**SSAC Minutes Thursday 11 September 2014**

**Conference Room 3**

**Victoria Quay**

**Edinburgh**

**Attending:**

Professor Muffy Calder

Dr Chris Masters

Mr Stuart Farmer

Professor George Salmond

Professor David Cumming

Professor Julian Jones

Mrs Angela Mathis

Professor Jim Hough

Professor Louise Heathwaite (*ex-officio member*) (For items 1-2 only)

Ms Clare Hicks, Head OCSA

Ms Diane Strachan, Head of SSAC Secretariat

Mrs Anna Milne, SSAC Secretariat

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

1. Professor Calder welcomed SSAC members to the meeting and gave apologies from Professor Ian Boyd, Professor Nigel Brown, Professor Ian Diamond, Professor Jon Oberlander, Professor Jason Reese, Professor Marian Scott and Professor Andrew Morris.

2. Professor Calder noted that this would be the last formal meeting for many SSAC members (including herself) as they would be stepping down at the end of January 2015 as their term of membership on SSAC had concluded.

**2. A Future Science Strategy for Scotland**

3. Professor Calder introduced this item and explained that she would like the opportunity to discuss with SSAC the concept and rationale for a Science Strategy for Scotland.

4. Professor Calder highlighted the document ‘Science for Scotland: A strategic framework for science in Scotland’[[1]](#footnote-1), which was published in November 2008. She noted that this document was very broad in scope and looked at a number of key areas e.g. developing individuals, scientific research, economic and business demand, international and connections in Scotland and Government.

5. Professor Calder then posed the question: what is a strategy? She suggested it was about setting (SMART) goals, determining actions and identifying and allocating resources. She further suggested it was also about what potentially we are going to stop doing, who has responsibilities and what levers we have. She concluded that in developing a new strategy we might also review past actions and reflect on what was successful/unsuccessful.

6. Professor Calder then took the opportunity to present some background facts and figures about the science landscape in Scotland to support and inform the discussion.

7. Professor Calder concluded her presentation by posing a number of questions to the Council. These questions included:

* Should we have a revised science strategy for Scotland and what would it look like?
* What is the rationale?
* Who will want it/own it?
* What are the dimensions? (scope, breadth, depth, activities, science areas)
* Who has influence/responsibility and how will a strategy make a difference?
* Who will develop it and what is the role of the SSAC?

8. SSAC members then had a wide ranging discussion and following this Professor Calder thanked members useful contributions. She summarised that the conclusion of the discussion was that there could be value in developing further a Scottish Science Strategy. If one were to be developed, SSAC felt that the focus should be firmly on science and address the key themes of strengthening the research base and developing individuals. Members had agreed that it was of less value for a science strategy to attempt to cover wider areas such as innovation policy or economic impact.

**3. Update on recruitment process.**

9. Professor Calder updated colleagues on the SSAC recruitment process. She reported that, following her announcement that she would be stepping down as CSA at the end of December 2014, the decision had been taken to delay the process of recruiting new SSAC members until a new CSA for Scotland had been appointed. This would allow the new CSA to have input into the recruitment process. She explained that, in the interim, the Secretariat would hold all applications that have already been received and there would be a further period, prior to the recruitment process commencing again, where we will accept any additional new applications following a period of notice on the SSAC website.

10. Professor Calder further reported that, in the period following her departure and the appointment of a new CSA, Professor Heathwaite and Professor Morris would provide cover for the CSA role.

**4. Minutes of the last meeting 12 June 2014**

11. The SSAC agreed and approved the minutes of the last SSAC meeting held on 12 June 2014.

**5. Members update**

12. Members updated colleagues on topics of interest from their areas.

**6. Science and the Media/Professional standards**

13. Dr Masters introduced this agenda item and noted that science and the media and professional standards for scientists was an issue that had been raised during discussion at the last meeting. He invited Professor Jones to present his paper.

