

Minutes of SSAC Meeting, 25 March 2025
13.00-17.00
Napier Conference Room, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ

Attendees:

Name	Position
Professor Julian Jones	SSAC Chair
Professor Julie Fitzpatrick	Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland (<i>ex-officio member</i>)
Professor Dame Anna Dominiczak	Chief Scientist (Health) (<i>ex-officio member</i>)
Professor Linda Bauld	Chief Social Policy Adviser (<i>ex-officio member</i>)
Professor Mark Inall	Chief Scientific Adviser Marine (<i>ex-officio member</i>)
Professor Deborah Williamson	SSAC Member
Dr Evgenia Yakushina	SSAC Member
Professor Gareth Harrison	SSAC Member
Professor Ifor Samuel	SSAC Member
Professor Julie Jacko	SSAC Member
Dr Kate Donovan	SSAC Member
Professor Louise Horsfall	SSAC Member
Professor Martyn Pickersgill	SSAC Member (online)
Professor Melanie Simms	SSAC Member
Professor Murray Roberts	SSAC Member
Professor Nick Owens	SSAC Member
Professor Qammer Abbasi	SSAC Member
Professor Russell Morris	SSAC Member
Professor Simon Dobson	SSAC Member
Dr Alexander Browne	SSAC Associate
Dr Kirsten Jenkins	SSAC Associate (online)
Dr Cat Ball	Assistant Director, Research and Innovation, Scottish Funding Council (Item 5) and observer
Professor Roger Halliday	Chief Executive Officer, Research Data Scotland (Item 6)
Fiona Bunn	University of Edinburgh, SSAC Engineering Biology Working Group member (Item 7a) and observer
Dr Linda Galloway	Deputy CSA Scotland, and Strategic Lead for Science and Research (SG)
Joanne Ward	Head of Science Advice and Engagement Team (SG)
Caroline Murray	SSAC Secretariat, Science Advice and Engagement Team (SG)

1. Welcome New Members and Introductions

- The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and invited the new members to give a brief introduction and suggested existing members introduce themselves when first commenting during the meeting.
- The Chair advised that Cat Ball, Assistant Director, Research and Innovation, Scottish Funding Council was attending as an observer to the main meeting,

and would give a presentation later in the agenda. He also advised that Fiona Bunn, SSAC Engineering Biology working group member, was attending as an observer and would provide a short presentation on the project later in the agenda.

- The chair noted congratulations for Professor Deborah Williamson on her newly appointed role as Dean of Medicine, St Andrews University.

Apologies noted from:

Professor Mathew Williams	CSA Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (<i>ex-officio member</i>)
Professor Graham Kerr	SSAC Member
Professor Lisa Boden	SSAC Member
Dr Connor Blair	SSAC Associate

2. Minutes and Actions from last meeting

- The minutes of the last meeting were agreed, published online, and circulated with the meeting papers.
- Actions completed apart from a few that will be discussed later in the agenda.

3. Scottish Government Update – Dr Linda Galloway

- CSA Scotland recruitment ongoing.
- Work is continuing in connection with the Scottish Government developing a series of Areas of Research Interest (ARIs) documents. The first ARI on Tax had been published in December and the next one due is Marine. Further information is available on the SG website [Areas of research interest - gov.scot](http://gov.scot). Dr Galloway suggested there could be a role for the SSAC to promote ARIs once a few more have been published.
- The CSAs across Scottish Government had gained approval from Ministers and the Executive Team to establish a new strategic, high-level forum over the coming months.

ACTION 36/1 – Role for SSAC to promote ARIs to be included in a future meeting agenda (possibly September) for further discussion

4. Ex-officio Hot Topic Discussion

4.1 CS(Health) – Professor Dame Anna Dominiczak

- A recent Parliamentary debate on innovation in the health and care service in Scotland highlighted interest in this area.
- Rolling funding (for up to three years) had been agreed for innovation adoption in a number of health issues, including the remission of type 2 diabetes with cost savings for the NHS, pharmacogenetic tests for prevention of second strokes in the elderly, and new genetic testing for prevention of life-time deafness in new-borns.
- Senior colleagues met in Edinburgh for a roundtable co-organised by the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry and the SG. The participants included senior leaders of clinical academia, NHS R&I, and several

representatives of major international pharmaceutical companies. The main topic of discussion were commercial clinical trials and opportunities for Scotland to lead in this area of research and innovation.

