THRIVING Food Futures: Nutrient and Environmental Profiling Model (NEPM) Development Project

Expert Working Group: Terms of reference

Version 2: Updated after requested changes at the first meeting of the Expert Working Group

17th June 2025

THRIVING Food Futures (Transdisciplinary Health Research to Identify Viable Interventions for Net zero Goals: food futures) is a research hub for academics, policymakers and the public to co-design work on healthy, sustainable diets for everyone. The research hub is funded by UKRI & NIHR and will run between February 2025 and January 2030. It includes work streams that will:

- Engage with both the public and policymakers
- Develop tools and metrics for sustainable healthy diets
- Enhance our understanding of relevant policy
- Develop and evaluate new policies and interventions

THRIVING Food Futures is led by Prof Peter Scarborough at the University of Oxford with collaborators at City St George's, University of London, Queen Mary University of London, the Universities of Cambridge, Strathclyde and Warwick, and Sustain.

One task of THRIVING Food Futures is to develop a Nutrient and Environment Profiling Model (NEPM) for food-related policy makers in the UK. A working definition of an NEPM is 'An algorithm for classifying, scoring, or ranking foods according to their characteristics for reasons related to promoting health and reducing the environmental impact of the food system' (adapted from the WHO definition of nutrient profiling). Food policies for which a NEPM would be useful include food labelling, food marketing restrictions, food taxation, etc.

The NEPM will be co-designed by the academic team and an expert working group (EWG) consisting of policymakers from the UK and devolved governments and other stakeholders in food policy. With support from a Project Team at the University of Oxford, led by Profs Mike Rayner and Peter Scarborough, the EWG will design approaches and methods for developing and testing an NEPM using a large dataset of foods that are available for purchase in the UK.

Accountability and governance

The role of the EWG will be to provide technical guidance and scrutiny for the work of the NEPM project and make recommendations to the Management Team for the THRIVING Food Futures research hub.

The role of the Project Team will be to assist the EWG in its deliberations. The team will provide background papers for the consideration of the EWG. These papers will include literature reviews and analyses of food composition and other data relevant to the development of the NEPM.

The EWG will be chaired by a policy maker or former policy maker. It will consist of up to 15 invited members including representatives of government departments, non-governmental organisations and academic institutions. Commercial organisations or organisations funded by commercial organisations will not be invited to send representatives.

EWG members will be asked to complete and sign a Conflict of Interest Form. The agenda, minutes and papers for all meetings of the EWG will be made publicly available on the THRIVING Food Futures website.

The EWG will:

1. Advise on all matters relating to the development of the NEPM.
2. In particular advise on the policy objectives of the NEPM.
3. Provide oversight of, and comments upon, the approach and methods for developing the NEPM.
4. Appraise a selection of proto-type NEPMs in relation to meeting the policy objectives of the NEPM.
5. Review the results or the testing of proto-type NEPMs.
6. Review the results of any public consultation with regard to the NEPM.
7. Provide comments on project reports, including a final report that will be authored by the EWG.

Workload

It is anticipated that there will be four or five 2-3 hour meetings of the EWG over two years. The first meeting will be face-to-face in London. The remaining meetings will be held on-line.

A small number of short papers will be circulated at least one week before each meeting. EWG members will be expected to have read the papers in advance of the meeting, and to provide either written comments in advance or feedback at the meetings.

To support the process of identifying proto-type NEPMs that perform well, the EWG will be asked for their judgement about how a final NEPM should categorise a small set (~150) of food and drinks, via an online survey. The results of these surveys will be used as a soft form of external validation to guide the development process. The survey results will not be considered a 'gold standard' as they are based on subjective judgements.