



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

## Appointment of 4 members to Defra's Science Advisory Council (expertise in natural sciences and allied disciplines)

### Briefing pack for applicants

Closing Date 8<sup>th</sup> April 2024



Science  
Advisory  
Council



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# Defra mission statement

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The Defra group is here to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener, and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for future generations, and to leave the environment in a better state.

This matters because enhancing nature and green spaces enhances lives and livelihoods, contributing to a strong economy. Our wellbeing, our physical and mental health, our love of place and landscape, and our intrinsic need for beauty, awe and wonder, are all intimately bound up with a thriving natural environment.

Appointing high-calibre people from diverse backgrounds with relevant skills, knowledge and experience to the boards of our public bodies will help us to ensure that our work is more effective, resilient and accountable.

## Equal Opportunities

UK government has a policy of equality of opportunity. We aim to promote equal opportunity policies whereby no one suffers unfair discrimination either directly or indirectly, or harassment, on grounds such as race, colour, ethnic or national origin, sex, gender identity, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or age.

## Diversity

We positively welcome applicants from all backgrounds. All public appointments are made on merit following a fair and open competition as regulated by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

## Disability

We guarantee to interview anyone with a disability whose application meets the minimum criteria for the post. 'Minimum criteria' means you must provide sufficient evidence in your application, demonstrating that you meet the minimum level of competence required for each essential criterion, as well as meeting any of the qualifications, skills or experience required. The Cabinet Office and Defra is committed to the employment and career development of disabled people. To show this we proudly display the Disability Confident Leader logo. More information about Disability Confident Leaders is available by clicking the logo above. If a person with disabilities is put at a substantial disadvantage compared to a nondisabled person, we have a duty to make reasonable changes to our processes where possible. If you need a change to be made so that you can make your application, please refer to the ['How to apply and submit your application'](#) section below.

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# The Science Advisory Council

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The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) invites applications for the position of member to the Defra Science Advisory Council (SAC), an advisory Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB).

SAC plays a vital role in assisting the Defra Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) by advising on and challenging the evidence that Defra uses in its policy development. The SAC currently consists of ten members plus a Chair.

## Aim of the Council

The Science Advisory Council (SAC) provides independent and scientific support, advice and challenge to Defra.

The SAC's remit is broad and focuses primarily on the strategic direction of the Departments' evidence. It delivers independent high-level, cross cutting, strategic advice and challenge to help assure the evidence used in Defra policy development and delivery and to this end, diversity of thought within the members is encouraged.

The SAC has its own [website](#) where information about the Council's activities, reports and meeting papers are regularly published. If you require more information about the vacancies, please contact the SAC Secretariat at: [science.advisory.council@defra.gov.uk](mailto:science.advisory.council@defra.gov.uk)

## Objectives of the Council

The objectives of the SAC are to:

- advise and support Defra on developing and implementing an effective and efficient strategy for obtaining and using evidence and scientific advice;
- advise on and provide assurance on the process for evidence gathering;
- provide strategic oversight and assurance on how evidence is used in policy, providing targeted support where necessary;
- provide constructive challenge on Defra's evidence, and
- identify sources of additional expert external advice to input to Defra evidence.

## SAC's relationship with Defra

The SAC's agenda and operation is structured to integrate it within the Department's workings but retaining its capacity to provide critical independent challenge. SAC is both reactive to Defra's

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needs and raises issues itself that it believes would be helpful for the Department to consider. Its work plan is a balance of being forward looking and being reactive to issues as they arrive.

### **Structure of SAC's Business**

To enable the SAC to take its role forward, at an appropriate strategic level, it organises its business in four ways: quarterly meetings; monthly teleconferences; subgroups on specific policy/evidence areas and a Defra Official and SAC member pairing scheme. The SAC has three standing subgroups: Social Science Expert Group, and Exotic and Emerging Animal Diseases, and Biodiversity Expert Committee. It may also establish time-limited subgroups, made up of SAC members and appropriate co-opted experts, in relation to emergencies, or to carry out in-depth studies. Subgroups will advise and challenge Defra's evidence and analysis.

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# Role specification

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We are looking for four members with expertise in the natural and social sciences and allied disciplines across a broad range across Defra's areas of interest, which include but are not limited to:

- Marine science
- System dynamics
- Veterinary epidemiology
- Biodiversity
- Engineering Biology including molecular biology and genetic technologies
- AI and advanced data methodologies for the environmental sciences

You will provide high-level strategic advice, support, and assurance to the CSA and Defra on developing and implementing an effective strategy for obtaining and using evidence and scientific advice (often at pace) including on high profile and contentious issues. You will provide strategic oversight on Defra's use of evidence, help to identify sources of external advice to input to Defra evidence, and act as a conduit between Defra and evidence providers. You will also advise on broader issues such as how Defra obtains its advice, its access to the scientific community and on maintaining and developing its scientific capabilities into the future.

