

**Minutes of SSAC Operational Meeting  
03 February 2026  
13.00-15.00  
MS Teams**

**Attendees:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>
Professor Julian Jones	SSAC Chair
Professor <i>Calum Semple</i>	<i>Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) for Scotland (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 Mathew Williams	CSA Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (ENRA) ( <i>ex-officio member</i> )
Professor Deborah Williamson	SSAC Member
Professor Gareth Harrison	SSAC Member
Professor Graham Kerr	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
Professor Melanie Simms	SSAC Member
Professor Murray Roberts	SSAC Member
Professor Qammer Abbasi	SSAC Member
Professor Russell Morris	SSAC Member
Professor Simon Dobson	SSAC Member
Dr Kirsten Jenkins	SSAC Associate Member
Dr Alex Browne	SSAC Associate Member
David Lott	Assistant Director, Research and Innovation, Scottish Funding Council (SFC)
Dr Linda Galloway	Deputy CSA for Scotland, and Strategic Lead for Science and Research, Scottish Government (SG)
Joanne Ward	Head of Office of the Chief Scientific Adviser (OCSA) (SG)
Sam Cox	SSAC Secretariat, OCSA (SG)

**1. Welcome**

- The Chair welcomed everyone and noted that both associate members (Drs Browne and Jenkins) had confirmed their acceptance of one year term extensions through to February 2027. He also welcomed David Lott from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), in attendance to advise on SFC's 'value of research' project. Actions from previous meetings were captured throughout the agenda items; apologies were noted from the following:

Professor Mark Inall	CSA Marine ( <i>ex-officio member</i> )
Professor Nick Owens	SSAC Member
Professor Evgenia Yakushina	SSAC Member

## **2. Update on current projects**

### **a) Engineering Biology**

- Professor Louise Horsfall thanked the SSAC for feedback on the final version of the report, noting that the report was ready for publication this week.

#### **ACTION 26/1: Secretariat to liaise with Professor Horsfall and SSAC Chair about a suitable date/time for a teach-in for the Engineering Biology report.**

- The Chair thanked Professor Horsfall for leading the project and producing a thought-provoking report.

### **b) NHS Decarbonisation**

- Dr Jenkins advised that the project's focus was on the NHS buildings estate and vehicle fleet. The project was progressing well, with early literature findings in place and ongoing conversations with Professor Harrison on data. Logistical planning had begun on the survey, early interviews and roundtable to take place over the coming months and more updates would follow in due course.
- The Chair noted the importance of this project because it was requested directly from Scottish Government colleagues and encouraged SSAC members to be actively involved in this report.
- Professor Dame Dominiczak noted her interest in the project's development due to its links to work done by SG's health policy area. The Chair and Dr Jenkins noted that a wider group of colleagues would be involved at various project milestones.

#### **Action 26/2: David Lott (SFC) to put Dr Jenkins in touch with relevant SFC colleagues to share knowledge and best practice on similar work looking at university estate decarbonisation.**

#### **Action 26/3: Dr Jenkins to speak to Secretariat about hiring a project assistant.**

### **c) Energy Demand Management**

- Professor Harrison advised that this project originally came from a suggestion from CENSIS, noting that a roundtable had been held last year. The project scope had been published online earlier today, and the working group will consider if a second roundtable was necessary. He also advised that he had had success co-opting two colleagues to the working group and that work was progressing in a similar fashion to NHS decarbonisation.

#### **Action 26/4: Secretariat to send official invitations to Professor Harrison's colleagues to join the working group.**

- The Chair noted the timeliness of the report and the broadening of the scope from the original CENSIS project. He further noted the importance of energy issues in a number of industry strategies that have been published for the UK.

- Professor Samuel reported that energy was regularly raised as a topic at the Scottish Technology Council meetings, in the context of economic growth.

#### **d) Climate Change Plan Consultation**

- Dr Donovan updated that the working group had met recently, agreed to respond to the Plan via the relevant lead SG official, David Mallon. The response would focus on where science/research could play a role in the implementation of the Plan, with the aim of highlighting the value of the SSAC in supporting these national strategies. Each working group member will be providing a few paragraphs to Dr Donovan on each of the themes by 9 February, and these will be compiled into a response for review.

