

**Minutes of SSAC Operational Meeting
8 September 2026
13:00-14:30**

Attendees:

Name	Position
Professor Julian Jones	SSAC Chair
Professor Calum Semple	Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) for Scotland (ex-officio member)
Professor Linda Bauld	Chief Social Policy Adviser (ex-officio member)
Dr Evgenia Yakushina	SSAC Member
Professor Gareth Harrison	SSAC Member
Professor Graham Kerr	SSAC Member
Professor Julie Jacko	SSAC Member
Professor Louise Horsfall	SSAC Member
Professor Melanie Simms	SSAC Member
Professor Murray Roberts	SSAC Member
Professor Qammer Abbasi	SSAC Member
Dr Kirsten Jenkins	SSAC Member
Professor Russell Morris	SSAC Member
Dr Kate Donovan	SSAC Member
Annika Chambers	Observer (SSAC Innovation Project Intern)
Grace Dey	Observer (SSAC Skills Project Intern)
Janna Smith	Observer (SSAC NHS Decarbonisation Project Intern)
Kei Wang	Observer (SSAC NHS Decarbonisation Project Intern)
Dr Cyrielle Opitom	Observer (SUSTAIN Leadership Shadowing Scheme)
David Mallon	Head of Climate Change Unit, 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 all members to the meeting and noted that the actions from the previous meeting had been completed or would be covered in later agenda items. He further invited the five observers in attendance to introduce themselves: Grace Barrett – skills project intern; Annika Chambers – innovation project intern; Kei Wang and Janna Smith – NHS decarbonisation project interns and Dr Cyrielle Opitom, a Reader at the Institute for Astronomy at the University of Edinburgh who is undertaking the SUSTAIN Leadership Shadowing Scheme with the CSA. Apologies were noted from the following:

Name	Position
Professor Dame Anna Dominiczak	Chief Scientist (Health) (ex-officio member)
Professor Mark Inall	Chief Scientific Adviser for Marine (ex-officio member)
Professor Mathew Williams	CSA Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (ENRA) (ex-officio member)
Professor Deborah Williamson	SSAC Member
Professor Ifor Samuel	SSAC Member
Professor Martyn Pickersgill	SSAC Member
Professor Simon Dobson	SSAC Member
Professor Nick Owens	SSAC Member
Dr Alex Browne	SSAC Associate Member

2. Recruitment

The Chair confirmed that eight new Members and three new Associate Members would join the SSAC from 1 October and be at their first meeting on 27 October. He further congratulated Dr Jenkins on her appointment to full membership and Dr Fiona Bunn, a previous project intern on the Engineering Biology report, for being appointed as an Associate Member.

3. Update on current projects

a) NHS Decarbonisation

Dr Jenkins confirmed that the recent roundtable noting had been successful and had been well received by attendees. She highlighted the positive emerging consensus on electrification being the path forward for the NHS and interesting, niche applications for hydrogen alongside the importance of resilience and constrained grid capacity. She thanked Miss Smith and Miss Wang for their help in scribing the roundtable and for their contributions on site and vehicle typologies.

The Chair highlighted that the roundtable had demonstrated more consensus amongst those in attendance and that hydrogen would feature at a smaller scale in the report than originally thought.

Action 26 Op 4/1 – Dr Jenkins to share draft report structure with SSAC at the next meeting for input.

Action 26 Op 4/2 – Dr Jenkins to consider NHS commitments in the Programme for Government when drafting conclusions/report recommendations.

Action 26 Op 4/3 – Dr Jenkins to have a conversation with SG NHS colleagues to determine if the starting points for the project have changed.

b) Energy Demand

The Chair highlighted Professor Harrison's ongoing work with the data centres project and its overlap with this project.

Professor Harrison noted that there is more interest in this area, including reports from Scottish Futures Trust, but it does not validate the messaging for this report, although it was positive that discussion was happening.

Action 26 Op 4/4 – Professor Harrison to circulate report draft to members.

