NMS metrics which was mentioned under 2.1 above.
- 3.5 There was a comment relating to the publication of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which happened on the same day as this PEG meeting. One PEG member offered to search through the REF impact statement for indications of GC impact.

4. Referee Cases Update

- 4.1 The presentation (slides circulated with these minutes) summarised recent referee cases and enquiries. The spike in GMO in rice / rice products from China appears to be over and recent cases have been more diverse and 'routine', e.g., pesticides (x 2 cases), mycotoxins (x 3) and food contact materials (PAAs in nylon kitchenware).
- 4.2 There was a question about technology transfer in the GMO area. It was explained that a training element has been agreed under NRL function (which is separate from the GC). The NRL is looking to see how it can support the acquisition and maintenance of 17025 accreditation for GMO analysis. The GC has seen peaks and troughs of GMO cases over the years and the National Laboratories remain keen on supporting PAs on this issue but mainly through the NRL function. The efficacy of the method (and the fact that it could be improved) has been noted. With regards training, it was noted that the GC has disseminated FAN webinars on GMO detection.
- 4.3 It was reported that the GC would be conducting a survey with OCL's on gaps in provision - of which GMO is an obvious one. The FSA is also reviewing its support for OCLs and a paper on this matter will be going to the FSA Board later this year.

- 4.4 One PEG member asked if there was any follow up in cases where there is a difference between the PA and GC results. The Referee Analyst replied that this is offered but not usually taken up.
- 4.5 There was a question about the recent GC advice request on the import of honey from non *Apis mellifera* bees. It was suggested that Michelle McQuillan at Defra would be the best person to help deal with this. **ACTION 1:** Referee Analyst to raise with Defra.
- 4.6 There was a question about the Chinese GMO cases. It was confirmed that any GMO for market placement in the UK needs to go through the official authorisation procedure.

5. Programme Progress Update

- 5.1 The Programme Manager's presentation (circulated with these minutes) gave an operational update for the GC programme as a whole. The programme continues to show good progress although some projects are not yet back to planned delivery levels. CB1, CB5, SF1, SF2, KT, AF, HS and PM are progressing either as planned or slightly ahead of plan. CB2, CB3, CB4, CB6, CB8, CB9 and CB10 are slightly behind schedule. CB7 is behind schedule.
- 5.2 The formulation process for the GC 2023-26 programme was outlined:
- Mid-June: Horizon scanning workshop, write up and communication.
 - End of June: Workshop topics review.
 - July: Capability building ideas generations aligning with prioritised topics from workshop.
 - July-Aug: Capability building ideas shortlist, those chosen for 1 page project proposal work up + communication/strategic themes & focus agreed.
 - Aug-Sep: 1 page project proposal preparation + budgets/strategy document preparation.
 - Early Oct: Internal review of 1 page project proposals/strategy review and sign off.
 - Mid-Oct: Send 1-page proposals & updated strategy to the PEG for review.
 - Mid-Nov: Decision conference with the PEG.
- 5.3 There was a question about the questionnaires inviting OCLs to participate in a planned inter-laboratory comparison under CB9 (*Toxic inorganic arsenic in an expanded range of rice-based products*). The Programme Manager replied that the questionnaires have been sent out and four OCLs have said they want to participate. We are now looking at laboratories from outside the OCL network who might want to take part. There are two RMs (one above/one below legal limit as per EU regulations) to be sent out in June or July.
- 5.4 Another area of concern was raised: matrices with shellfish, specifically the back extraction method. There are additional toxiforms in shellfish which are not present in rice. The Referee Analyst thought this might come under the NRL rather than the GC, unless there was a referee case in this area. However, it is a topic that could be considered for the next GC programme.
- 5.5 The issue of nanoplastics was raised regarding whether or not the GC programme needed to put more focus in this area. The Government Chemist said he would expect

that to come up in the forthcoming formulation exercises. He added that getting into Net Zero issues involved a much longer timeframe than is usual for the GC, so there would need to be some more consideration (and discussion with BEIS) about where and when the GC can get involved.

6. Programme KPIs and Dissemination Outputs

- 6.1 This presentation (circulated with these minutes) covered programme highlights in terms of research outputs, trade and regulation activities, stakeholder interaction, training and skills exchange. It finished with a focused examination of the impact of the GC's cannabinoids work.
- 6.2 There was a comment that the cannabinoids work had been exemplary in helping industry and preparing for the next phase of legislation in this area.

7. Programme Priorities in 2022/23

- 7.1 The Deputy Government Chemist's presentation (circulated with these minutes) outlined plans for a Horizon Scanning Stakeholder workshop on 6 June 2022, which will start the process of formulating the GC programme for 2023-26. The presentation also summarized the many developments affecting the GC that have emerged since the last workshop took place in 2019.
- 7.2 With reference to the forthcoming workshop, one PEG member asked if there was a stakeholder invitation list that could be shared with the PEG to ensure that key stakeholders haven't been missed. **ACTION 2:** Draft invitation list to be shared with the PEG.

8. Capability Building Project (CB6) – GMOs and Gene Editing Update

- 8.1 This presentation (circulated with these minutes) summarised progress on this project, as well as some background on gene editing, some key developments in this area over the last few years from both a UK and EU perspective, and a discussion of the analytical challenges posed by gene editing.
- 8.2 There was some discussion about the inability to detect where a genetic change has been introduced and the public's perceptions of GMOs. The presenter remarked that it was important to keep pace with developments and come up with a way of determining whether something is a natural mutation or not. It must be acknowledged that there are strong polar views on accepting gene edited products.
- 8.3 It was noted that the FSA had done some work on consumer views of GMOs and gene editing (which can be found [here](#)).
- 8.4 One PEG member mentioned that ENGL is looking at method performance requirements as they face the same analytical challenges described in the presentation. The presenter agreed that it was more about the acceptance criteria of a method than recommending a particular technique.
- 8.5 A PEG member commented on different approaches taken in different regions and wondered what effect that would have on UK imports/exports. The presenter highlighted

the need to remain aware of the potential dichotomous legislation for gene editing and the impact this may have on trade. It was suggested that the FSA might be able to raise this at Codex level. **ACTION 3:** FSA representative to pick this up within FSA.

9. Feedback and Questions

- 9.1 There were no specific questions.
- 9.2 One PEG member noted their thanks to the GC for all their support with referee samples.
- 9.3 Another PEG member expressed their thanks for a very interesting meeting and commented that it was good to see the excellent work the GC is doing and how it supports regulation. This was echoed by a number of other PEG members.

10. Next meeting

- 10.1 **ACTION 4:** A Doodle Poll will be sent for the Autumn 2022 meeting.