

**Minutes of SSAC Operational Meeting
23 June 2026
14:00-16:00**

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 Mark Inall	Chief Scientific Adviser for Marine (ex-officio member)
Professor Deborah Williamson	SSAC Member
Dr Evgenia Yakushina	SSAC Member
Professor Gareth Harrison	SSAC Member
Professor Graham Kerr	SSAC Member
Professor Ifor Samuel	SSAC Member
Professor Julie Jacko	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 Simon Dobson	SSAC Member
Dr Alex Browne	SSAC Associate Member
Dr Kirsten Jenkins	SSAC Associate Member
David Mallon	Head of Climate Change Unit, Scottish Government (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 to the meeting and noted that the actions from the previous meeting had been completed or would be covered in later agenda items. Apologies were noted from the following:

Name	Position
Professor Linda Bauld	Chief Social Policy Adviser (ex-officio member)
Professor Mathew Williams	CSA Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (ENRA) (ex-officio member)

Dr Kate Donovan	SSAC Member
Professor Nick Owens	SSAC Member
Professor Russell Morris	SSAC Member

2. Energy Demand

Professor Harrison updated that project work was progressing and some elements would be ready to be shared with the SSAC. He noted that regular working group meetings would continue over the summer to progress this work and he would share it with the wider SSAC.

3. Upcoming Projects

a) Climate Change

The Chair reminded attendees that Dr Donovan had led a small working group in a written response to Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan (CCP) consultation, and it had been agreed with SG colleagues that this work would be followed up with a second project.

Dr Donovan had pulled together an extensive Terms of Reference (ToR) document to guide this work, including suggestions to provide a state-of-play update on relevant research to identify evidence gaps, highlight opportunities for future research and collaboration and to assess the state of research/evidence on effective implementation of the CCP.

Mr Mallon noted that the ToR and the four-to-six-month timescale outlined in them would be suitable for the nature and scale of the task. He also noted that due to this timeline, the work would not be fully inline with the planned Areas of Research document (ARI) but that updates could be made in light of new advice from the SSAC prior to its finalisation.

Mr Mallon suggested a two-phase approach: a sense check of the work that was done for the CCP consultation to ensure no major developments were overlooked when the advice was collated and to consider the largest knowledge gaps, and a consideration of the energy space and the relationships between the electrification of industry, the move to decarbonised buildings, the rollout of electric vehicles, and the evidence relating to the greater demand and access to the grid. There could also be a focus on agricultural land space and its interaction with land use change and forestry, and then how natural carbon sinks can be best taken advantage of for delivery of net zero.

Mr Mallon noted that the final CCP included a refreshed monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework which included indicators, explaining that this is how Scottish Government planned to monitor progress for annual report publications.

Mr Mallon noted that there was interest in electricity supply issues for economic benefit in Scotland due to the capacity for renewable energy that is

likely to satisfy Scotland's needs for decarbonisation. He further noted the UK White Paper and other work going on in the energy demand space and noted that this project would be looking to add additional value rather than duplicating work that is already underway.

Action 26 Op 3/1 – Secretariat to arrange a Climate Change working group meeting and include relevant Scottish Government colleagues, with the aim of narrowing the ToR and following up on recruitment for a project intern.

Action 26 Op 3/2 – Secretariat to investigate funding allocation for a project intern with Dr Donovan

Action 26 Op 3/3 – Mr Mallon and Professor Harrison to be invited to the Innovation Roundtable in connection with energy-related discussion points.

b) AI

Professor Dobson updated on the recent meeting with Scottish Government colleagues, noting interest in investigating economic opportunities for Scotland outside of data centres and training foundation models. He further noted that there is interest in Scotland's potential competitive advantages that could mean not having to build data centres and sacrificing net zero ambitions. Professor Dobson summarised that the AI issues will firstly be pursued as part of the Innovation project and then it will be decided if further exploration is required.

The CSA noted that AI is of great interest to Scottish Government for its economic and improved wellbeing opportunities, but the concurrent need for Data Centres has also raised environmental impact concerns from some quarters. He shared that he had participated in the recent UK Research & Development forum in London and had met innovative organisations working on data centres that provide engineering solutions that minimise environmental impact.

Dr Jenkins noted the emerging concerns of justice outcomes and the potential of data centre connections with community benefits. There are potential knock-on implications for having larger pieces of infrastructure connected to the grid.

