



SSAC Update Report - September 2013

The SSAC is Scotland's highest level science advisory body, providing independent advice and recommendations on science strategy, policy and priorities to the Scottish Government's Chief Scientific Adviser. Professor Muffy Calder, the Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland (CSA) and Dr Chris Masters are co-chairs of the SSAC.

SSAC issues a short report following each quarterly meeting to provide an update on their latest workstreams and areas of interest. This is the fifth of these reports.

ONGOING WORK STREAMS

Current work includes:

- ✚ SSAC continues to progress work on **the current scientific evidence around Synthetic Biology** and the impact of novel biology on the Scottish economy. This work aims to consider the key issues surrounding synthetic biology and to highlight the potential economic and environmental benefits for Scotland and potential risks. The working group has initiated an information gathering exercise and produced a paper setting out a general introduction to Synthetic Biology; its use in a range of different areas; and some of the social acceptability issues associated with its use. The paper highlights five main work areas where the group will focus future activity. These include: research; medical and pharmaceutical; agriculture; industry/energy; and public attitudes/social acceptability. SSAC has engaged a researcher for a six month period from the Institute of Nanotechnology who will support the work of the group.
- ✚ SSAC continue to monitor the situation surrounding the current debate on **Open Access Publishing and Open Access Data** associated with publically funded research.
- ✚ SSAC issued its report summarising **issues of interest to the science and engineering community in the context of the Independence debate on 10 October 2013**. In addition to seeking views from the SSAC members the Co-Chairs wrote to a number of key stakeholders in the science and engineering community in Scotland to gather the wider views and interests of the community. In total 26 organisations and individuals responded. The resulting report seeks to summarise those views submitted. It does not represent the collective view of the SSAC or its members, but seeks to act as a basis for informed discussion.

- ✚ Link to report: <http://www.scottishscience.org.uk/article/ssac-paper-science-and-engineering-scotland-independence-debate>

NEW WORK STREAMS

- ✚ At the SSAC meeting on 11 September SSAC members agreed to undertake a review of current activities associated with 'Big Data' in Scotland. This review will highlight expertise in Scotland and outline all the current and likely initiatives, the unique and best aspects of these activities and identify any gaps and overlaps. The review will be undertaken by SSAC member Professor Jon Oberlander.

OTHER NEWS

- ✚ At the June 2013 SSAC meeting the Co-Chairs agreed that Council would, in line with good governance practice, undertake a **self-assessment exercise** to help bring benefit to the Council performance. A questionnaire was designed to identify the strengths and weaknesses within the Council meeting process in order to facilitate changes and improvements where necessary. The results of the questionnaire were presented at the September meeting. Overall the responses received were positive. The Co-Chairs will be giving further consideration to other issues which were raised...

- ✚ The SSAC Co-Chair's met with a delegation of 14 visitors including researchers and members of Parliament from Swedish organisation **Rifo** on 28 August. Rifo is a forum for facilitating contact and dialogue between members of the Riksdag and researchers. The purpose of the meeting was to promote the work of SSAC and share best practice on the use of scientific evidence in policy making.