

SSAC Minutes - 2 December 2020

Zoom video conference – hosted by Chair SSAC

Attendees:

Attendee	Position
Professor Maggie Gill	SSAC Chair
Professor <i>Sheila Rowan</i>	<i>Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) for Scotland (ex officio member)</i>
Professor David Crossman	Chief Scientist (Health) (<i>ex officio member</i>)
Professor Andrew Millar	CSA Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (<i>ex officio member</i>)
Professor Carol Tannahill	Chief Social Policy Adviser (<i>ex officio member</i>)
Professor Robert Bowman	SSAC Member
Dr Caroline Cantley	SSAC Member
Professor Bob Ferrier	SSAC Member
Professor Mark Inall	SSAC Member
Professor Julian Jones	SSAC Member
Professor Wayne Powell	SSAC Member
Professor Marian Scott	SSAC Member
Professor John Underhill	SSAC Member
Mr Richard Lochhead	Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Agenda Items 6-9 only)
Professor Melanie Welham	Chief Executive, UKRI-BBSRC (Agenda Items 6-9 only)
Dr Roddy Macdonald	Deputy Director and Head of Higher Education and Science (Scottish Government) (Agenda Item 4 only)
Joanne Ward	Head of SSAC Secretariat/Science Advice and Engagement Team (SG)
Dr Heather Owen	SSAC Secretariat, SAE Team (SG)
Caroline Murray	SSAC Secretariat, SAE Team (SG)
Dr Kirsty McWhinnie	SSAC Secretariat, SAE Team (SG)

1. Welcome and Apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting noting apologies from:

Professor Anna Dominiczak
Professor Aziz Sheikh
Professor Jan Webb

2. Minutes and Actions of last meeting

2.1 September Minutes already agreed and published on SSAC website. Actions from previous meeting completed except:

Action 18/4 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 Chair and CSA prior to circulating to SSAC for comment.

2.2 In connection with this, the Chair will have a further discussion around the SSAC role with Professor Webb and Secretariat prior to next meeting.

3. Update from Professor Sheila Rowan, Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland

3.1 CSA provided an overview of the work she had been involved with including regular meetings connected to COVID-19 and ongoing engagement with the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science; Scottish Science Centres; the UK CSA network and other science and science funding-related bodies.

3.2 There was some discussion around the challenges for land use management to achieve 'net zero' carbon in connection with climate change, whilst maintaining biodiversity and considering social and economic factors.

3.3 CSA ENRA gave a short update on SEPA/Scottish water work on testing for COVID in waste water and shared the link: <https://informatics.sepa.org.uk/RNAmonitoring/>.

3.4 It was noted that the importance of the photonics sector was not highlighted in Scotland's digital strategy, and connecting photonics to wider sectors is needed. The CSA indicated that she was happy to continue to promote photonics as one of the important science sectors in Scotland.

3.5 Marian Scott advised that the subgroup work on the digital strategy was near completion and will share a one page document soon with the SSAC for comment.

Action 19/1 Marian Scott to complete the response to the Digital Strategy consultation and secretariat to circulate to members for comments.

4. Update from Roddy Macdonald, Deputy Director, Higher Education and Science Division, Scottish Government (SG)

4.1 Roddy Macdonald outlined some of the current priorities within the Higher Education and Science Division around COVID-19.

4.2 He highlighted that the Scottish Budget was due 28 January 2021 and stated that the UK spending review announced the previous week was generally positive for research and science. High level Brexit negotiations are continuing, as is the work around Erasmus and Horizon Europe.

5. Introduction from Professor Carol Tannahill, Chief Social Policy Adviser

5.1 Carol Tannahill provided a brief background to her past work and explained her role as Chief Social Policy Adviser as a broker between community, academia and local and national government, with strong links to supporting the delivery of Scotland's National Performance Framework. She stated that there is no equivalent CSPA role in other devolved administrations or UK(G).

6. Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science

6.1 The Minister acknowledged the valuable work the council has done and continues to do despite the challenges of COVID-19 and Brexit.

6.2 The Minister highlighted some of the work that SG is doing to meet the challenges of a green, and fair economic recovery, including addressing key skills gaps and supporting young people.

6.3 He also stressed the importance of international collaboration post-Brexit, particularly in the context of the transition through the pandemic and the upcoming international opportunities afforded by COP26 being held in Glasgow in November 2021. This should be a good platform to showcase Scottish science and research excellence.

7. SSAC Chair Update

7.1 The Chair thanked the Minister for attending and outlined some of the ongoing work of the Council and the important link between science and policy in green recovery work.

8. Professor Melanie Welham, UKRI-BBSRC Chief Executive – Presentation on the future strategy on ‘Engineering Biology’

8.1 Professor Welham discussed the potential for engineering biology to contribute to green recovery in the UK including Scotland. She stated she had also shared the presentation with the UK CSA Network (CSAs at UK Government (UKG) departments as well as devolved administrations) and UKG and was interested to hear the views of the SSAC and the Minister.

Action 19/2 Secretariat to circulate Professor Welham’s presentation to SSAC members.

9. Roundtable discussion

9.1 There was discussion around opportunities for Scotland including the use of engineering biology in animal feed sector, potential for aquaculture applications and industrial biotechnology opportunities for the Grangemouth Refinery. The work of the IBioIC and Scottish universities were considered key strengths in Scotland.

9.2 There was discussion about how Scotland can best coordinate innovation, research pools, skills and career paths and tie in with industry and academia. The pros and cons of a systems-based approach was discussed, including the potential for a system that can adapt to long term challenges. To achieve this it was important to have a flexible skills base, and well-resourced research councils and innovation centres able to react to support local/national economic, and other, needs.

9.3 It was suggested that there was a role for SSAC to provide advice to SG about the skills and opportunities in this area. It was agreed that SSAC meetings should be structured in future to include guest speakers from across a range of areas.

Action 19/3 SSAC members to provide suggestions for future guest speakers to the secretariat to be considered by Chair and CSA (by end December for the next meeting in March).

10. Standing Item – Feedback on SSAC Reports

10.1 Secretariat referred to the feedback provided in the SSAC Note 20/20 regarding the Environmental Impacts of the Scottish Manufacturing Industry report and the Robotics and Autonomous Systems Note.

11. Geospatial Knowledge Project (SSAC Note 20/21)

11.1 Mark Inall provided the first draft of this report for comment/feedback. He advised that the project intern intends to complete interviews before Christmas using the standardised questions around the four subject areas used as exemplars in the report.

11.2 Mark Inall expects a second draft of the report to be available by end of Jan/Feb. He addressed some of the comments raised at the meeting and stated he welcomed further input particularly on the wording and language used in the summary.

Action 19/4 All SSAC to provide comments on Geospatial first draft paper.

Action 19/5 Mark Inall to circulate second draft of the Geospatial paper to SSAC end January/beginning of February.

Action 19/6 Secretariat to arrange SSAC project meeting beginning of February to discuss the second draft of the Geospatial report.

12. Talking Heads (joint RSE/SSAC/SAGES project)

12.1 Mark Inall stated the work was underway and Marian Scott had completed the first Talking Heads video to help highlight Scottish research and science and its contribution to understanding/tackling climate change, in the 12 months prior to the COP26 meeting in Glasgow. There will be two interviews issued every month in the run up to COP26 and these will be uploaded on the RSE youtube channel. It was agreed that the links would also be included on the SSAC website.

Action 19/7 Secretariat to continue to support the Talking Head project and arrange for the links to the talking heads videos to be uploaded on SSAC website when available.

13. Sustainable Chemicals Note – Maggie Gill

13.1 There was discussion around taking this work forward, possibly by linking with Engineering Biology. It was agreed to revisit this project at the March 2021 meeting.

