

Minutes of SSAC Operational Meeting
19 May 2026
13.00-15.00
MS Teams

Attendees:

Name	Position
Professor Julian Jones	SSAC Chair
Professor Calum Semple	Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) for Scotland (ex-officio member)
Professor Dame Anna Dominiczak	Chief Scientist (Health) (ex-officio member)
Professor Linda Bauld	Chief Social Policy Adviser (ex-officio member)
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
Professor Martyn Pickersgill	SSAC Member
Professor Melanie Simms	SSAC Member
Professor Russell Morris	SSAC Member
Professor Simon Dobson	SSAC Member
Dr Evgenia Yakushina	SSAC Member
Dr Kirsten Jenkins	SSAC Associate Member
Dr Alex Browne	SSAC Associate Member
David Mallon	Head of Unit, Climate Change Division, Scottish Government (SG)
Sasha Maguire	Senior Economic Adviser (SG)
Dr Linda Galloway	Deputy CSA for Scotland, and Strategic Lead for Science and Research, (SG)
Joanne Ward	Head of Office of the Chief Scientific Adviser (OCSA) (SG)
Sam Cox	SSAC Secretariat, OCSA (SG)
Caroline Murray	SSAC Secretariat, OCSA (SG)

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed all and thanked them for their consent to the recording of the SSAC operational meetings and advised that the transcription will be shared following the meeting.

Previous actions were completed and will be covered during the course of the agenda. Apologies were noted from the following:

Professor Mathew Williams	CSA Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (ENRA) (ex-officio member)
Professor Mark Inall	CSA Marine (ex-officio member)

Professor Nick Owens	SSAC Member
Professor Murray Roberts	SSAC Member
Professor Qammer Abbasi	SSAC Member
Professor Louise Horsfall	SSAC Member
Dr Kate Donovan	SSAC Member

2. Recruitment

The Chair updated on the recent SSAC recruitment and thanked the panel members for their support during the three days of interviews - Prof Calum Semple, CSA for Scotland and Professor Catherine Ross, Chief Scientific Officer for Scotland.

He noted that the panel had agreed to appoint eight members. In light of the exceptionally strong response to the associate roles, the panel also agreed to appoint four associates rather than the advertised three.

These appointments are subject to ministerial approval. Successful candidates will be informed at the earliest opportunity, likely in June, pending confirmation of ministerial appointments.

He confirmed that the new recruits will attend an induction and the upcoming in person strategic meeting scheduled for Tuesday 8 September. He reminded all to advise secretariat of their availability to attend the September meeting in person.

3. Update on current projects

a) NHS Decarbonisation

Dr Jenkins reported that the project is progressing well, with a meeting scheduled for Friday 22 May at which two new research members from the Energy, Society and Sustainability group at the University of Edinburgh will be introduced to support the work. She expressed the hope that they would be able to attend future SSAC meetings as required.

The questionnaire and roundtable programme have been shared with Scottish Government officials for consideration and approval. Subject to confirmation, the group will proceed to schedule the roundtable. Desk-based research is advancing as planned, and the project remains on track.

b) Energy Demand Management

Professor Harrison advised that there has been steady progress on the project with working group members at the stage of producing an initial draft on various sections of the report. He advised that a new schedule of working group meetings will need to be issued.

Action 26 Op 2/1 – Secretariat to liaise with Professor Harrison to reschedule upcoming working group meetings.

c) Skills

Professor Simms advised that she and the project intern, Grace Dey, have completed a comprehensive mapping of all previous SSAC reports that reference skills development.

These findings have been mapped against the wider skills ecosystem as a draft report. This has been shared with the Chair and Secretariat for feedback.

The next stage will involve engagement with relevant Scottish Government colleagues and stakeholders to ensure that the analysis reflects and aligns with their understanding of the skills landscape. She indicated that this stage is not expected to be time-consuming and that a draft report will be ready to share with the wider SSAC for feedback at the next meeting.

Action 26 Op 2/2 – Secretariat to provide SG skills contacts for Professor Simms.

4. Future Projects

a) Innovation

Professor Jacko thanked all the members of the Working Group, noting that the scoping agreement has been finalised and made available online.

The operational plan and timeline have been agreed, and the next stage is to co-ordinate the roundtable event scheduled for 25 June. The roundtable will have three sessions:

1. scene setting and short survey document,
2. breakout sessions focussing on the four report sectors (healthcare, life sciences, advanced manufacturing and energy)
3. cross cutting themes on data, digital and AI.

Professor Jacko advised that the group is working on the stakeholder invitation list and asked SSAC members to notify her and Dr Yakushina of any contacts to include from industry, commercial and investment backgrounds.

The invitations for the roundtable will be issued by 22 May and she is looking to engage the support of an intern for the project.

Dr Yakushina thanked Professor Jacko for the comprehensive update and added that they would also appreciate more stakeholders with a background in AI.

Professor Dominiczak agreed with the need for more invitees from the industry and investment communities and suggested the project leads investigate inviting stakeholders outwith Scotland.

The CSA agreed and suggested the project leads look into the [Scottish National Investment Bank](#) website, which lists many of the investments it has made on a strategic basis.

Professor Samuel added that he could provide AI leads from Codebase and could attempt to leverage the Scottish Technology Council.

Action 26 Op 2/3 – All SSAC members to provide contacts for industry, commercial, investment and AI stakeholders to include in the innovation roundtable invitations.

