

SSAC Minutes – 15 July 2021

Zoom video conference – hosted by Chair SSAC

Attendees:

Attendee	Position
Professor Maggie Gill	SSAC Chair
Professor Julie Fitzpatrick	Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland (<i>ex officio member</i>)
Professor David Crossman	Chief Scientist (Health) (<i>ex officio member</i>)
Professor Carol Tannahill	Chief Social Policy Adviser (<i>ex officio member</i>)
Dr Caroline Cantley	SSAC Member
Professor Dame Anna Dominiczak	SSAC Member
Professor Bob Ferrier	SSAC Member
Professor Mark Inall	SSAC Member
Professor Julian Jones	SSAC Member
Professor Marian Scott	SSAC Member
Professor John Underhill	SSAC Member
Professor Jan Webb	SSAC Co-opted member
Iain Gulland	Chief Exec, Zero Waste Scotland (Agenda Item 14)
Andrew Dick	Zero Waste Scotland (Agenda Item 14)
Rhona McDonald	Strategic Lead for Science, Research, International & EU Exit, Higher Education and Science (SG) (Agenda items 1-4)
Joanne Ward	Head of SSAC Secretariat/Science Advice and Engagement Team (SG)
Alasdair Maclean	SSAC Secretariat, Science Advice and Engagement Team (SG)
Caroline Murray	SSAC Secretariat, Science Advice and Engagement Team (SG)

1. Welcome and Apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies were noted from:

Professor Andrew Millar
 Professor Aziz Sheikh
 Professor Robert Bowman
 Professor Wayne Powell
 Dr Roddy Macdonald

1.2 The Chair advised that five members of the SSAC had been invited to and had agreed to extend their membership for another year (to January 2023) and thanked them for their continued work on the Council and the various sub-groups.

2. Minutes and Actions of last meeting

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting had been formally agreed electronically and published on SSAC website.

2.2 All previous actions were completed except for the following:

18/4 SSAC Niche – for discussion at agenda item 11

Note: Action 20/3 regarding SG consultations was continued for further discussion around the role of the SSAC.

Action 21/1 – Secretariat to circulate a draft core distribution list for SSAC reports for comment, before finalising in time for Geospatial report publication.

3. Update from Professor Julie Fitzpatrick, Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland

3.1 CSA provided an overview of her first five weeks in post. She had been involved in multiple director-level meetings focussing on the new Ministers' first 100 days and manifesto commitments, as well as a range of meetings in connection with the pandemic response, at both the Scottish and UK level.

3.2 Plans were ongoing for a Science and Innovation day at COP26, and this is an opportunity for Scottish science on the global stage.

3.3 CSA outlined the main areas she would like to focus on during her three year term, including pandemic response and planning; investment in innovation; science and innovation underpinning the Climate Change Plan; and system-wide issues around food distribution and inequalities, and how that feeds into other societal inequalities.

3.4. CSA advised that she is keen to help ensure that science organisations/universities are involved meaningfully in plans and action around the economic recovery from the pandemic.

3.5 CSA emphasised the need to make science more visible within SG, and there was support from members for efforts to achieve this, including looking at structures elsewhere and the possibility of building on work done before the pandemic to promote science within and outwith SG.

Action 21/2 – Mark Inall to provide details on the key two or three science issues SSAC would want to see promoted at COP26, for CSA's use in relevant discussions.

4. Update from Rhona McDonald, Strategic Lead for Science, Research, International HE & EU Exit, Advanced Learning and Science, SG

4.1 Rhona McDonald provided an update of the work carried out within Advanced Learning and Science Directorate since the new Cabinet Secretary and Minister have been in post (Shirley-Anne Somerville and Jamie Hepburn respectively). Focus has been on the first 100 days commitment and work is ongoing to collate the Programme for Government, which will be published later in the summer. The SG is working on the response to the recently published SFC review. There is ongoing work on the Covid response and working with universities for the autumn term. There is continued engagement with the UK Government on a number of strategies linked to science and innovation.

4.2 Engagement continues with BEIS on the ARIA (Advanced Research and Innovation Agency) Bill; SSAC members raised concerns over potential funding issues for Scotland in future, and it was considered crucial that these issues are raised with SG.

Action 21/3 – Discussion on HE research funding issues to be added to the agenda for a future SSAC meeting.