4.2 Chief Social Policy Adviser – Professor Linda Bauld

- Ten-year population health framework to be published by the summer, with possible links to research in the context of future ARIs.
- Work on Public Service Reform also expected to be published soon.
- The Promise, Scotland’s commitment to children and young people who are in, or at risk of being in, the care system, was published in December 2024. The CSPA is now chairing a data and evidence group to develop a programme of work to improve monitoring and evaluation, integrate qualitative data and identify research gaps.
- CSPA currently leading on a programme of work with policy profession colleagues and others to improve Impact Assessments, which are statutory duties for the Scottish Government when developing major or new policies and strategies.

4.3 CSA Marine – Professor Mark Inall

- ARI document for Marine being developed, will include references to offshore wind, agri-fisheries’ interests in the marine climate crisis and economic impact, fish health/disease, plus weather and habitat distribution in the context of changing climate.
- An example of the tension in the Marine policy area is the fact that 200+ appeals had been made to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) in connection with an adaptive framework on sea lice management. There’s an active debate on the science evidence underpinning this.

Action 36/2 – Secretariat to gauge members’ interest in a possible event/meeting session on mis- and dis-information, potentially involving the UK Science Media Centre in London

4.4 Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland – Professor Julie Fitzpatrick

- Action ongoing in connection with the Good Food Nation Act (2022) and the Scottish Food Commission set up last year, chaired by Dennis Overton to oversee progress towards Scotland becoming a Good Food Nation. Given the cross-cutting nature of food as a policy topic (with elements in health, education, environment, economy etc), this could be a suitable area for the new strategic, high-level forum to look at.
- SSAC’s profile with senior officials in the Scottish Government could also be raised through the new forum, and the continuing use of ‘teach-in’ online seminars for Scottish Government staff to learn more about SSAC reports, as they are published.

5. Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Presentation – Dr Cat Ball, Assistant Director, Research and Innovation

- Dr Ball gave an overview of the work of the SFC, including a drive to explain and promote the value of research. Activities in this space include events and the development of an economic evidence base. Work linking the SG's Programme for Government commitments and priorities (including on new technologies and AI) with university/HE research is expected to be published by the summer.
- There was discussion on the shared interests of the SFC and SSAC around research, and the potential for SSAC members to provide feedback and input on elements of SFC's work. It was recognised that some of the 'spotlight' areas for SFC are the subject of SSAC projects (eg critical technology/superclusters and engineering biology).
- The Chair thanked Dr Ball for her input and looked forward to continued engagement with the SFC.

Action 36/3 – Induction and main meeting presentations to be shared with SSAC

Action 36/4 – SFC to consider future engagement with SSAC to add value to their work eg by inviting SSAC to provide feedback on draft documents; by updating SSAC on relevant work at a future meeting etc.

6. Research Data Scotland (RDS) – Professor Roger Halliday, CEO

- Professor Halliday gave an overview of the work of RDS which was established by SG to enable new data-driven research through trusted arrangements for access to public data that is faster and simpler than previous methods. Public data involved includes health, census, National Statistics data sets etc.
- RDS is keen to promote Scotland as a good location for research and researchers, because of the quality and combination of local data. A draft framework for operating is based on 'public good' benefits, and includes principles around who can access the data and for what purpose, plus issues around accreditation. Engagement on the framework is expected before the summer.
- There was discussion about the opportunities around RDS' work, and a suggestion that Professor Halliday could follow up offers around university/industry contacts with individual SSAC members, as appropriate.