The Chair suggested that the CSA be involved in the innovation report drafting to ensure the report will be suitable for Scottish Government's needs. The CSA and Dr Yakushina agreed with this approach. He further noted that it would be important to continue engaging with Scottish Government colleagues on AI to determine if any aspects not addressed by the innovation project could lead to further conversations and/or a project.

Action 26 Op 3/4 – Meeting to be arranged between the CSA and Professor Jacko and Dr Yakushina to discuss the Innovation report structure.

Action 26 Op 3/5 – AI Scottish Government colleagues to be contacted after the innovation roundtable to determine if further conversations leading to a potential project are necessary.

4. Update on current projects

a) NHS Decarbonisation

Dr Jenkins updated that the work was progressing well and thanked her two research assistants for their ongoing support. She noted that they were preparing to send out the survey after the contact list was updated by the Scottish Government policy team. She further updated that a roundtable date had been confirmed (Wednesday 26 August) and that work was ongoing on drafting the report.

b) Skills

Professor Simms updated on her meeting with Chief Scientific Officer (CSO) for Scotland Professor Catherine Ross about the work her team were planning to do in this space. Professor Simms noted that she and Grace Dey (project intern) had scoped out the main areas of policy and evidence and were speaking with key stakeholders who had already done work in this area, including both academics and practitioners with a scientific interest in this area. A second draft of the report would be available to share with the Chair by the end of the summer.

The Chair noted that defence had become an area of particular interest with its wide range of technologies (many of which overlap with the critical technologies defined by UKG and SG).

Professor Dominiczak updated that there are active discussions surrounding porosity between biomedical and clinical academia and industry. She noted that an autumn report would be forthcoming on this, co-chaired by industry, and would be applicable to other parts of academia.

Professor Inall asked if there was an element to be added, if it was within scope, about the science profession within government with regards to the ongoing Public Service Reform and the overall reductions in civil service numbers. The Chair agreed that this is something to be considered and noted that this raised an interesting question about enabling people to acquire skills continuously throughout their careers rather than it just being a focus at the beginning.

Action 26 Op 3/6 – Professor Simms and CSA to consider defence sector related skills in relation to this report and Scottish Government interests.

Action 26 Op 3/7 – Professor Simms and Professor Dominiczak to discuss skills and links to health-related careers, including in academia.

c) Innovation

Professor Jacko updated that the working group meetings had been progressing well and that the roundtable was arranged for Thursday 25 June. She noted that attendees would be in one of three breakout sessions (healthcare and life sciences, advanced manufacturing, or energy) with each

session having a common set of questions alongside sector-specific questions. She noted that the goal is to compare where barriers differ and where they are truly systemic. She further noted that the full group would engage on the cross-cutting theme of data/digital/AI with the aim of separating common enablers from sector-specific digital-constraints.

The Chair thanked the project co-leads for bringing the project to this point, noting their enthusiasm for the project alongside that of the Scottish Government policy team. He noted that after the roundtable was complete, careful consideration would be needed to determine its influence on the scope and deliverables and if there are any additional areas that might need to be addressed, possibly as separate projects.

5. Ex-officio requests for SSAC input

a) Scotland's Performance in Clinical Trials

Professor Dominiczak noted that UK-wide, four nations activity, has a focus on commercial clinical trials in collaboration with the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI). She noted that annual revenue for this calculated by ABPI for 2025/2026 was approximately £250 million in revenue for the NHS to reinvest in research, highlighting that this was good for patients but also for the economy. She highlighted that this work was an integral part of the Life Sciences Strategy and was included in the SNP's manifesto. She noted that she would be looking for SSAC support on this later in the year and would provide a further update at the next SSAC meeting.

Action 26 Op 3/8 – Professor Dominiczak to provide an update on Scotland's clinical trial performance at the September SSAC meeting.

b) Marine Science Advisory Body

Professor Inall noted that post-election, marine policy now sits under Mr Fairlie, Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands, and this has led to revisions being done to the ToR to share them with the new Minister.

Professor Inall also updated on a report published by Environmental Standard Scotland (ESS) noting that the Scottish Government had failed in various aspects of environmental protection. He noted that it was an acute piece of work requiring a response and that a broader piece of work was in discussion with Professor Williams (CSA ENRA) to determine if a different way of looking at environmental variables/measurements and how they are interpreted in targets was needed. He noted that Scotland, UKG and Europe were all grappling with similar issues.

c) UKRI and research council governance

The CSA encouraged SSAC members to put themselves and their contacts forward for representation on the UKRI boards and research councils to promote Scottish contributions.