5. Reflections on the pandemic – Professor Dame Anna Dominiczak, Director of Laboratories, NHS Test & Trace Department of Health and Social Care.

5.1 Dame Professor Dominiczak updated the council on her work with NHS Test and Trace Department followed by general discussion and questions from members.

6. Member Updates

6.1 The Chair reiterated the purpose of these updates was for members to feedback any useful information gathered from their membership of various groups and to share anything of importance with the Secretariat for wider distribution.

6.2 Marian Scott advised that she will share a link to the recent publication of European Regulations on Artificial Intelligence. (Post meeting note - Article distributed to SSAC members). John Underhill advised that the British Geological Society subsurface observatory is now operational, and there is potential for this to be showcased at COP26. Mark Inall highlighted his membership of the Arctic Circle Advisory Board, connected to a new policy agenda for Scotland in terms of connections to Nordic and Arctic countries, focussing on culture, tourism, transport and climate change.

7. Standing Item – Feedback on SSAC Reports (SSAC Note 21/2) – Alasdair Maclean

7.1 The Chair welcomed Alasdair to his first SSAC meeting.

7.2 Caroline Cantley flagged up that many of the primary recommendations from the Environmental Impacts of the Scottish Manufacturing Industry report were being progressed by the policy team and associated groups.

8. Update on Current Projects/Reports – Commissioned work: Geospatial Knowledge Project

8.1 Mark Inall confirmed that this report is being prepared for publication in August.

Other Projects:

9. COP26 Talking Heads Series (joint RSE/SAGES/SSAC) – Mark Inall

9.1 This item was covered in introductory discussions with the SSAC and CSA prior to the main meeting (the project is progressing, with new videos regularly posted online to highlight Scottish research of relevance to COP26 themes).

10. Energy – update following meeting with SG Energy policy officials – John Underhill

10.1 John Underhill provided an update from the recent meeting, which had been positive. Policy officials had requested a copy of the SSAC Sustainable Chemicals briefing note so that they could map their hydrogen/energy work against the report findings. Policy officials are now considering a future commission of work for the SSAC to undertake.

11. SSAC Niche paper for agreement – (SSAC Note 21/3) – Maggie Gill

11.1 The Chair thanked members for their further comments on the niche paper (ie the role and strengths of the SSAC) and reiterated its importance and value as a set of principles for the SSAC going forward. The Chair is keen to publish the initial page of the document on the SSAC website once members are agreed on the text.

11.2 Members were generally content with the paper. There were some suggestions made about whether more needs to be included about the value of science – to SG and wider society

– particularly in the context of the economy and post Covid recovery; and the value of having a foresighting role (in the context of future desired outcomes for Scotland).

11.3 There was discussion about the SSAC’s work – as independent science advice – being about finding the best possible outcome for the benefit of society; trying to reach conclusions so that Ministers and officials have the best science evidence and advice to inform their decisions around policy.

Action 21/4 – Secretariat to check wording in the SSAC Terms of Reference and similar documents, in connection with ‘science policy’ references and to update the Chair.

Action 21/5 – The Chair will consider comments made and finalise a revised Niche document for publication on the SSAC website.

12. Standing Agenda Item – Climate Change (SSAC Note 21/4) – Maggie Gill

12.1 The Chair referred to her Note 21/4 and stated that she was happy to lead the Climate Change sub-group at the moment but is seeking volunteers to lead on parts of this work.

12.2 The Chair has had discussions with Andrew Mortimer from SG Economy regarding the TIMES model assumptions and suggested it would be good to invite Andrew to a future subgroup meeting.

12.3 There was general discussion around the type of work to which the SSAC could add value in this space, reflecting an enthusiasm from some stakeholder groups and SG officials. The Chair sought the views of members for a possible piece of work on climate change adaptation (potentially around policies that combine mitigation and adaptation), and there was agreement that a specific, discrete piece of work could be a successful focus for the SSAC to add value, if it could be accommodated within existing commitments.

Action 21/6 – Chair and Secretariat to discuss further and take forward inviting SG climate change policy officials to another meeting of the Climate Change Sub-Group; members to provide feedback on possible SSAC work around adaptation.

