

SCOTTISH SCIENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minute of meeting held on:
13 March at 11:30, at
University of the West of Scotland
Hamilton Campus
Almada Street, Hamilton

Present:

Professor Anne Glover (Co-Chair), Professor Stuart Monro (Co-Chair), Professor Alan Bundy, Professor Sir Kenneth Calman, Professor Mike Ferguson, Professor Julie Fitzpatrick, Professor Chris van der Kuyl, Professor Jim McDonald, Professor Andy Porter, Mr Ian Ritchie, Dr Barbara Spruce, Professor Joyce Tait, Professor Bob Tooze, Eur Ing Graham Wren, Dr Andy Bishop, Dr Avril Davidson , Anna Milne (Minute Secretary)

Item 1: Welcome and Apologies

1. Professor Glover welcomed members of the committee to the first meeting of the new phase of the SSAC. She conveyed apologies from, Professor Steve Beaumont, Dr Karen Jervis, Professor Peter Morgan, Professor Stuart Reid and Professor Roland Wolf.

Item 2: Introductions

2. Professor Glover invited the Committee members to briefly introduce themselves, stating their name, affiliation, community and interests.

3. She then provided a brief overview of the role of the Committee and the way of working. Professor Glover explained that the SSAC was the highest level scientific advisory committee for Government and while the Committee now had a closer connection with Government it was important to retain its independence. She also outlined her role as Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) and the role of the Committee Co-Chairs. Professor Glover added that one of the key roles of the Committee was to challenge and question the information they received in order to provide unbiased, well-balanced advice and recommendations for Government.

Item 3: University of the West of Scotland – Strategic Overview

Presentations by Professor Seamus McDaid, Principal and Professor Roger McLean, Dean of Science and Engineering at the University of the West of Scotland (UWS).

4. Professor Monro introduced Professor McDaid Principal and Professor McLean, Dean of Science and Engineering and Ian Bishop, Director of the Research and Innovation office at the University of the West of Scotland. He thanked the University for kindly agreeing to host this first meeting of the refreshed SSAC. As Scotland's newest university he said that it would be very interesting for the Committee to hear about the challenges faced in bringing together the University of Paisley and Bell College to form the UWS, new ideas and strategies being considered by the University for the future and what the University could contribute to an already crowded higher education landscape in Scotland.

Professor McDaid, Principal - UWS

5. Professor Seamus McDaid, University Principal, gave a brief strategic overview of the University, highlighting a number of issues including:

- The background to UWS - where they came from and the strategic benefits of the merger, both for the University, the higher education sector and Scotland more widely
- Strategic overview of teaching, research and knowledge transfer
- Strengths of the UWS
- Interfaces with other HEIs/business/the Scottish Government and policy makers/ etc.
- The University's ambitions for the future

6. Professor Roger McLean, Dean of Science and Engineering, gave an overview of science and engineering at the University, highlighting areas of particular research strength.

7. Following the two presentations the committee discussed the issues raised with the presenters.
8. Professor Monro thanked the speakers for their informative presentations. Professor Monro agreed that the Committee would provide the University with feedback following the meeting.

Item 4: The Scottish Government's Economic Strategy
Presentation by Fiona Robertson, Head of Economic Strategy Directorate, Scottish Government

Introduction – Professor Glover

9. Professor Glover introduced Fiona Robertson, Head of the Economic Strategy Directorate and Joe Brown, Science Strategy Project Team Leader. She reported that the recent Evidence Report¹ had demonstrated the global impact of Scottish Science, e.g. Scotland captures 1% of world citations and is ranked second in the world behind only Switzerland and ahead of the USA in terms of impact of the research we produce. The quantity of research papers produced by Scotland is small in relation to the USA for example but the quality and the impact are very high. Professor Glover acknowledged that there were still some areas of concern for example in relation to chemistry and engineering. She also noted that Scotland pulls in a large amount of UK funding in relation to its population size and there was an opportunity to make more of this and promote investment potential.