14. Professor Jones explained that at the June 2014 SSAC meeting there was a discussion about whether there were core professional standards that should apply to scientists and engineers in their interaction with the media. In the discussion, it was acknowledged that in many of the established professions, e.g. medicine, accountancy and others, such standards clearly existed. He noted that his paper suggested some possible standards and suggestions for further actions. He noted that there might be a role for SSAC to instigate a discussion with the learned bodies on this topic. Dr Masters thanked Professor Jones and Professor Brown for their paper. He noted that during the last meeting there was also discussion on the quality of evidence (scientific papers and data) used to develop policy. He suggested that the issue of standards could also apply in this context.

15. A member commented on the definition of professional standards and noted that such things do exist but they are technical or prescriptive in nature. He further noted that advice from a Professional (e.g. a lawyer or an accountant) tended to come with an associated fee, whereas when scientists are asked for their professional expert opinion, this is rarely the case. There is a historical difference between the professions in this respect.

16. A member further pointed out that Learned Societies are groups of scientists brought together for the purpose and benefit of the discipline. Professional institutions, however, are associated with “brass plate” professions such as medicine, law, accountancy etc. A member suggested that Engineering was somewhere in the middle.

17. A member commented that if we are to have evidence-based policy we have to have some way of calibrating it. The Council agreed but noted this was a very difficult area that, arguably, may have been exacerbated by the recent move to open access (“author pays”) publishing. Peer review was seen conventionally as a way of distinguishing between science quality, but the quality of peer review across increasing numbers of journals was far from uniform.

18. The Council further agreed that there were two separate but related issues being discussed. The first about scientists engaging responsibly with media and the second related to the quality of scientific evidence used in the policy process (or elsewhere).

18. A member suggested that scientists are not required to be part of a professional body and, therefore, we need to instil a sense of responsibility and the need for individuals to act in a professional manner. It was agreed that chartered status was currently mostly about syllabus and the number of hours experience completed by an individual but it could be suggested that some emphasis could also be put on an individual’s responsibilities as a professional scientist.

20. A member highlighted a recent article by Sir Paul Nurse, President of the Royal Society, which criticised those who “cherry pick” scientific findings to suit their agenda.

Next steps:

21. Following their discussion, SSAC members agreed that this was not a topic for SSAC alone and that, if it were to discuss this issue further, it should be with the wider science and engineering community through the learned societies and engineering bodies.

22. SSAC members agreed that this issue would be brought back on the agenda when the new Council members were appointed and Council activities commenced again in 2015.

**7. SSAC Work Programme – SSAC report on Synthetic Biology: opportunities for Scotland**

23. Professor Calder and the full Council recorded thanks to all members of the Synthetic Biology working group. She especially thanked Professor Brown who had chaired the group.

24. She commented that the process of developing this piece of work had been particularly successful and that the early engagement with policy colleagues and Ministers had been especially helpful.

25. She noted that the report would be launched at an event on 16 October at the Royal Society of Edinburgh and then placed on the SSAC website. The report would be embargoed until that date. She noted that Professor Brown and Professor Richard Cogdell would give presentations at the event and that the 2014 Scottish iGEM teams would also be attending to present their projects.

**8. SSAC Work Programme: Research Infrastructure report**

26. Professor Calder thanked the working group led by Professor Julian Jones on behalf of the SSAC for their efforts in pulling together this report.

27. She confirmed that the report had formed the basis of an SSAC response to the BIS consultation on proposals for long-term capital investment, which concluded on 4 July 2014. She further noted that the full report had been presented to Dr Allan, (Minister for Learning Science and Scotland’s Languages) and would be published on the SSAC website.

28. The SSAC Secretariat agreed to send a link to the report to all those who had contributed to the SSAC working group activities.

**9. Any Other Business**

29. Professor Calder agreed to provide SSAC with details of the timescales for the recruitment of a new CSA when this information was available.

**10.** **Date of Next Meeting.**

30. Professor Calder confirmed there would not be a further SSAC meeting in November/December. **The final SSAC event of 2014 will be a dinner in central Edinburgh on Wednesday 19 November**. The timings will be as normal 18:45 for a 19:00 start concluding at approximately 22:30. Full details will be circulated in due course.

**SSAC Secretariat**

**October 2014**

1. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/247013/0069782.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)