Action 36/5 – All SSAC members to consider how universities could work with and support RDS, and to provide feedback on RDS' dataset priorities and industry links.

7. Update on Current Projects

7.1 Engineering Biology – Professor Louise Horsfall/Fiona Bunn

- Professor Horsfall advised that the Engineering Biology is one of the five critical technologies where Scotland has real strength and talked about the six Engineering Biology Mission Hubs announced as part of a UK-wide

investment in engineering biology, with University of Edinburgh leading on one of them

- Fiona Bunn, University of Edinburgh and SSAC project intern, provided an overview of the project, advising that the working group had agreed to use the UK definition of Engineering Biology. The recent roundtable had been well attended on 4 March and she highlighted some of the emerging themes from the questionnaire responses (Translation, Retention and Implementation) and from the roundtable discussions (Energy, Strategic Distribution, Policy and Translation).

Action 36/6 – Engineering Biology Academic Landscape Annex (raw data) to be shared with Dr Cat Ball, SFC

7.2 Critical Technologies – Professor Melanie Simms

- Professor Simms provided an overview of the Critical Technologies Supercluster project, focussing on four key areas: Photonics; Quantum; Semiconductors; and Connectivity and sensing. The project would be looking at the cumulative, synergistic benefits of co-location linked to place-based innovation.
- The working group has created a map of companies across sectors in Scotland with data on geographical size and location based on information from Scottish Enterprise.
- Professor Simms thanked Professor Abbasi for agreeing to join the working group and completing the questionnaire. She advised that she may reach out to SSAC if volunteers were required for the roundtable breakout discussion groups which will be held on 15 May.

7.3 Flexible Energy Demand Management – Dr Kate Donovan

- Dr Donovan advised that that the initial draft scoping document for the energy demand project provided by SG colleagues had required some refinement, which had now been done. This would be used for the basis for an upcoming roundtable on 22 May, to develop a firmer project proposal.

Action 36/7 – Scoping details for the Energy Demand project to be shared with members and volunteers to be sought to join the working group.

8. Future Projects

8.1 NHS Decarbonisation

- The Chair briefly outlined an approach by SG officials for a potential SSAC project on NHS decarbonisation and sought volunteers to join a preliminary discussion with SG policy colleagues to identify scope.

Action 36/8 – Secretariat to circulate information on NHS decarbonisation project; members to consider getting involved in preliminary discussions on this project requested by Health policy officials.

8.2 Near Term Skills

- The Chair outlined the suggestion raised by a SG policy lead (David Mallon) at the December SSAC meeting for a potential project to focus on near-term skills issues in the context of Scotland's climate change-related ambitions (domestic heating, transport/infrastructure).

Action 36/9 – Secretariat to circulate information on the near-term skills issues project requested by Climate Change policy team; members to consider joining the working group for this project.

8.3 New Member Suggestions (taken in combination with Item 9)

Professor Abbasi: opportunities in looking at data centres in the context of the 'own, collaborate, access' framework, linked to potential future investment.

Dr Browne: potential for Scotland in looking at academic training in the modern world of work (links to entrepreneurial training/activity), including how the education sector (primary, secondary, tertiary and vocational) responds to AI.

Professor Dobson: opportunities and risks of AI in Scotland, including power consumption, data centres, regulation, reputation management; also interested in any potential project looking at defence-related issues.

Professor Harrison: considering the EY report on Grangemouth from a more academic angle, also potentially looking at opportunities linked to data centres and defence.

Professor Jacko: looking at the potential for a platform to show/support the translational ability of R&D, supporting the innovation pathway to the point of impact; would be an opportunity here to work with government to increase their understanding of opportunities in this space.

Dr Jenkins: scope for developing and examining data related to Just Transition, particularly to measure social aspects e.g., empowerment; the justice dimensions of emerging technologies (e.g. hydrogen); Just Transition aspects of Grangemouth industrial cluster development.

Professor Morris: exploring the potential opportunities to transition technology (including RAS) and infrastructure for new uses/spaces (for example in the context of events at Grangemouth).