Action 26 Op 4/5 – Professor Harrison, supported by secretariat, to arrange a new series of working group meetings.

c) Skills

Professor Simms updated on her one-on-one interviews with a variety of stakeholders and that herself and Mrs Dey were working to consolidate and synthesise these conversations. She highlighted two potential challenges: contrasting views, though these can be reflected in the write-up; and keeping a clear focus on the scope. She suggested that a working definition and focus would be appropriate but would mean that some of the issues related to specific subsections of the workforces and would therefore be less central in the report. She suggested that a first full draft would be able to be shared with Council by the next meeting.

The Chair highlighted the extent to which skills are mentioned throughout the Programme for Government and noted that careful consideration would be needed for any discussions around university funding. He further asked if there had been any conflicts with recommendations from earlier SSAC reports.

Professor Simms noted that there had not been any conflicting recommendations but had put these into broader context within the skills ecosystem approach. She noted how helpful it was that Programme for Government has explicitly recognised this.

Dr Yakushina highlighted the Manufacturing Skills Academy and its Path programme as a further option to consider and offered to facilitate the connection. She further flagged ongoing work on statistical analysis of apprenticeships including the capacity needed to have them, the demand and how to match them. She also noted the High Value Manufacturing Catapults (HVMC) and their work in this area.

Professor Simms noted that the report would not dive into specific sectors because the scope of the report was a synthesis.

Action 26 Op 4/6 – Professor Simms to share draft skills report with Council ahead of the next meeting in October.

Action 26 Op 4/7 – Dr Yakushina to facilitate connections for Professor Simms at the next stage of the report drafting.

d) Innovation

Professor Jacko confirmed that the project roundtable had gone well with 62 participants and strong engagement. She thanked Professors Kerr, Dominiczak, Dobson and Samuel and Dr Browne, for chairing the breakout groups. She noted that they were working to align the report with the Programme for Government and with previous SSAC reports. She further updated that one-on-one engagements were planned with key stakeholders and work was ongoing to consolidate and synthesize the breakout notes from the roundtable for the future report annex. She thanked Ms Chambers for her work supporting the project.

Action 26 Op 4/8 – Meeting to be arranged between the CSA and Professor Jacko and Dr Yakushina regarding the report structure.

Action 26 Op 4/9 – Professor Jacko and Dr Yakushina to share the draft report with Council at the end of October.

4. Upcoming projects

a) Climate Change Plan (CCP)

Dr Donovan updated on the ongoing work drafting a Terms of Reference to support the peatland and forestry sectors as identified by Scottish Government colleagues. She noted that Professor Morris would be taking over leadership of this project due to her impending departure from the SSAC. Dr Donovan also highlighted that this could be a long-term piece of work, picking up different priorities as SG determines how they will deliver the CCP.

Professor Morris thanked Dr Donovan for her work and leadership thus far. He highlighted the overlap between the CCP and Programme for Government on peatland and noted his keenness to bring the working group together. He noted his goal to have a first draft ready to share by the end of the year.

Mr Mallon noted that the area of research interest (ARI) for climate would be shareable in October. He thanked the SSAC for its ongoing work in this area and noted his agreement with the subject matter focus and timescales. He further noted that the Programme for Government did not have any surprises in terms of climate content, but restated the importance of this work.

Action 26 Op 4/10 – Secretariat to support Professor Morris in arranging working group meetings

Action 26 Op 4/11 – First draft of the CCP project to be shared by the end of the year

Action 26 Op 4/12 – Mr Mallon to share the climate ARI in October

b) AI

The Chair confirmed that, following discussion with Scottish Government AI policy colleagues, it had been agreed that the inclusion of AI issues in the Innovation project report meant that there was no requirement for a separate

piece of work from the SSAC on AI at the moment, although this would be revisited in the future.

