

SSAC Minutes – 3 March 2021

Zoom video conference – hosted by Chair SSAC

Attendees:

Attendee	Position
Professor Maggie Gill	SSAC Chair
Professor Sheila Rowan	Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland (<i>ex officio member</i>)
Professor David Crossman	Chief Scientist (Health) (<i>ex officio member</i>)
Professor Andrew Millar	Chief Scientific Adviser ENRA (<i>ex officio member</i>)
Professor Carol Tannahill	Chief Social Policy Adviser (<i>ex officio member</i>)
Professor Robert Bowman	SSAC Member
Professor Bob Ferrier	SSAC Member
Professor Mark Inall	SSAC Member
Professor Julian Jones	SSAC Member
Professor Wayne Powell	SSAC Member
Professor Marian Scott	SSAC Member
Professor John Underhill	SSAC Member
Professor Jan Webb	SSAC Co-opted member
Chris Stark	Chief Executive, UK Climate Change Committee (Agenda Item 14)
Dr Roddy Macdonald	Deputy Director and Head of Higher Education and Science (SG) (Agenda Item 4)
Rhona McDonald	Strategic Lead for Science, Research, International & EU Exit, Higher Education and Science (SG)
Joanne Ward	Head of SSAC Secretariat/Science Advice and Engagement Team (SG)
Caroline Murray	SSAC Secretariat, Science Advice and Engagement Team (SG)

1. Welcome and Apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting introducing Rhona McDonald who joined the SG Higher Education and Science Division. Apologies were noted from:

Dr Caroline Cantley
Professor Anna Dominiczak
Professor Aziz Sheikh

2. Minutes and Actions of last meeting

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting were officially agreed and had been published on SSAC website.

2.2 All previous actions were completed except for the following:

18/4 SSAC Niche - for discussion at agenda items 13 & 15

Note: Action 19/9 was amended – agreement not to publish SSAC Climate Change Plan input in line with SG’s decision to provide copies of SRAG deep dive papers on request. SSAC responses uploaded on erdm connect instead. - Completed

3. Update from Professor Sheila Rowan, Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland

3.1 CSA provided an overview of the work she had been involved in since the last meeting, including regular meetings connected to COVID-19 and ongoing engagement with the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science. She had an upcoming meeting with the Science Leadership Network which focusses on research and science professional development for the SG's own science profession, and outlined some of the Science Champions work that had progressed around the wider promotion of science within SG. Sheila had also given a presentation to Transport Scotland colleagues to further promote the work of the CSA and science engagement.

3.2 Bob Ferrier said that it may be helpful for the Science Champions network to discuss engagement with centres of expertise to look at other approaches and links to promoting science.

3.3 Andrew Millar advised that responses had been received for the consultation on the SG Draft Strategy for Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Research 2022-2027. The final strategy and tenders for grants are expected to be issued soon. Andrew also highlighted the SEPA/Scottish Water work on waste water monitoring in the context of Covid.

3.4 David Crossman noted that the SEPA/Scottish Water project was a good example of joint working and hoped that post-Covid wider public health and environmental issues will continue to be approached in this manner.

3.5 There was some discussion around some concerns that post-pandemic work will need a framework and issues around ARIA (UKG's Advanced Research and Invention Agency), funding and the distinction in CSA roles was raised.

4. Update from Dr Roddy Macdonald, Deputy Director, Higher Education and Science Division, Scottish Government (SG)

4.1 Roddy provided an update on UK government engagement around research and innovation, discussion between SG and Scottish Funding Council and UKRI. Budget work is ongoing and Roddy advised that SG has provided a further £60m funding to colleges and universities. Work continued around practical university courses and students' return to campus. Brexit-related work is also ongoing and discussions continue around the ERASMUS and Horizon programmes.

4.2 There was some discussion around funding issues for research and connections between social and physical sciences in terms of input to the SG's work. UKRI covers all research areas including Arts and Humanities and Social and Economic Sciences, not just natural or physical science. Social scientists are part of the SG's analytical services teams, embedded in policy areas across SG and able to provide input to policy teams as a matter of course. The SSAC is uniquely-placed in providing advice on the full spectrum of sciences, with membership covering both physical and social science – although the SSAC's ability to provide advice on physical science, technology and engineering is not replicated or supported by SG staff in analytical services teams.