Professor Samuel: potential for using Scotland's abundant renewable energy in the context of AI (as data cables are very small compared with huge pylons for power transmission); also exploring how to improve translation of research, for the benefit of Scotland.

Professor Williamson: potential role for SSAC to co-ordinate a piece of work and/or a framework on biosecurity in the Scottish context (noting that environment and health are devolved but defence is reserved to UK Government).

Dr Yakushina: The integration of data-driven, digital approaches to advance circular economy (CE) principles in manufacturing - embedding digital tools such as predictive analytics, artificial intelligence, and digital twins into manufacturing systems to optimise resource use, reduce waste, and create a sustainable industrial ecosystem. Additionally, would be keen to explore how we might support data science companies in adopting a circular economy approach, particularly in the repair and re-use of components. Exploring the scope to support data science companies to take a 'circular economy' approach around the repair/re-use of components.

Action 36/10 – SSAC Chair and CSA Scotland to discuss future work programme in more detail.

Action 36/11 – Secretariat to arrange discussion between CSA, Professor Jacko and Dr Yakushina regarding Making Scotland's Future Board considering a new tool connected to the 'innovation readiness' of research, and wider context of supporting translational research.

9. Members' Updates

9.1 Members raised a few items of interest from their respective areas including:

- Professor Horsfall is attending a UK GoScience event on Engineering Biology.
- Dr Donovan advised that all new CXC tenders will be advertised in the coming weeks [Invitations to quote | ClimateXChange](#) and SSAC members were encouraged to sign up to the newsletters. Past reports/projects can be found here [Research | ClimateXChange](#)
- Professor Owens highlighted the recent formation of the National Research Organisation (NRO) which is a self-organising group made up of UK independent research organisations.
- Professor Roberts advised that protected areas were discussed in Scottish Parliament last month and the Ocean Sciences conference is coming to Glasgow in February 2026.
- Professor Pickersgill advised on a possible event involving Scottish academics and partners in health-related research, in connection with the recent UKG announcement on overseas aid budgets.
- Professor Williamson highlighted a new published list of 24 pathogen families potentially to shape future research priorities in the context of preparedness and therapeutics. [UKHSA highlights pathogens of greatest risk to public health - GOV.UK](#)

10. AOB

- None

11. Date of Next Meeting

- The next meeting will be online on 10 June 2025, 13.00-17.00

Summary of Actions

Action	Item	Lead	To be done by	Update
36/1	Role for SSAC to promote ARIs – add to future agenda (possibly September) for further discussion	Secretariat		
36/2	Gauge members' interest in a possible event/meeting session on mis- and dis-information, potentially involving the UK Science Media Centre in London	Secretariat	31/5/25	
36/3	Induction and Main meeting presentations to be shared with SSAC	Secretariat		
36/4	SFC to consider future engagement with SSAC to add value to their work eg by inviting SSAC to provide feedback on draft documents; by updating SSAC on relevant work at a future meeting etc.	SFC		
36/5	SSAC members to consider how universities could work with RDS, and to provide feedback on RDS' dataset priorities and industry links	All		
36/6	Engineering Biology Academic Landscape Annex (raw data) to be shared with Cat Ball, SFC	Secretariat		
36/7	Scoping details for the Energy Demand project to be shared with members and volunteers to be sought to join the working group.	Secretariat		
36/8	Circulate information on NHS decarbonisation project; members to consider getting involved in preliminary discussions on this project requested by Health policy officials.	Secretariat		
36/9	Circulate information on the near-term skills issues project requested by Climate Change policy team; members to consider joining the working group for this project.	Secretariat		
36/10	SSAC Chair and CSA Scotland to discuss future work programme in more detail.	Chair/CSA		
36/11	Arrange discussion between CSA, Professor Jacko and Dr Yakushina regarding Making Scotland's Future Board considering a new tool connected to the 'innovation readiness' of research, and wider context of supporting translational research.	Secretariat		