**Action 26/5: working group members to send responses to Dr Donovan by 9 February, for collation into an overall draft CCP response to be shared with SSAC for further input/review.**

**Action 26/6: final CCP response to be sent to David Mallon by end of February.**

**Action 26/7: SSAC members to contact Dr Donovan with details of further items to be included or anything that would complement this work.**

- Professor Williams noted that it would be helpful for the response to comment on the monitoring and evaluation that science can provide, noting that it would be helpful to assist the government in tracking its progress more effectively and thinking more about targeted, place-based advice. Dr Donovan agreed, highlighting that the SSAC had been asked to look at monitoring and evaluation as key things to focus on in their response.
- Subsequent discussion on the Plan included the focus on carbon budgets, opportunities to link in health inputs and outcomes more explicitly (including the One Health agenda), and scope for including more reference to fisheries. Dr Donovan suggested that the SSAC response could highlight the importance of looking across sectors and not separating out adaptation and mitigation.

### **3. Future Projects**

#### **a) Skills**

- Professor Simms updated that the report would be a useful opportunity to bring together current skills recommendations from previous SSAC reports to then plot out a comprehensive position of the SSAC for skills for the future. The critical technologies project intern Grace Dey was actively working on this. Professor Simms expected the entire report delivery process to take approximately six months.
- This project had started from a request from David Mallon to look at the skills needed to support the energy transition, but it had since broadened out to a more general approach to skills.

#### **b) Innovation**

- Professor Jacko highlighted that the work had moved from identifying innovation as a cross-cutting priority to where the SSAC can intervene most usefully in terms of policy and delivery. She and Professor Yakushina had identified four emerging lines of focus: adoption and implementation of innovation in public services; data and AI in national infrastructure; incentives and career pathways for translational activity; and the coherence of the innovation funding landscape. These areas of focus would lend themselves well to clear outputs, and next steps would be to narrow these to two priority questions for initial attention, or to possibly consider others that had not been mentioned.
- Professor Dame Dominiczak shared that focusing on health innovation would be helpful, noting that this is a large priority for Scottish Government, and she would be happy to help on this.

**Action 26/8: Secretariat to arrange working group meetings for the Innovation project, including Professor Dame Dominiczak as appropriate.**

#### c) AI

- Professor Dobson shared that a meeting was scheduled on AI with Scottish Government colleagues for Thursday 5 February. He noted that there is a lot of overlap between innovation and AI, highlighting a report discovery from MIT that only 20% of AI projects move from pilots to deployment. He further noted that there is work to be done to investigate those that are successful to determine if there are any patterns that could be replicated.
- Professor Dame Dominiczak noted that there is a huge interest in AI for health, including UK wide regulation on this.
- Professor Dobson agreed, noting that the health sector deals with the portions of AI that function well (data analysis, analytics, prediction). He further noted that more work is needed on the use of AI for medical imaging and genetics.
- Professor Abbasi shared via the chat that he had attend the [2026 Consumer Electronics Show](#) in Las Vegas where there was a large focus on personalised AI from the major players (ex. Microsoft, NVIDIA, Google), with a large number of companies focusing on AI for healthcare and lifestyle.

#### 4. David Lott - Scottish Funding Council Value of Research Event

- Mr Lott explained that SFC were planning to run a one-day event (similar to 2025's Net Zero event) that would illustrate the value of investments in research with a suggested focus on health and social care. He asked the SSAC for guidance on how to approach this topic and how to focus their event within this broad topic area. He shared he had also spoken to Professor Semple, Professor Dame Dominiczak, the Digital Health Institute and NHS Education for Scotland.
- Professor Dame Dominiczak noted that she had shared three current activities with David: the annual CSO/NHS Research Scotland meeting, the Academy of Medical Sciences Scottish Hub events, and the stakeholder meeting that brings together NHS, academia and industry with a focus on

medical schools and biomedical. She noted it would be important for Scotland to consider where inward investment could be beneficial.

