

## SSAC Update Report - March 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. Professor Muffy Calder, the Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland (CSA) and Dr Chris Masters are co-chairs of the SSAC.

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

### CONCLUDING WORK PROGRAMMES

Two major work programmes are now drawing to a close:

✚ **SSAC Education** - Following the publication of *Science Education: Enhancing Support for Schools Through Collaboration* in January 2012, the SSAC has been working with key stakeholders, including Education Scotland, to create an Industry/Academic Schools Liaison Co-ordinator for Sciences post. The post will map and facilitate good practice engagement between schools, universities and industry. Following an application and interview process at the end of last year, Scott Bryce, formerly of Broxburn Academy has been appointed, and he started work in March 2013. Scott will be employed by the Scottish Schools Education Research Centre (SSERC), with the focus of his work and progress being overseen by a Governing Body of funders, on which SSAC continues to be represented.

✚ **SSAC Innovation**- The SSAC report, '*Making the most of our Scientific Excellence*' was published on 20 February 2013 and concludes a two-year period of work on this topic for the SSAC. Key recommendations in the report include, amongst others, that commercial skills should be embedded in all Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) degree courses; the establishment of an annual 'entrepreneurship' summer school for selected undergraduates; that consideration be given to defining and implementing promotion criteria that encourage and reward STEM academics who focus, for a period, on innovation or commercialisation associated with the outcomes of research; and that consideration be given to setting up a 'payroll support' scheme to encourage post-graduate employment in Scottish SMEs. A copy of the Report and associated news release can now be found on the SSAC website: <http://www.scottishscience.org.uk/article/ssac-making-most-our-scientific-excellence-report-launched>. SSAC co-chairs and members will continue to raise awareness of the report with key stakeholders over the coming months to encourage take-up of the recommendations.

### NEW WORK STREAMS

The SSAC is always looking to develop ideas for future work streams on a broad range of scientific issues and science-related policies. The SSAC will be progressing the following new pieces of work over the coming months.

✚ The SSAC had an interesting and wide ranging discussion on the topic of **Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)** and on current aspects of the technology at the March meeting. It was concluded that SSAC would undertake a piece of work to review the current scientific evidence around GMO research and technology and produce a short paper considering the potential economic benefits for Scotland.

- ✚ Given the current constitutional debate in Scotland, the SSAC is also undertaking a new piece of work to consider what the **possible implications for science and engineering could be in the independence debate**. The aim of the workstream is to compile a series of pertinent questions and issues that will require to be considered in the course of the debate, rather than seeking to provide answers or take a view on the merits or otherwise of independence. The workstream will also consider how best to gather the wider views and interests of the science and engineering community in Scotland and ensure that they are fully represented.
- ✚ The positive feedback from the recent SSAC paper - '*Some Consequences of Open Access Publishing*' - stimulated another useful discussion this time on the issue of **Open Access Data associated with publically funded research**. SSAC members agreed that they will develop a short paper outlining the current issues and possible implications for key stake holders in Scotland to raise awareness of any potential issues arising from wider moves towards Open Access Data (from publically funded research).

### OTHER NEWS

- ✚ The SSAC submitted a response to the UK Government's Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Triennial Review of the Research Councils: Call for Evidence. A copy of the response can be found on the SSAC website: <http://www.scottishscience.org.uk/article/research-council-triennial-review-response>
- ✚ The First Minister hosted an evening reception for SSAC members at Bute House in early February. This provided members with the opportunity to bring to the FM's attention some of the key science and engineering issues in Scotland. Members raised the topics of synthetic biology and sensor systems, in particular, since they represent potential growth areas for Scotland in the future. As a result several SSAC members are providing follow-up information to the FM. Prof Peter Higgs also attended the reception as a special guest and members were pleased to have had the opportunity to engage with him.