Action 26 Op 2/4 – Professor Samuel to provide Professor Jacko and Dr Yakushina with AI leads from Codebase and the Scottish Technology Council.

b) Artificial Intelligence

Professor Dobson advised that a meeting is being arranged with SG colleagues in light of the publication of Scotland's AI Strategy. SG officials have indicated that work on barriers to AI adoption is currently being taken forward in collaboration between Scotland's enterprise agencies and The Data Lab.

Professor Samuel noted that a significant proportion of AI-related activity has now been incorporated within the broader innovation project, but suggested that the meeting with SG may help to identify gaps for further exploration.

The Chair agreed that the original AI proposal may no longer be appropriate to progress in its initial form.

The Chair further advised that the innovation project should be outlined to SG, emphasising that AI spans multiple sectors and should be considered as an enabling component across the various elements of innovation, rather than as a distinct sector in its own right.

5. Ex-officio requests for SSAC input

a) Chief Social Policy Adviser

Professor Linda Bauld advised that work is ongoing and is currently focused on longer-term projects, with no items requiring SSAC input at this stage.

b) CSA for Scotland

The CSA encouraged members to consider putting themselves forward for membership of UKRI committees and councils, to strengthen the Scottish offer of academic support to UKRI.

Professor Williamson asked whether a register of individuals currently serving on these bodies exists, noting that those already appointed may be acting in a

personal or institutional capacity and may not have considered a broader role in representing Scotland.

Professor Dominiczak concurred with the CSA and advised that she had been actively encouraging applications to improve Scotland's contribution on these boards. She further noted the importance of ensuring that those appointed are encouraged to provide feedback to relevant stakeholders.

c) Marine Science Advisory Body

The Chair noted that the Terms of Reference had been shared with the meeting papers in lieu of a full discussion due to Professor Inall's absence.

The Chair advised the ToRs included the recruitment process for the first set of members from some specific subject areas. He encouraged SSAC members to review these for their own interest or to share with their respective networks.

Action 26 Op 2/5 – SSAC members to review MSAB ToRs and consider the recruitment process for their own interests and/or to share with their respective networks.

6. Climate Change Mapping Exercise

The Chair thanked David Mallon and Sasha Maguire for joining the meeting to discuss the proposal of a new climate change related project from the feedback provided to the climate change plan (CCP) consultation.

Mr Mallon advised that the CCP was published on 24 March but due to the pre-election period there had been little external activity. He noted that work would progress towards implementation once the new Ministerial priorities had been agreed.

Mr Mallon advised that it would be helpful if SSAC could review the monitoring and evaluation section of the CCP. He added that given the limited time afforded to SSAC to prepare the CCP feedback, he suggested a workshop may be useful to identify more detail that may have been omitted from the earlier contribution. He also suggested that SSAC look in more detail at some of the gaps identified and that it may be worthwhile to conduct a mapping exercise for this.

Action 26 Op 2/6 - SSAC to review the monitoring and evaluation section of the CCP and identify any gaps.

He further advised that a climate change Area of Research Interest (ARI) was in development, but without a committed deadline, and that SSAC expertise would be an asset in due course. Mr Maguire noted that he would share a draft outline of the ARI with the SSAC.

Mr Maguire further noted that the monitoring and evaluation framework provided by the SSAC had generated a lot of interest leading to further development in SG and that additional feedback on this from the SSAC would be helpful.

The Chair asked if the original working group on the CCP consultation would be interested in continuing with this new project and Professors Harrison, Dobson, Samuel and Morris and Dr Jenkins agreed. He added that SSAC funding could be available for a research assistant to assist with the desk based research to identify gaps.

Action 26 Op 2/7 – Mr Maguire to share copy of draft climate change ARI outline.

7. SG Update

Dr Galloway advised that there was little by way of an update available following the election. However, once Cabinet and Minister portfolios are announced, an update will be provided with the meeting minutes.

The Chair advised should anything of urgency come to light, a short meeting may be arranged ahead of the next scheduled meeting on 23 June.

Action 26 Op 2/8 – Dr Galloway to provide a written update on post-election ministerial portfolios to issue with the SSAC May Minutes.

8. Members' Updates

Professor Pickersgill advised that he is a member of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Strategic Advisory Network.

Professor Samuel updated on his recent attendance at the Society for Information Display exhibition and had observed that there were many more Chinese companies showing strength in innovation.

Professor Williamson provided an update on the Scottish Pandemic Sciences Partnership. Following the launch of a funding call at the beginning of the year, 21 applications were received and three projects were funded to look at data linkage, misinformation and diagnostic innovations.

An event held in April at the Royal Society was well attended and received positive feedback. She thanked colleagues for attendance at the Partnership's oversight board meeting and added that the interface between the partnership in Scotland and general UK preparedness structures was discussed.

Professor Morris advised that he had attended the Scottish Women's Health Forum as part of his research interest in engineering medical devices. He pointed out that there seemed to be activism around women's health and the Forum remarked that FemTech in Scotland does not appear to be as well serviced.

Action 26 Op 2/9 - Professors Morris, Pickersgill and Williamson to have a discussion on FemTech and whether there is any scope for a potential project.

9. Secretariat Updates

Secretariat advised that the SSAC website will be updated to include a new photo editing tool, enabling member photographs to be standardised and presented in a consistent format.

10. AOB

The Chair advised that Royal Society were hosting a UK science investment summit and suggested that participants from this may be helpful to invite to the innovation roundtable.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be the online operational meeting on 23 June 2026.