6. Scottish Government Update

Dr Galloway noted that there had been a reduction in the number of Cabinet and Ministerial posts after the Scottish election and while some priorities remained the same, there is a call for increased vigour on delivery. She further noted that the change in portfolios was intended to provide us with a more lean and agile government to deliver the First Minister's unchanged four priorities (eradicating child poverty, growing the economy, tackling the climate emergency and ensuring high quality/sustainable public services).

Dr Galloway noted that Mr Macpherson's portfolio would now cover innovation, technology and tertiary education, which includes research, noting that the CSA's office sits entirely in this area. She expanded that the Minister is keen for cross-portfolio ways of working and has emphasised the importance of engagement. He has also emphasised that the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) remains the overarching framework that is supported by the sector strategies (AI, green industrial, life sciences).

Dr Galloway noted that there should not be any changes for the SSAC in terms of how it interacts with the Scottish Government.

The CSA noted that he had positive introductory meetings with Mr Macpherson and Mr Flynn (Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport).

Dr Galloway suggested that Professor Simms link in with key Scottish Government colleagues on a proposed national approach to skills planning to ensure the work being done by the SSAC is fed into this. She further noted that the next Programme for Government was expected to be published in September and a further update would be available on that at the next meeting.

Dr Galloway confirmed that ARIs continued to be published once developed. There was continued engagements with Professor Christina Boswell, who has been leading on work on the research policy exchange and best practices for ARI use and development. This culminated in a roundtable at the Royal Society of Edinburgh facilitated by the British Academy, and further work in this area could include SSAC having a role to help ensure ARIs stay relevant over time.

Action 26 Op 3/9 – Professor Simms to link in with Scottish Government colleagues on national skills plan.

Action 26 Op 3/10 – Dr Galloway to provide an update on PfG at the September meeting.

Action 26 Op 3/11 – Dr Galloway to provide an update on ARI work and consider if Christina Boswell would attend a meeting to provide an update on this work.

7. Members' Updates

Professor Morris (via correspondence) noted he and Professors Pickersgill and Williamson had discussed FemTech and agreed that while it is an interesting and important area that could have potential for Scotland, without a specific steer from

government or a Minister who will champion it, they do not feel it will garner enough traction. The Chair noted that they would continue to monitor this.

Professor Pickersgill (via chat) shared that he has been appointed as Chair of a Nuffield Council on Bioethics Working Group on neurotech and will update the SSAC on any intersections with ongoing discussions/works-in-progress.

Professor Jacko noted that she had attended a roundtable that will feed into Scottish Government and University Scotland's future framework for Scottish universities, specifically on Pillar 1B (future needs). She shared that her contribution was on future workforce needs, particularly in the context of health, data science, and digital transformation.

Dr Yakushina updated that she is leading on the technical roadmap on behalf of NMIS for HMC's recently published strategy. She noted that this is the first step to investigate workforce needs and skills expected for advanced manufacturing technologies in Scotland and the UK.

Professor Samuel shared that he had recently been in China where he visited the opening of an innovation centre. He noted that they had similar technology focuses but had also focused on hydrogen and low altitude economy (i.e. drones).

Dr Browne noted that he would be attending the University Policy Exchange Network (UPEN) annual meeting.

Professor Roberts noted that it would be important to watch the pushback on the Berwick Bank project. He also noted the University of Edinburgh's place-based impact accelerator award and that some of this funding would be used to take forward work on offshore wind. He also noted a forthcoming series of workshops around offshore wind and potentially the best way to decommission offshore wind (i.e. the environmental impacts and how these farms are decommissioned). Professor Inall expressed interest in these workshops and arranged to speak with Professor Roberts about them.

Professor Abbasi asked if there had been any information about the AI strategy implementation fund. The Chair noted that there was not any information from colleagues in attendance and this was something to be monitored moving forward.

Action 26 Op 3/12 – Professor Pickersgill to inform the SSAC if neurotech work intersects with ongoing discussions/works-in-progress.

Action 26 Op 3/13 – Professor Jacko to feedback updates on her ongoing work on Pillar 1B.

Action 26 Op 3/14 – Information to be sought by Secretariat on the AI strategy implementation fund.

8. AOB

The Chair noted that the recommendations for appointment to Council were still with the Minister for endorsement. He shared that candidates had been informed of the delay and that he was hopeful that an update would be available soon.

The Chair wished all members a pleasant summer break and noted he looked forward to seeing them in-person for the next meeting in September.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be the operational, virtual meeting on Tuesday 8 September 2026.