These duties will be performed through discussions and engagement with Defra officials and key stakeholders, and a mixture of meetings and smaller working groups.

The successful candidate must abide by the Seven Principles of Public Life (attached at [Annex A](#)) and the [Code of Conduct for Board members](#).

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# Essential Criteria

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## **SAC members must be able to demonstrate all of the following essential criteria:**

- Significant expertise in the natural sciences or allied disciplines lying within the broad areas of interest to Defra; this might include knowledge of social science, animal disease control and system approaches.
- The ability to analyse issues in an impartial way and work across a range of topics drawing on, but not limited by, their expertise.
- The ability to provide strategic scientific advice on matters relating to the use of evidence in policy making in Defra. This will include the broader issue of how Defra obtains and accesses its external advice.
- A collaborative style and the ability to command the respect and confidence of the SAC Chair, the CSA, senior officials, and senior scientists. This might include the ability to Chair a subgroup.
- An understanding of the interface between science, commerce and policy along with knowledge of UK and international research funding relevant to Defra. Demonstrable ability in strategically assessing the application of evidence in policy-making.

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# Time commitment and term of office

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Appointments are made by the Secretary of State for Defra.

## Terms and Conditions

The SAC's standard terms and conditions for appointments apply. These are available from the SAC Secretariat on request and will be provided to any successful candidates before any appointments are confirmed. Key points to be aware of are set out below.

## Time Commitment

You should ensure you have sufficient time to meet the expectations of the role. Council business will usually take place in London or by teleconference. During the year, SAC business will require a total of approximately 11 days, consisting of:

- Four principal meetings each lasting about five hours;
- Seven monthly teleconferences each lasting an hour;
- Monthly half hour Defra/SAC pairing scheme teleconference;
- Ad hoc meetings that the Member may be invited to; and
- Additional time may also be required to provide input to the work of Council subgroups.

Meetings are normally arranged well in advance and every effort will be made to avoid state school holiday periods. The 2024 principal meeting dates have been arranged: 5<sup>th</sup> September and a date to be determined in December.

In addition, it is envisaged that each SAC Member should be willing to participate in activities during emergencies that fall within Defra's remit (with considerations of an individual's availability and relevant skills being taken into account), and in some circumstances this may involve participation in meetings called at short notice.

## Term of Office

The appointment of two members will commence in July and two members will start later in the year (exact dates to be determined) and will be for a period of three years.

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# Remuneration and expenses

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Remuneration for SAC business (but not travelling time to and from meetings) is £39.00 per hour. Preparation time may also be claimed, on average this is generally 2.5 hours in respect of principal meetings and 0.5 hours in relation to monthly teleconferences.

Reasonable (only standard class rate) travel expenses are also paid.

The Department has due regard to diversity. Expenses may include reimbursement of reasonable additional childcare or other carer costs that are occurred due to SAC commitments, and the reimbursement of reasonable additional expenses of disabled people.

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# The recruitment process

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The closing date for applications is the 8th April 2024 at noon. We expect to have shortlisted by the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May with Panel interviews in the week commencing the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2024.

It is essential that your statement of suitability gives full but concise information relevant to the appointment, clearly demonstrating how you meet each of the [essential criteria](#).

The Advisory Assessment Panel will consist of:

- **Professor Gideon Henderson**, Defra Chief Scientific Adviser, as chair
- **Professor Louise Heathwaite**, current SAC Chair
- **Ele Brown**, Defra Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer
- **Professor Tim Jickells**, ex-SAC member (independent panel member)

At the Shortlist meeting the Panel will assess each application against the essential criteria in order to decide who to invite for interview.

Interviews are expected to take place via Microsoft Teams and will last for approximately 45 minutes. We will be asking each candidate to make a short presentation and further details about the format will be provided to you in advance.

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# How to apply and submit your application

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To apply you will need to [create an account](#) or [sign in](#) to “Apply for Public Appointment Service” gov.uk by the deadline of midday on **8th April 2024**. Once logged onto your account, **click on ‘apply for this role’** and follow the on-screen instructions.