10. Professor Glover proposed that science and technology would be critical for sustainable economic growth in Scotland. She acknowledged that the research base in Scotland was very active but there was still a disconnect and a lack of translation into economic benefit and that there had to be a commitment to remove barriers and to create incentives to ensure that science and technology can deliver better for the economy.

11. She commented that it was therefore very opportune to discuss the Government's Economic Strategy and the developing Science Strategy together in the context of delivering The Purpose of Government. Professor Glover explained that the responsibility for development of the Science Strategy had changed from the Office of the Chief Scientific Adviser and was now being taken forward by Joe Brown, who was based in the Business Growth and Innovation Team.

Fiona Robertson

12. Fiona Robertson explained that the Government's Economic Strategy sets out the approach to delivering the Government's Purpose, which is "*To focus the Government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth*". She reported that the Economic strategy was the overarching strategy for all of the public sector, with a focus on a single purpose. The Strategy contained ambitious, measurable time-bound Purpose targets and she explained that this was aligned with the budget of the Scottish Government – the operating plan for the next three years.

13. Ms Robertson also outlined the important role played by the Council of Economic Advisers in providing clear focused advice to the First Minister. She explained that the Council had now met twice - in September 2007 and February 2008. Ms Robertson also noted that the National Economic Forum had met on 6 February. The Forum brings together senior figures with a broad cross section of interests to consider a shared agenda and approach to delivery of the targets and outputs. It is intended that the Forum will allow the Council of Economic Advisers and the Government to draw from the widest pool of opinion.

5. Fiona Robertson reported that the overarching purpose and strategic targets were encapsulated by a set of five strategic objectives – the principal means of delivery - which aim to make Scotland:

- Healthier,
- Wealthier and Fairer,
- Smarter,
- Safer and Stronger
- and Greener.

¹ Metrics for the Scottish Research Base, Scottish Government, 2008
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Business-Industry/science/16607/research/evidence>

And five strategic priorities are identified as the channels through which economic growth is most effectively driven:

- Learning, skills, and wellbeing
- Supportive business environment
- Infrastructure development and place
- Effective government
- Equity

6. Ms Robertson explained that the challenges included increased productivity and competitiveness, to stimulate economic participation and to stimulate population growth. She noted however that it was important to ensure that economic growth was shared and sustainable. Ms Robertson reported that the Purpose Targets identified by Government related to the short term aims e.g. increasing GDP and decreasing emissions. She acknowledged that the scale of challenge was great and this was not helped by current disparities in economic indicators across the regions of Scotland.

7. Ms Robertson reported that the Strategic Priority – Supportive Business Environment makes the links between the research base and the economy and includes a commitment to “*develop a new science strategy for Scotland, outlining how science will underpin Scotland’s success as a nation through developing knowledge exchange between academia and business, increasing the flow of overseas investment into Scotland’s R&D base and developing the science base*”. She concluded by explaining that this provided the opportunity for the science base to contribute to the delivery of The Purpose.

8. Following Ms Robertson’s presentation the committee discussed the issues raised.

9. Professor Monro thanked Ms Robertson for an informative presentation.

**Item 5: The Scottish Government Science Strategy
Presentation by Joe Brown, Science Strategy Project Team Leader,**

10. Mr Brown reiterated that there was a clear commitment by Government to the development of a science strategy. He reported that the Science Strategy would focus around 3 key themes (the Science Base, Knowledge Exchange and International), which were prioritised from the 7 themes covered in the recent consultation document. He noted that there was a strong correlation between the 7 consultation themes and the Government’s strategic priorities. He also noted that while there had been a prioritisation, the remaining 4 themes would not be forgotten, but would underpin the strategy. He added that the business innovation would be taken forward in the Innovation Framework.

11. Mr Brown explained the Scottish Government’s Strategy Hierarchy noting that the Science Strategy, the Skills Strategy and the Innovation Framework would all feed into the Economic Strategy, with the delivery plans of SFC and Scottish Enterprise being crucial to the delivery of all 4 strategies. Mr Brown acknowledged that there would be a degree of overlap between the strategies.

12. Mr Brown highlighted that the SSAC’s contribution was an essential element of the process and was happy to engage with the committee in whatever form was most appropriate.