13. SSAC Future Projects – (SSAC Note 21/5) – Maggie Gill

13.1 The Chair had prepared a note in response to the members’ suggestions of future work projects. Given current commissions and other work, it is likely that some of these suggestions will only be able to proceed if additional resources are available to support the projects. This will be discussed further with Secretariat.

Action 21/7 – All to provide feedback on any projects to which members would like to make a time commitment.

Action 21/8 – Secretariat to provide further feedback to the Chair on resourcing issues.

13.2 The Chair thanked Prof Julian Jones for agreeing to lead on the **Quantum Technologies** (QT) project and Prof Marian Scott for joining the sub-group. The project arose as a request from SG policy officials.

13.3 Professor Jones outlined the focus of the project; interviews with Scottish research communities would be used to fill gaps in understanding and assess future socio and economic benefits of QT. The subgroup plan to have a roundtable discussion to feed into a first draft in the early new year for SSAC comment.

13.4 Dr Caroline Cantley volunteered to join the project group and advised that a high level audit of relevant research was currently underway.

Action 21/9 – Dr Caroline Cantley to share audit material on QT research with QT subgroup; members to provide further feedback on the QT commissioning note.

14. Zero Waste Scotland (ZWS) – Roundtable Discussion

14.1 The Chair introduced Iain Gulland, CE, and colleague Andrew Dick, of ZWS. She thanked Iain for the input he provided on her Climate Change Note 21/4 that had been discussed earlier in the agenda with the SSAC members.

14.2 Iain provided an overview of ZWS work and priorities and stated ZWS want to work with SSAC on a more granular level – areas around circular economy, bio-economy and the built environment. He was keen to have a conversation on how we can work together going forward.

14.3 General discussion ensued on a variety of topics including use of materials, 're-manufacturing', reduced demand for resources and the need for changes to consumer patterns not just at individual, but also at organisational level, and the need to use evidence to influence change at a strategic level.

14.4 ZWS has looked at the social benefits of the circular economy – including jobs, but not necessarily on child poverty, and there was interest from members to see if further analysis in this space would be helpful, on the benefits of a circular economy around child poverty/fairer Scotland ambitions.

14.5 Linking to the SSAC paper, there was agreement that some quantitative work, cataloguing the demand for various resources, would be of interest to both ZWS and SSAC.

14.6 The Chair thanked ZWS colleagues for attending the meeting and their input to the discussion and the climate change subgroup.

15. AOB

15.1 The Chair advised that the September meeting date will need to change, and Secretariat are looking into the availability of the Minister (Mr Hepburn), DG Education and Justice and/or Director of Advanced Learning and Science for next meeting. Discussion on possible attendees and speakers for future events.

Action 21/10 –SSAC Members to provide suggestions for potential guests at future SSAC meetings relevant to the current work programme.

Summary of Actions

Action	Item	Update
18/4	Chair and secretariat to produce a draft paper about SSAC's 'unique selling point' and where it can best add value for the Scottish Government, and plans to raise awareness of SSAC within SG for discussion with new CSA prior to circulating to SSAC for comment.	
20/3	Chair and Secretariat to discuss further SSAC's possible input to consultations, noting the importance of early engagement with policy teams, where possible, and the value that SSAC can add to consultations on major, cross-cutting or strategic issues.	
21/1	Secretariat to circulate a draft core distribution list for SSAC reports for comment, before finalising in time for Geospatial report publication.	
21/2	Mark Inall to provide details on the key two or three science issues SSAC would want to see promoted at COP26, for CSA's use in relevant discussions.	
21/3	Discussion on HE research funding issues to be added to the agenda for a future SSAC meeting.	
21/4	Secretariat to check wording in the SSAC Terms of Reference and similar documents, in connection with 'science policy' references and to update the Chair.	
21/5	The Chair will consider comments made and finalise a revised Niche document for publication.	
21/6	Chair and Secretariat to discuss further and take forward inviting SG climate change policy officials to another meeting of the Climate Change Sub-Group; members to provide feedback on possible SSAC work around adaptation.	
21/7	All to provide feedback on any projects where there is interest in taking forward.	
21/8	Secretariat to provide further feedback to the Chair on resourcing issues.	
21/9	Dr Caroline Cantley to share audit material on QT research with QT subgroup; members to provide further feedback on the QT commissioning note.	
21/10	SSAC Members to provide suggestions for other potential guests at future SSAC meetings relevant to the current work programme.	