

**Minutes of SSAC Meeting, 9 September 2025**  
**13.00-16.30**  
**Conference Room 2, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh**

**Attendees:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>
Professor Julian Jones	SSAC Chair
Professor Calum Semple	Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) for Scotland ( <i>ex-officio member</i> )
Professor Dame Anna Dominiczak	Chief Scientist (Health) ( <i>ex-officio member</i> ) – online
Professor Linda Bauld	Chief Social Policy Adviser ( <i>ex-officio member</i> )
Professor Mark Inall	CSA Marine ( <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
Professor Louise Horsfall	SSAC Member (online)
Professor Martyn Pickersgill	SSAC Member
Professor Melanie Simms	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
Dr Olivia Swann	Consultant in Paediatric Infectious Diseases, University of Edinburgh – guest
David Mallon	Head of Unit, Climate Change Division, Scottish Government (SG) – guest
Fiona Bunn	University of Edinburgh, SSAC Engineering Biology Working Group member – observer
Grace Barrett	University of Glasgow, SSAC Critical Technologies Working Group member – observer
Dr Linda Galloway	Deputy CSA 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 and actions from last meeting**

- The Chair welcomed all to the meeting, highlighting that Professor Semple was attending his first SSAC meeting as the new CSA Scotland, and that Professors Dominiczak and Horsfall were joining online.
- The Chair noted special thanks to Dr Connor Blair who was unable to attend his last in-person meeting as an associate member, and expressed appreciation for the work he had been involved in with many of the SSAC projects during his term.

- He also recorded thanks for the work of Professor Boden on the Council, whose term completes at end of November.
- He welcomed and thanked Grace Barrett (Dey) and Fiona Bunn for attending the meeting and for their contributions to their respective projects Critical Technologies and Engineering Biology. He also noted that Dr Swann would join the meeting later as the guest speaker.
- The Chair noted there were no specific actions from the previous meeting that needed raised at this point.
- Apologies were noted from:

Professor Mathew Williams	CSA Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture ( <i>ex-officio member</i> )
Professor Lisa Boden	SSAC Member
Professor Murray Roberts	SSAC Member
Professor Nick Owens	SSAC Member
Dr Connor Blair	SSAC Member
Dr Evgenia Yakushina	SSAC Member
Dr Kate Donovan	SSAC Member

## 2. CSA Introduction

- CSA thanked the Chair for the welcome and highlighted the past work of the SSAC and the importance of focusing on science and innovation. He viewed his role as CSA as an important one to ensure that policy teams have access to science advice, adding value and ensuring good value for money, from policy development through to implementation. The SSAC plays a key role in this ambition.
- CSA is keen to promote Scotland's science strengths, noting that the data used in the SSAC Science Landscape report that was prepared by Elsevier (published 2019) was nearly ten years old.
- The Chair advised that Scottish Government is working with Elsevier to update some of this data for the period 2020-2024. The CSA suggested that further discussion with the SSAC Chair and potentially a small working group could allow further discussion on the data and how SSAC may contribute further to the project.
- The Chair highlighted the importance of undertaking this further analysis and that it is appropriately guided and interpreted and that the SSAC would be pleased to support CSA on this.

## 3. Ex-officio Hot Topic Discussion

### 3.1 Chief Scientific Adviser (Marine) – Professor Mark Inall

- Update provided on activity around salmon; approval of the Berwick Bank wind power project; a public information notice on replacing the Scotia vessel and the importance of this boat for SG and wider Scottish marine research.
- Highlighted some of the cross-directorate work between CSA Marine and CSA ENRA on coastal issues. Engagement with UKRI continues on a strategic programme to better understand the coastal marine environment and that it crosses many borders (eg, aquaculture, sea level rise, etc.)

- Ongoing discussions with agencies that do marine work/research (eg, SEPA, NatureScot) what they do in terms of research, aiming to do ARI mapping on what is being done and by whom.
- Glasgow is hosting the [OCEAN Sciences Conference](#) in February 2026, the first time for a city to host outside of the United States.
- The Chair thanked Professor Inall for his update and commented on the speed in which the Berwick Bank report had been prepared and wondered whether similar issues around seabirds/nature would likely arise with similar developments in the future. Professor Inall advised that marine funding is being set up for this research. He suggested that the response to any objections raised would perhaps benefit from SSAC input/review of the evidence and methodologies.