Action 26 Op 4/13 – Future conversation to be arranged with SG AI colleagues to discuss if a project might be necessary

c) Data Centres

The Chair updated on the high level outputs being collated by a short life working group to provide scientific advice to Planning policy colleagues within Scottish Government.

He thanked those members who had contributed to the advice. He noted that due to the specialist and short term nature of the project, with advice provided at pace, the output would not take the form of a formal report and therefore did not need to be signed off by the entire Council in advance of the advice being provided. However, the output would be shared with members for information.

Action 26 Op 4/14 – Data centre advice to be shared with the wider SSAC for their information.

5. Ex-officio requests for SSAC input

a) Professor Bauld

Professor Bauld highlighted the focus throughout the Programme for Government on public service reform, noting that roundtables would be taking place with academic involvement in a variety of areas including health, local government and education.

Action 26 Op 4/15 – Professor Bauld to inform the SSAC if inputs from specific members are required for the public service reform roundtables.

6. Scottish Government update

Ms Ward updated that the Programme for Government was a five year plan and that one year delivery programme documents would be published every January. She highlighted the inclusion of data, research, innovation, skills and support for spin-outs and the merging of NatureScot, SEPA, Zero Waste Scotland and parts of Scottish Forestry as being likely to be of interest to SSAC members.

Mr Alyn Smith MSP is the new Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education, and Ms Ward suggested that Mr Smith could be invited to a future meeting as SSAC reports are presented to him via the CSA.

The Chair noted that every subject covered by recent SSAC reports is covered within Programme for Government, showing the closer alignment of the SSAC's work with that of the Scottish Government's priorities. He asked the CSA and

members to consider the Programme for Government in terms of the Council's future work.

Action 26 Op 4/16 – Secretariat to consider arrangements for inviting Mr Smith to a future SSAC meeting

Action 26 Op 4/17 – Secretariat and CSA to reflect on how to help Mr Smith get to know the SSAC.

Action 26 Op 4/18 – CSA to consider particular areas within Programme for Government where he felt there was a likelihood that a future project would be valuable.

Action 26 Op 4/19 – All members to reflect on Programme for Government and share anything that might be relevant to the work of Council.

7. Members' updates

Dr Yakushina highlighted the change to the People's Roadmap Programme and noted it was gaining more traction and funding from Innovate UK. She noted that NMIS are the only Scottish representative on this programme and are pushing to highlight the Scottish landscape and skills from this sector. She also highlighted the Manufacturing Scottish Conference happening in October and an advanced engineering event in England in November.

Professor Morris was due to attend a meeting with the UK Atomic Energy Authority in connection with fusion technology, and would provide feedback on this.

Professor Harrison noted that earlier this summer, the National Energy System Operator [published an explainer](#) on the electricity transmission network.

Dr Donovan shared via chat that ClimateXChange's work can now be viewed online: [Ongoing research | ClimateXChange](#)

Professor Simms highlighted a recent visit from Professor Chris Johnson, UK CSA for DSIT and their conversations about UKRI and funding for science and higher education in Scotland. She asked if there would be scope for producing a document outlining the particular challenges on this, and the Chair suggested that a follow up conversation would be helpful.

The CSA noted that UKRI is a UK-wide organisation but Scotland has had good engagement and a productive relationship with the UKRI officials. The Chair suggested a conversation between himself and the CSA on this, and the role of Scottish Funding Council (SFC), would be helpful.

The CSA noted that more work was needed to raise the visibility of ARIA in Scotland, which would also help to increase engagement and funding for Scottish innovators and academics.

Action 26 Op 4/20 – Professor Morris to update on the UK Atomic Energy Authority discussions on science and fusion technology.

Action 26 Op 4/21 – The Chair and CSA to discuss URKI and SFC in their next catch up.

8. AOB

Action 26 Op 4/22 – Members to confirm attendance at the next in-person meeting.

Action 26 Op 4/23 – Members with outstanding Register of Interests to share these with secretariat (including those with no changes required).

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be the in-person strategic meeting on Tuesday 27 October 2026.