FSA Research and Evidence

Introduction

In 2023 we were pleased to accept the recommendations made by our independent expert in the FSA's GSR Review. One year on, we reflect on our progress in implementing these recommendations, as we plan our upcoming year of continuous professional development in FSA's Social Science team.

1. Early policy involvement

To improve our research and evidence planning, the FSA recently consolidated its Research & Evidence Programmes, reflecting the areas of strategic focus for the organisation and aiding earlier engagement with our policy colleagues

To facilitate earlier involvement with policy colleagues, Analytics Unit have also introduced Analytical Leads for all of FSA's policy areas as regular points of contact, to facilitate a more collaborative relationship, complemented by improving and presenting the Analytics Unit offer made to policy colleagues.

To prevent vague objectives and questions occasionally caused by late involvement of analysts, we in Social Science have developed a new research question guide and quality assurance checklist. We are applying this to new wider project processes, such as Project Initiation Forms, to better specify research with policy from the start.

2. Procurement procedures

To improve procurement procedures, we have improved and applied our guidance, templates, and quality assurance checklists for both research specification and tender evaluation.

3. Identifying impacts

To identify research impacts, we have completed desk research on defining and measuring research impacts, held whole team sessions on this topic, and are now working with Science Evidence Research Division colleagues to implement this across the Division as a whole.

FSA's Science Evidence Research Directorate has introduced Project Evaluation Forms which we now use to assess and monitor project impacts with policy colleagues, including in the medium to long term, and to report impact annually to the FSA Board.

4. Transparent technical details

To make reporting of relevant technical details more consistent across our published research outputs, we have developed and applied a methodology reporting guide, and we have improved and applied our guidance, template, and quality assurance checklists for reporting.

5. External peer reviewing

To promote a more consistent approach to internal and external peer review, working with our academic Advisory Committee for Social Science, we have developed and implemented a risk-based decision-making guide for peer review.

6. Specialist CPD

To enhance our continuous professional development, we have completed a specialist skills whole team training series delivered by University College London, including quantitative methods, evidence reviews, impact evaluation and innovative methods. We have supplemented this with self-led, in-house, whole team sessions on implementation, and by improving our method-specific guides and quality assurance checklists.

7. Skills maintenance

To enable specialist skills maintenance, we have completed evidence reviews, secondary data analysis, and reports in-house across a range of research projects this year.

8. Self-assessment tool

To implement the recommendation that FSA's Quality Assurance Toolkit should be used as the main means of assessing social science research quality in both FSA and other government departments, we have embedded the toolkit into our team's processes throughout the project

cycle. We are collaborating with colleagues to build on this toolkit to develop holistic quality assurance guidance for our wider Analytics Unit. We have also shared our improved version of the toolkit with our international counterparts, including presenting at the ISSLG (International Social Science Liaison Group) annual conference 2024.