### **3.2 Chief Social Policy Adviser (CSPA) – Professor Linda Bauld**

- Professor Bauld advised that a health information integrity (mis-/dis-information) strategy would be published soon and that Scotland was first in the world to have this (no WHO member states had published one about health), and would welcome views from SSAC on this once it is published.
- Recent meeting with UKRI behavioural researchers and climate behaviours team in SG to try and enhance behavioural advice in SG that the team can benefit from, advising that this was an action from the First Minister's Environmental Council (FMEC).
- Other recent work included activity on child poverty, Scotland's response to humanitarian disasters, and an RSE project about research and policy exchange and how well these relationships work (a workshop in November will bring together stakeholders for recommendations and next steps).
- The Chair thanked Professor Bauld for her update and asked her to reflect whether she would like SSAC to be more active in the RSE project.
- Professor Williamson asked if there was anything SSAC could do, noting the disparate areas of science, to draw attention to, or provide innovative ideas, to the ongoing issue of drug deaths in Scotland. Professor Bauld advised there were challenges in this area but it may be worth having a conversation with policy colleagues on this. Professor Dame Dominiczak advised that the Office of Life Sciences (OLS) has a goal on addiction with research and innovation projects running from CSO and OLS with interesting results. She also noted that there would be an opportunity for Scottish researchers in this area to apply for funding.

### **3.3 Chief Scientist (Health) – Professor Dame Anna Dominiczak**

- Professor Dame Dominiczak advised that the Scottish Life Sciences Strategy (from SG and life sciences industry) would launch in early October, and is expected to focus on NHS and health research enabled innovation. She said that SSAC comments would be welcomed post-publication and noted her interest in having a discussion after the announcement about where the SSAC could help in delivery.

**Action 38/1 - Secretariat to arrange a small SSAC Working Group to meet following publication of the Life Sciences Strategy to determine if any work**

could be done, with an update to be provided at the next SSAC meeting on 28 October.

- Professor Dame Dominiczak attended the First Minister's roundtable on dementia a few weeks ago – noting its focus on social care rather than NHS/health, looking at improving late dementia and putting innovative research into care at home, the community and nursing homes. Advised that this is an area where there will be more work assisting policy teams in social care.
- Professor Williamson noted that UKRI have announced a local innovation partnership fund with some of it being earmarked for Devolved Administrations and asked if that were something that would cover the health remit. Professor Dame Dominiczak explained that the geographical areas of Scotland where funding would land had been pre-selected but the subject areas had not been.

### **3.4 Chief Scientific Adviser Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (ENRA) – Professor Mathew Williams**

- A brief written update had been circulated with the meeting papers.

**Action 38/2 – All to look at the draft ENRA research strategy <https://consult.gov.scot/environment-forestry/draft-strategy-environment-2027-2032/> and advise Secretariat whether interested in coordinating a response, noting that the deadline for responses is 24 October.**

### **4. Scottish Government Update – Dr Linda Galloway**

- Dr Galloway advised of the newly established Interministerial Group (IMG) on science, innovation and technology across the UK's four nations, co-ordinated by the UKG's Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. This is an opportunity for closer working to make the most of shared or similar priorities on, for example, AI. Further feedback to SSAC on this will feature in future updates.
- The recently formed Scottish Technology Council (STC) is to look at how to maximise economic benefits of the technology sector in Scotland by engaging with policy leads. CSA to have a place on the Council as an ex-officio member and updates will be provided on how to establish formal links with SSAC going forward.
- The Chair commented that the STC could fill an important gap in ensuring that policy is appropriately informed by those with specialist knowledge. He is keen to find ways to work together, adding that a mechanism is required for sharing SSAC work with STC.
- CSA suggested inviting STC members to SSAC WGs/meetings in future.

### **5. Role for SSAC to promote Areas of Research Interest (ARIs)**

- Dr Galloway shared a presentation that summarised how ARIs are being developed in SG:

- A small co-ordination and advice team pulled from the Office of the CSA and the Office of the Chief Researcher is supporting policy teams, who are responsible for developing and promoting their ARIs.
  - The project co-ordination team have presented to Director General Senior Leadership Team meetings within SG to encourage business areas to develop ARIs.
  - ARIs will be published on [Areas of research interest - gov.scot](#); and [ARI Database from UK governmental bodies](#).
  - ARIs are being promoted via Scottish Policy and Research Exchange (SPRE). Some policy areas have research links already in place and are using them to raise awareness
- Dr Galloway stated it would be useful for the SSAC to support the use of ARIs by helping to obtain a view from academics about the ones already published, and SG would seek SSAC's help in terms of promoting/raising awareness across the academic community. There were suggestions that University teams dealing with research impact have an interest here, as well as Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Universities Scotland, and the SSAC Chair could provide contacts for each.
  - There may be a role for the SSAC/RSE to play as a challenge function for ARIs before they are published; Dr Galloway explained that the oversight of ARIs would vary across business areas and any requirement for external challenge will be considered by the oversight board as required.
  - Dr Galloway advised that there is some overlap with UKG ARIs but SG's ARIs reflect the priorities for Scotland, noting there may be similar questions with UKG departments.
  - Professor Inall stated that Marine policy colleagues had worked with DEFRA to align their ARIs and also noted that the evidence base is often similar but the need for evidence is different depending on the policy perspective.

**Action 38/3 – Secretariat to arrange meeting with Chair/CSA/Dr Galloway to determine an action list for SSAC regarding ARI promotion.**

## **6. Update on Current Projects**

### **a) Critical Technologies – Professor Melanie Simms**

- Professor Simms shared a short presentation on the background to the draft report and advised that further work to finalise the report was ongoing. An updated version will be prepared and circulated for final sign off, taking into account the feedback provided, particularly around skills, drawing out workforce strategies.
- The Chair advised that the report is at an advanced stage and SSAC members were content to generally approve subject to the agreed amendments.

**Action 38/4 – Professor Simms to prepare a final draft Critical Technologies report based on the feedback received, for approval by email correspondence.**

### **b) Engineering Biology – Professor Louise Horsfall/Fiona Bunn**

- Fiona Bunn shared an update on the project and advised it is hoped that the project report would be published shortly after the Critical Technology report.
- The Chair thanked Fiona Bunn and the working group for their contributions on getting the report to this stage.
- The Chair advised that Professor Horsfall is speaking with colleagues in the Scottish Universities Life Sciences Alliance (SULSA) to inform their strategic plan.
- A question was raised on issues around skills which are similar between both reports. The Chair noted that there are similarities and differences and that there had been interaction between both working group leads for the reports.
- Professor Horsfall advised that the project's starting point had been about recognising that engineering biology, while a critical technology for the UK, is very strong in Scotland.
- Professor Horsfall would welcome feedback at this stage, with the caveat that some sections are still to be fully written. The working group will liaise by email to produce a final version in due course.

#### **7. Presentation – Home, Heat and Healthy Kids – Dr Olivia Swann**

- Dr Swann shared her presentation, outlining opportunities to use household unit data to improve health outcomes for children, by linking different data sets for young people born 2008-2025. Her project showed the impacts on children's health of various factors, including fuel poverty, old housing stock, damp homes and poor ventilation.
- The Chair thanked Dr Swann for her presentation and noted that it crossed a wide range of SSAC interests. There followed discussion, with some suggestions regarding work in this area in New Zealand and data sharing with local authorities who are working with local organisations to deploy sensors to track condensation. The CSA noted that he heard the project being cited several times in SG.
- The Chair suggested that there may be a role for SSAC in this area on how we ensure that our future homes are healthy in the context of energy transition.

**Action 38/5 – Professor Kerr to introduce Dr Swann to local authority contacts in connection with the use of sensors for monitoring the fabric of buildings (e.g. condensation levels).**

#### **8. Members Updates**

- Deferred to next meeting.

#### **9. Climate Change Update – David Mallon**

- Mr Mallon highlighted upcoming Scottish Parliamentary activity on carbon budgets, with a new Climate Change Plan to be finalised in 2026. He encouraged SSAC members to see if there were areas where it would be appropriate for the SSAC to comment, to ensure there is a good science base for future advice

## 10. Future Projects Discussion

### a) Near-term skills

- The Chair advised of the recent meeting between SSAC and SG colleagues and that he was awaiting further feedback from SG following the meeting.
- He commented that skills recommendations have come up in every SSAC report but that no explicit skills project has been conducted.
- Suggestion was made to do a synthesis report from SSAC where all skills recommendations from past reports are consolidated.

**Action 38/6 – Secretariat to arrange a follow-up meeting on skills with SG colleagues and SSAC Chair and members, to include Professors, Kerr, Morris, Simms and Williamson**

### b) NHS decarbonisation

- The Chair thanked Dr Jenkins for the draft scoping paper for this project, with input from the SSAC working group. It was noted care needed to be taken to prevent the scope of the project becoming too broad.