13. Professor Glover thanked the two speakers for their presentation which had helped to crystallise the interrelationship between the Governments Economic Strategy and the Science Strategy and also provided a helpful context for understanding where the Innovation Framework and the Skills Strategy fit into this landscape.

Item 6: Discussion on the previous presentations

14. Following the presentations a number of points were made during a wide-ranging discussion, with the key points being fed back to Mr Brown and Ms Robertson.

Item 7: Minute of the Last Meeting

15. The minute of the last SSAC meeting held on 13 December 2007 was accepted and approved as an accurate account of the meeting.

Item 8: Matters Arising

Review of Action Points Arising from the meeting held on 13 December 2008

16. Members discussed progress with the action points arising from the last meeting.

Energy Technology Partnership

17. Professor McDonald thanked the SSAC for its part in triggering the development of what was now the Energy Technology Partnership. He reported that the ETP was a very constructive group and noted that ongoing work included scoping of collaborative Energy and R&D opportunities and supporting economic development and inward investment opportunities. Professor McDonald reported that Scottish Enterprise had recently seconded a senior manager into ETP and this person would provide valuable support to the ETP Directorate.

Item 9: Chair's Reports

Meeting with John Beddington, Chief Scientific Adviser, UK Government

18. Professor Glover reported that she had met with the new UK Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor John Beddington. She added that she had agreed with Professor Beddington that there should be a close working relationship between SSAC and CST and noted that Professor Janet Finch, Co-Chair of CST would be attending the SSAC meeting on 26 June.

Meeting with Fiona Hyslop MSP, Cabinet Secretary, on Future Working Arrangements with SSAC

19. Professor Monro reported that Professor Glover and he had met with Fiona Hyslop MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, to discuss the formal working arrangements between the SSAC and Government.

Networks

20. Professor Monro noted that he had recently attended a meeting of the Edinburgh Centre for Rural Research (ECRR) and the 21st BioSS meeting. He encouraged members to attend similar events within their own networks to raise the profile of the SSAC.

SSAC Branding

21. A member suggested changing the name of the Committee to indicate the wide membership of the committee and in particular the engineering aspect of the group. Professor Glover suggested that this could be incorporated in a working group proposal to consider the branding and impact of the Committee.

Item 10: SSAC Future Work Programme

22. Professor Monro thanked the members for all their suggestions for the Committee's future work programme. He reported that the Co-Chairs had examined the suggestions against the list of existing reports produced by the Committee and had come up with a short list of suggestions for further discussion. The Committee members discussed the shortlisted topics. Following a wide ranging discussion Professor Monro commented that given that there was a level of support for each of the suggestions, the Co-Chairs would have a further discussion on this.

Item 11: Updates on ongoing work

Animal Bioscience Network in Scotland

23. Professor Fitzpatrick updated the committee on the progress in planning a further Animal Bioscience Network meeting.

Patterns of Business R&D Report

24. Professor Tait reported that the working group had met with Scottish Government's, Innovation Policy group to discuss the recommendations in the Patterns of Business R&D report. She noted that the meeting had been very productive.

Item 12: Future SSAC Meetings

25. Dr Davidson encouraged members to come forward with suggestions for future meetings. She also encouraged members to send any future agenda items to the Secretariat.

Item 13: Any Other Business

First Minister Trip to the United States April 2008

26. Professor Glover reported First Minister would be visiting the United States for Scotland week in April, and that she would accompany him at a number of science-related visits and events.

Scientific Literacy Grid

27. Professor Glover agreed that the SSAC Chairs would finalise the Scientific Literacy Grid. She noted that the finalised grid would be sent to Learning Teaching Scotland and the Curriculum for Excellence Team in Scottish Government for consideration.

Item 14: Date of Next meeting

28. The next SSAC meeting will be held on **Thursday 26 June 2008**. The meeting will be held at the Surgeons Hall Complex, Seminar Room A, Quincentenary Hall, Nicolson Street, Edinburgh, EH8 9DW.

**SSAC Secretariat
March 2008**