5. Standing Item – Feedback on SSAC Reports (SSAC Note 20/24)

5.1 An update had been provided with the meeting papers and SSAC reports continued to prove helpful to relevant policy areas.

6. Update on Current Projects/Reports - Commissioned work: Geospatial Knowledge Project

6.1 Mark Inall thanked all for their feedback on the second draft of the Geospatial paper. All feedback had been incorporated into the summary report provided with the meeting papers and approval was sought to issue this on behalf of SSAC along with the full report once this had been finalised. The summary paper was approved subject to a small amendment to recommendation 3.

Action 20/1 – Mark Inall to amend Recommendation 3 of the Geospatial Summary Paper and complete the commissioned report to include as an annex.

7. Other Projects: Talking Heads (joint RSE/SAGES/SSAC)

7.1 Mark Inall stated the COP26 Talking Heads project was progressing with around six videos released so far. The RSE had reported that the videos were receiving around 150 YouTube hits on release and they were discussing the possibility of holding promotional events in the summer involving the participants.

8. Sustainable Chemicals Note

8.1 The Chair updated the meeting on her conversation with the former SSAC member, Professor Iain Hunter, about this work, which he had led. It was agreed that Professor Hunter would update and shorten the note to two or three pages.

Action 20/2 – Robert Bowman to assist with the completion of the Sustainable Chemicals Note and the Chair will circulate the paper for SSAC approval once received.

9. SG Consultations

9.1 The Chair advised that two recent consultations had been completed covering Digital Strategy and Land Use and thanked the members involved in the work. There were four other consultations circulated for discussion on where SSAC could add value. It was considered that there may be more value for the SSAC being involved at an earlier stage to ensure the right questions were being asked but agreed capacity may be an issue. There was SSAC interest in providing input to the Public Engagement Strategy on Climate Change and possibly the Heat in Buildings Strategy consultation due to the overlap with the green recovery work.

Action 20/3 – Chair and Secretariat to discuss further SSAC's possible input to consultations, noting the importance of early engagement with policy teams, where possible, and the value that SSAC can add to consultations on major, cross-cutting or strategic issues.

10. Member Updates

10.1 Bob Ferrier advised of activity planned for World Water Day on 22 March; Mark Inall stated that applications for spaces in the COP26 'green zone' will close on Friday 5 March.

11. Climate Change Subgroup

11.1 The Chair advised that there were no further updates from policy colleagues at this stage but climate change issues will be considered further.

12. Hydrogen Subgroup

12.1 John Underhill thanked the SSAC members involved in the hydrogen subgroup for their input at the last meeting and advised that the feedback was incorporated into the hydrogen table document which was circulated with the SSAC meeting papers for comment.

12.2 John advised that he attended the SG hydrogen policy webinar on 24 February and was delighted to see that the SSAC input had been highlighted at the event. He advised that the SG hydrogen action plan was expected to be published after the Scottish Election in May.

12.3 It was considered that the concise table format was a useful way to summarise issues and raise any cross-cutting questions. There is potential for the SSAC to add value in this area by looking at the advice from the UK Climate Change Committee, through a Scottish lens.

12.4 John Underhill agreed to engage further with the SG policy team, UK CCC and the SSAC subgroup, to finalise the document. This will be circulated to SSAC for views before it is submitted formally to Ministers and officials by the CSA, prior to the publication of the Action Plan.

Action 20/4 – John Underhill to incorporate further feedback into the hydrogen table document and circulate to SSAC for approval prior to it being submitted to SG Ministers and officials.

13. SSAC Niche

13.1 The Chair advised that she had further updated the SSAC ‘niche and remit’ paper which was circulated with the SSAC meeting papers for consideration and views. It was expected that this item will be on-going and may need to await agreement from the CSA’s successor going forward.

13.2 Discussion took place around the balance between SSAC work being reactive and proactive, with the CSA outlining previous pieces of SSAC reports in both categories. It was noted that there are mechanisms in place for science advice in government but that the SSAC had to identify where it could best add value, promoting the key strengths as an expert, independent, interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral organisation.