- The Chair noted that the event's audience was likely to comprise those with links to universities, colleagues from SFC and Universities Scotland, and one or two other groups/industries who work closely with the university sector.
- Mr Lott noted that this would be their second event of this nature and that SFC's instinct was to give prominence to the impact of discussions leading to solutions to health and social care challenges (including delivering service in a challenging fiscal environment and increasing demographic challenges).
- The Chair noted that it would be important to approach events like this from the perspective of government priorities to avoid the risk of being perceived solely as an event to lobby for more funding, with SFC needing to be clear about its aims for the event.

**Action 26/9: Mr Lott to contact Secretariat when it would be useful for the SSAC to provide additional support/advice on the SFC research event.**

## **5. Ex--officio requests for SSAC input**

### **a) Research-Enabled Pandemic Preparedness**

- Professor Dame Dominiczak noted the lack of a research focus in UK strategies for pandemic preparedness. The first meeting of the Advisory Board for the Scottish Pandemic Sciences Partnership had discussed challenges involving health research.

**Action 26/10: Professor Williamson to inform Secretariat as/when it would be helpful to include pandemic preparedness as an agenda item.**

- Professor Williamson noted that CMO (Professor Sir Gregor Smith) is on the oversight board and is feeding back to his area. She also shared that as part of the workplan of [open funding calls](#), SPSP are conducting a research capability review.

### **b) Life Sciences Strategy**

- Professor Dame Dominiczak shared that the SG's [Life Sciences Strategy](#) had been published. She advised that Scotland's definition of life sciences was broader than that in the UK strategy because its focus was on One Health. It included a focus on Scotland-specific tasks as well as areas for Four Nations collaboration.

### **c) Other Updates**

- The Chair shared that Professor Inall hoped to update in future regarding a marine science advisory board.
- Professor Bauld updated on the recent SG ARI strategic advisory board meeting, noting that there was more work to be done across various parts of Scottish Government. She advised that there had been conversations about

having a high level meeting. The Chair suggested they link in with RSE, who have related projects underway.

## 6. Members' Updates

- Dr Donovan advised that CXC are hosting a [Climate Action Assembly](#) on 26 February at Dynamic Earth and SSAC members would be welcome to attend.
- Professor Morris noted that he had enjoyed the recent mis-/dis-information session and shared his interest in developing tools to counter these. He advised that he was investigating this with philosophers and computer scientists about how AI could be used to classify arguments in order to counter them.
- Professor Dobson shared an article about AI and its threat to democracy: [How malicious AI swarms can threaten democracy | Science](#)
- Professor Pickersgill advised that his new book is due for publication: [Configuring Psychology](#)
- Professor Kerr noted that the [Scottish Spin-Out Summit](#) is taking place in Glasgow next week.
- Not shared in meeting but UK Government published the latest [Public Attitudes to Science](#) | survey

**Action 26/11: Secretariat to include Dr Browne in innovation working group meetings.**

## 7. Secretariat Updates

- Secretariat updated that the critical technologies teach-in had gone very well and thanked Professor Simms for her time and contributions. They also noted that a teach-in would be arranged for engineering biology. The Chair advised that he and Professor Simms would be speaking about the report at the Scottish Technology Council on Wednesday 4 February.
- Secretariat also updated that the mis-/disinformation session with Fiona Lethbridge of the Science Media Centre had gone very well and thanked Professor Bauld for Chairing and members for attending. They noted that an additional session would be arranged for members who were unavailable to attend.

## 8. AOB

- The Chair advised that the June online operational meeting would be shifting dates to accommodate an unforeseen event and that Secretariat would be sharing details in due course.

**Action 26/12: Secretariat to share new operational meeting details with members.**

- The Chair thanked members for their continued dedication to the SSAC amidst the ongoing busy report season they are currently in.

**9. Date of Next Meeting**

- The next meeting will be the in-person Strategic Meeting on 17 March 2026.