To apply, all candidates are required to submit:

- A CV of no more than two sides of A4 with education, professional qualifications and employment history and the names and contact details for two referees, together with their statement of suitability.
- A statement of suitability should give evidence of the strength and depth of your ability to meet the essential criteria for this role. Please provide specific examples to demonstrate how you meet each of the criteria (max two pages please).
- equality information
- information relating to any outside interests or reputational issues

For an informal discussion about the role please contact Ruby Pickup, Secretary to the Advisory Assessment Panel (e-mail [science.advisory.council@defra.gov.uk](mailto:science.advisory.council@defra.gov.uk))

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# Ineligibility criteria

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You cannot be considered for a public appointment if:

- you become bankrupt or make an arrangement with creditors;
- your estate has been sequestrated in Scotland or you enter into a debt arrangement programme under Part 1 of the Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Act 2002 (asp 17) as the debtor or have, under Scots law, granted a trust deed for creditors;
- you are disqualified from acting as a company director under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986;
- you have been convicted of a criminal offence, the conviction not being spent for the purposes of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (c. 53);
- you become subject to a debt relief order or a bankruptcy restrictions order;
- you fail to declare any conflict of interest.

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# Conflicts of interest and due diligence

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If you have any interests that might be relevant to the work of the Science Advisory Council, and which could lead to a real or perceived conflict of interest if you were to be appointed, please provide details in your application. If you have queries about this and would like to discuss further please contact the [Public Appointments Team](#).

Given the nature of public appointments, it is important that those appointed as members of public bodies maintain the confidence of Parliament and the public. If there are any issues in your personal or professional history that could, if you were appointed, be misconstrued, cause embarrassment, or cause public confidence in the appointment to be jeopardised, it is important that you bring them to the attention of the Advisory Assessment Panel and provide details of the issue(s) in your application. In considering whether you wish to declare any issues, you should also reflect on any public statements you have made, including through social media.

As part of our due diligence checks we will consider anything in the public domain related to your conduct or professional capacity. This will include us undertaking searches of previous public statements and social media, blogs or any other publicly available information. This information may be made available to the Advisory Assessment Panel and they may wish to explore issues with you should you be invited to interview. The information may also be shared with ministers and Cabinet Office.

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# The Commissioner for Public Appointments

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This appointment is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, to ensure that it is made on merit after fair and open competition. More information about the role of the Commissioner and the Governance Code on Public Appointments can be seen at:

<http://publicappointmentscommissioner.independent.gov.uk/>

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/578498/governance\\_code\\_on\\_public\\_appointments\\_16\\_12\\_2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/578498/governance_code_on_public_appointments_16_12_2016.pdf)

For full details of the complaints process for public appointments, please click on the following link which will take you to the Commissioner for Public Appointments website

<https://publicappointmentscommissioner.independent.gov.uk/complaints/>

## Data protection

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Defra is committed to protecting the privacy and security of your personal information and does so in accordance with data protection law including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All the information you provide will be used to proceed with the public appointment listed in this information pack and in the case of diversity monitoring information may be anonymised and used solely for monitoring purposes. For more information about the way we collect and hold your information, please read the Privacy Notice accessible through the Cabinet Office's Public Appointments Website (<https://publicappointments.cabinetoffice.gov.uk>) or request a copy of Defra's Public Appointments Privacy Notice from [publicappts@defra.gov.uk](mailto:publicappts@defra.gov.uk).

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# Annex A – The seven principles of public life

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## **Selflessness**

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

## **Integrity**

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

## **Objectivity**

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

## **Accountability**

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

## **Openness**

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

## **Honesty**

Holders of public office should be truthful.

## **Leadership**

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

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## Annex B – Current membership of the Board

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- Professor Louise Heathwaite (Chair), Distinguished Professor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise) at the University of Lancaster.
- Professor Richard Bardgett, Professor of Ecology at the University of Manchester.
- Professor Lisa Collins, Professor of Animal Science, N8 Agrifood Chair in Agricultural Systems, Head of the School of Biology, Academic Director of the National Pig Centre, and Director of the Smart Agri-Systems research initiative at the University of Leeds.
- Professor Peter Cox, Professor of Climate System Dynamics, University of Exeter.
- Professor Felix Eigenbrod, Professor of Applied Spatial Ecology, in Geography and Environmental Science at the University of Southampton.
- Professor Lin Field, Head of Department of Biointeractions and Crop Protection, Rothamsted Research.
- Professor Rosie Hails, Director of Nature and Science, The National Trust.
- Professor Nicholas Hanley, Professor of Environmental and One Health Economics, Institute of Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine, University of Glasgow.
- Professor Rowland Kao, Professor of Veterinary Epidemiology and Data Science, University of Edinburgh.
- Professor Susan Owens, Emeritus Professor of Environment and Policy and Fellow Emerita of Newnham College, University of Cambridge.
- Professor Marian Scott, Professor of Environmental Statistics, School of Mathematics and Statistics, University of Glasgow and elected fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the International Statistics Institute.



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