13.3 It was considered that the composition of the council could include industry members however it was recognised that this was constrained by lack of applications from this area but there was the ability to co-opt members if needed and we could consider how to target the next round of recruitment for new council members.

13.4 It was recognised that earlier SSAC involvement in consultations and key areas of SG policy would be preferred and SSAC should refer to the SG Programme for Government, which sets out clear intentions for the year ahead as a useful tool for SSAC to identify areas for potential input. The PfG had previously been circulated but there was a reminder to focus on this for next year, after the Scottish election in May. [Further discussion of this issue continued after the next Agenda item, due to timing constraints of our guest]

14. Chris Stark, Chief Executive, UK Climate Change Committee – Presentation

14.1 The Chair welcomed Chris Stark to the meeting and thanked him for agreeing to provide an update on the UKCCC work.

14.2 Chris Stark presented the key issues around the UKCCC work, highlighting some of the 2030 and 2045 targets and challenges for Scotland.

14.3 The Chair invited questions from the council members and these were put to Chris who provided further clarification and insight. He advised that lifestyle and behavioural changes tied to post-Covid work could be a useful area for SSAC to get involved in and also land use. He suggested that the UKCCC team would be interested in a follow up discussion to establish where SSAC could add value to the debate going forward.

14.4 The Chair agreed to reconvene the SSAC climate change subgroup to take forward the UKCCC relationship.

Action 20/5 – Secretariat to include additional SSAC members in the Climate Change subgroup – Mark Inall, Andrew Millar, Jan Webb and Bob Ferrier

15. SSAC Niche Follow up

15.1 The Chair asked the council members to provide written comments about the Niche paper for the Chair to develop further.

Action 20/6 – All SSAC members to provide written comments about the draft Niche paper for the Chair to develop further.

16. CSA – Reflection on past five years

16.1 The CSA highlighted some of the key achievements and progress made in her five years in post since June 2016, advocating the importance of science inside and outside of government and supporting the work of SSAC. It was a very broad role supporting ministers on a range of areas including providing input to government policy eg in STEM education. The development of the Science Advice Framework and the Science Champions network were important pieces of work promoting awareness and advising government officials on available science resources. The pandemic further raised the profile of science in the UK, highlighting how research, development and manufacturing can be focussed to achieve exceptional results.

16.2 The Chair and members thanked CSA for all her work and input to SSAC and wished her well in her future endeavours.

17. AOB

17.1 SSAC Secretariat had received an approach by a business journalist in connection with the science and technology sector in the context of the pandemic. The questions were circulated and members were asked to provide ideas to allow a response to be sent to the journalist.

Action 20/7 – SSAC members to provide comments for Business Insider query; secretariat to collate feedback and respond to the journalist.

18. Date of Next Meeting

Action 20/8 – Secretariat to issue July holding dates for next SSAC meeting, with the expectation that the new CSA Scotland will be in post and able to attend.

Summary of Actions

Action	Item	Update
18/4	Chair and secretariat to produce a draft paper about SSAC's 'unique selling point' and where it can best add value for the Scottish Government, and plans to raise awareness of SSAC within SG for discussion with new CSA prior to circulating to SSAC for comment.	
20/1	Mark Inall to amend Recommendation 3 of the Geospatial Summary Paper and complete the commissioned report to include as an annex.	
20/2	Robert Bowman to assist with the completion of the Sustainable Chemicals Note and the Chair will circulate the paper for SSAC approval once received.	
20/3	Chair and Secretariat to discuss further SSAC's possible input to consultations, noting the importance of early engagement with policy teams, where possible, and the value that SSAC can add to consultations on major, cross-cutting or strategic issues.	
20/4	John Underhill to incorporate further feedback into the hydrogen table document and circulate to SSAC for approval prior to it being submitted to SG Ministers and officials.	
20/5	Secretariat to include additional SSAC members in the Climate Change subgroup – Mark Inall, Andrew Millar, Jan Webb and Bob Ferrier	
20/6	All SSAC members to provide written comments about the draft Niche paper for the Chair to develop further.	
20/7	SSAC members to provide comments for Business Insider query; secretariat to collate feedback and respond to the journalist.	
20/8	Secretariat to issue July holding dates for next SSAC meeting, with the expectation that the new CSA Scotland will be in post and able to attend.	