**Action 38/7 – Dr Jenkins to redraft NHS Decarbonisation scoping document and circulate for comment ahead of the Working Group meeting with SG colleagues on 25 September.**

### c) Energy Demand Management

- Professor Harrison shared a copy of the draft scoping document at the meeting for discussion and comment.
- The Chair advised members to read the scope, feed back any comments, and advise if interested in joining the working group for this project. Professor Morris agreed to join at the meeting.

**Action 38/8 – Secretariat to circulate Energy Demand Scoping paper to seek Working Group volunteers and arrange meeting to define scope in more detail, bearing in mind the devolved/reserved split of issues in this area.**

### d) Hydrogen Briefing Note

- The Chair advised of the recent meeting with SG colleagues, with feedback awaited on whether there is a potential project for SSAC to deliver in this area.

**Action 38/9 – Secretariat to arrange follow up SSAC/SG hydrogen meeting, pending feedback from SG officials.**

### e) Innovation Ecosystems

- The Chair advised that a meeting with SSAC and SG policy officials was held in August to discuss the potential for this project. They identified similar work is being carried out by other groups. Feedback was awaited from SG on whether

there are gaps or overlaps with work already underway that SSAC could undertake.

f) Artificial Intelligence

- The Chair advised that further feedback from SG colleagues was awaited to identify the potential focus of an AI project for SSAC to undertake.

g) SSAC Space Report review

- Professor Kerr provided a brief overview of the [Royal Society Space report](#) and the SSAC Space report to determine if there was any additional work for SSAC to do in this area. He advised that both reports were written from different perspectives and that both were standalone and complementary and concluded no further action in this area is required by SSAC.

**11. AOB**

- a) Members' end of term/extension – The Chair highlighted that six members would be serving for an additional year, to 30 November 2026. Further recruitment of members is planned to start in Spring 2026. The CSA noted the value of the SSAC for informing CSAs and extended his thanks for the important contributions that members make.

**12. Date of Next Meeting**

- The next meeting will be the first of the operational online meetings on 28 October 2025.

## Summary of Actions

Action	Item	Lead	To be completed by	Update
36/1	Role for SSAC to promote ARIs – add to September agenda for further discussion	Secretariat		
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	Secretariat		
37/9	Working Group meeting to be arranged to determine scope of energy demand management project.	Secretariat		
37/14	To provide feedback from relevant SG colleagues about AI projects and those likely to be of particular interest to Economic Development policy colleagues.	Jo Ward		
37/16	To consider which SG policy areas would be most appropriate to progress discussion on university research translation in advance of the next SSAC meeting.	Jo Ward		
37/18	To discuss via email and draft a short paper on Just Transition data ahead of next meeting.	SSAC Chair and Dr Jenkins		
38/1	To arrange a small SSAC Working Group to meet following publication of the Life Sciences Strategy to determine if any work could be done, with an update to be provided at the next SSAC meeting on 28 October.	Secretariat		
38/2	To look at the draft ENRA research strategy and advise Secretariat whether interested in coordinating a response, noting that the deadline for responses is 24 October. <a href="https://consult.gov.scot/environment-forestry/draft-strategy-environment-2027-2032/">https://consult.gov.scot/environment-forestry/draft-strategy-environment-2027-2032/</a>	All SSAC		
38/3	To arrange meeting with Chair/CSA/Dr Galloway to determine an action list for SSAC regarding ARI promotion.	Secretariat		
38/4	To prepare a final draft Critical Technologies report based on the feedback received, for approval by email correspondence.	Prof. Simms		

38/5	To introduce Dr Swann to local authority contacts in connection with the use of sensors for monitoring the fabric of buildings (e.g. condensation levels).	Prof. Kerr		
38/6	To arrange a follow-up meeting on skills with SG colleagues and SSAC Chair and members, to include Professors, Kerr, Morris, Simms and Williamson	Secretariat		
38/7	To redraft NHS Decarbonisation scoping document and circulate for comment ahead of the Working Group meeting with SG colleagues on 25 September.	Dr Jenkins		
38/8	To circulate Energy Demand Scoping paper to seek Working Group volunteers and arrange meeting to define scope in more detail, bearing in mind the devolved/reserved split of issues in this area.	Secretariat		
38/9	To arrange follow up SSAC/SG hydrogen meeting, pending feedback from SG officials.	Secretariat		