Action 19/8 Secretariat to include Sustainable Chemicals Note and Engineering Biology on agenda for next SSAC meeting.

14. Digital Strategy Subgroup

14.1 This item was discussed earlier at paragraph 3.5 above.

15. Hydrogen – Maggie Gill

15.1 The Chair stated that the SSAC subgroup met on 28 October to discuss possible input to the SG hydrogen energy policy area. It was agreed to continue engagement with the policy leads and for the SSAC subgroup to prepare a short report once they have sight of the published SG hydrogen report.

16. Climate Change – Maggie Gill

16.1 The Chair mentioned that further positive feedback was provided by the policy lead at the last SSAC subgroup meeting on 20 November. There was agreement that the SSAC subgroup should continue this work.

16.2 John Underhill and Caroline Cantley agreed to join the SSAC Climate Change subgroup.

16.3 It was also agreed to adjust some of the wording in the transport document to clarify the issues and to publish a link to the amended subgroup papers on the SSAC website with a caveat that they were quickly provided in response to the specific Sustainable Renewal Advisory Group (SRAG) papers provided by SG.

Action 19/9 Chair to amend the paper commenting on the SRAG transport paper. Secretariat to update SSAC website with link to the SRAG climate change papers and SSAC feedback documents once these have been published by SG.

17. Member Updates

17.1 Members highlighted a few areas of interest including the publication of the Royal Society's 'Digital technology and the planet' report and the upcoming Scottish Government Consultation on 'Making Scotland's Future: A Recovery Plan for Manufacturing'.

18. Any Other Business

18.1 Caroline Cantley outlined the ETP Review of Innovation and Opportunity in the Scottish Solar Energy Sector

Action 19/10 Secretariat to forward updated Review of Innovation and Opportunity in the Scottish Solar Energy Summary document to SSAC for comment.

18.2 The Chair noted Heather Owen was leaving the SSAC Secretariat on promotion later in the month; and thanks for Heather's contribution to supporting a number of SSAC projects was noted.

18.3 Members agreed to extend Professor Jan Webb's co-option for a further six months due to the continued work and subgroups she is involved in.

18.4 As a number of SSAC members have professional interests in this area, it was agreed that members would contribute to the Scottish Government's Draft Strategy for Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Research 2022-2027 consultation on behalf of their individual institutes, rather than from a collective SSAC contribution.

18.5 It was agreed that at subsequent meetings, speakers and presentations will be invited which address the relevant themes of the SSAC work (see also Action 19/3 above).

19. Date of next meeting

19.1 The date was agreed for 3 March 09.00-13.00 in a virtual capacity. Future dates and format of meetings (provisionally planned for June, September and December 2021) will be provided in due course.

Summary of Actions

18/4	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 Chair and CSA prior to circulating to SSAC for comment.	
19/1	Marian Scott to complete the response to the Digital Strategy consultation and secretariat to circulate to members for comments.	
19/2	Secretariat to circulate Professor Welham's presentation to SSAC members.	
19/3	SSAC members to provide suggestions for future guest speakers to the secretariat to be considered by Chair and CSA (by end December for the next meeting in March).	
19/4	All SSAC to provide comments on Geospatial first draft paper.	
19/5	Mark Inall to circulate second draft of the Geospatial paper to SSAC end January/beginning of February.	
19/6	Secretariat to arrange SSAC project meeting beginning of February to discuss the second draft of the Geospatial report.	
19/7	Secretariat to continue to support the Talking Head project and arrange for the links to the talking heads videos to be uploaded on SSAC website when available.	
19/8	Secretariat to include Sustainable Chemicals Note and Engineering Biology on agenda for next SSAC meeting.	
19/9	Chair to amend the paper commenting on the SRAG transport paper. Secretariat to update SSAC website with link to the SRAG climate change papers and SSAC feedback documents once these have been published by SG.	
19/10	Secretariat to forward updated Review of Innovation and Opportunity in the Scottish Solar Energy Summary document to SSAC for comment.	