



[Home](#) > [Scientific advisory committees: code of practice](#)

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Guidance

Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees and Councils: CoPSAC 2021

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Contents

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. Operating as part of a system](#)
- [3. Roles and responsibilities of Chair and Members](#)
- [4. Roles and responsibilities of the secretariat](#)
- [5. Recruitment, remuneration, liability and indemnity of members](#)
- [6. Operations and working practices](#)
- [7. Environmental, electoral and legal considerations](#)

Annexes

References



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1. Introduction

This chapter at a glance:

- SACs help government departments to independently access, interpret and understand scientific information, and to make judgements about its relevance, potential and application
- Science Advisory Councils offer strategic direction and review across the whole of their sponsoring organisation's science remit
- the CoPSAC provides guidance on the establishment, management and conduct of SACs

1.1 Scientific Advisory Councils and Committees

Scientific Advisory Councils and Committees (SACs) help government departments (and their arms-length bodies) to access, interpret and understand the full range of relevant scientific information, and to make judgements about its relevance, potential and application. SACs give advice on a very wide range of issues, spanning everything from the food we grow and eat, to the quality of our environment, the safety of our roads and transport, and the design of buildings we live and work in. Departmental SACs will consider a range of issues connected to their responsibilities. Devolved administrations' SACs may look at a broader range of science-related issues, reflecting the administration's responsibilities. They will be focused on issues of relevance to the geographical area of the United Kingdom in which the administration and the SAC operate.

A SAC is responsible for providing independent scientific advice to inform policy-making or to advise on the methods used to carry out analysis. This includes highlighting issues that may be of future concern that lie within their Terms of Reference (ToR).

A SAC should not serve to represent stakeholder views or positions that are external to the committee or council, even though individual members may have been appointed because of their stakeholder expertise.

Science Advisory Councils advise across the whole of their sponsoring organisation's science remit, offering strategic direction and review; and views on which science advisory committees may be required. The Chairs of these Councils are members of the Chairs of Science Advisory Councils 'CSACs' group, which meets twice annually. Scientific Advisory Committees have a narrower remit, focusing on a particular topic or issue. These two types of scientific advisory bodies are collectively known as 'SACs'.

The process of obtaining and using scientific advice by government departments in the course of policy development and implementation is addressed more generally through the 'Guidelines on the Use of Scientific and Engineering Advice in Policy-Making' [\[footnote 1\]](#). The Guidelines are intended to be of general application to the procurement of scientific advice, irrespective of whether it is sought from in-house experts or from external individuals or bodies.

Specific actions that government departments should take in order to use scientific advice to promote government effectiveness and better policy-making have been

outlined in the Government Science Capability Review [\[footnote 2\]](#). The Review makes a number of recommendations, including the need for departments to i) have a clearly defined science system that forms an integral part of overall business planning and ii) to publish Areas of Research Interest documents on an annual basis.

1.2. Purpose and status of the Code of Practice

This Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees and Councils (CoPSAC) is intended for the use of scientific advisory committees and councils (Chairs and members) and their secretariats and the sponsoring organisations they advise (officials and Ministers).

The purpose of the CoPSAC is to provide guidance on the establishment, management and conduct of SACs and their relationship with the sponsoring organisations they advise.

The CoPSAC applies to any committee or council that assesses and/or advises on data from any field of study engaged with the scientific process, including the natural sciences, technology, medicine, engineering, the social sciences, the arts and humanities.

The CoPSAC should be used by any such committee or council, regardless of its specific structure, lines of accountability, or Cabinet Office classification. The CoPSAC is not intended to apply to general scientific discussion outside a SAC structure (for example CSAs' weekly discussions), research grants or other resource-awarding committees.

While the CoPSAC is a guidance document, the expectation is that it should be applied where possible. Where SACs, in discussion with their sponsoring organisations, judge that certain sections of the CoPSAC are not possible to follow, for example owing to security concerns, the rationale should be recorded by the secretariat.

Given the diversity of contexts in which SACs operate, the CoPSAC cannot provide guidance on all eventualities that may arise. Where judgement is required, SACs and their sponsoring organisations should refer to the 'Principles of Scientific Advice to Government' [\[footnote 3\]](#) as a basis for interactions and operations (Annex A).

References to documents, legislation, terminology etc. within this CoPSAC were correct at the time of publication. SACs should consult the relevant department or team in their sponsoring organisations to check whether updates have been made since (for example to data management requirements) to ensure they are abreast of any relevant developments. This document will be updated every 5 years.

If SACs have any queries about the content of the CoPSAC, they should raise this with their secretariat in the first instance. Where further clarification is needed, the relevant Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) should contact the Government Office for Science (GOS): contact@gov-science.gov.uk.

2. Operating as part of a system

This chapter at a glance:

- sets out the role and responsibilities of sponsoring organisations to support the operational needs of SACs that are germane to their success
- further outlines that a successful SAC will be integrated within the wider science system and co-ordinated with its different parts, including CSAs and Ministers within the department, and external stakeholders and other SACs

2.1. General

SACs aim to provide high-quality, timely, independent scientific advice by drawing on the best available evidence and expertise relevant to their remit. This requires clear and open communication channels between the Chair, members and secretariat, and with the sponsoring organisations that the SAC advises. The SAC should be clear on its role before undertaking any work, bearing in mind that once excellent and prompt science is provided, policy decisions are based on a range of factors in addition to its own advice. The sponsoring organisation should respect the independence of the SAC.

2.2. Roles and responsibilities of the sponsoring organisations

SACs are funded by one or more government departments or public bodies to which they report and advise (hereafter referred to as ‘sponsoring organisations’).

It is the sponsoring organisation’s responsibility to ensure that there is an appropriate level of secretariat support for the SAC to fulfill its duties and to comply with the CoPSAC. The Chair should discuss any concerns regarding levels of resourcing with the sponsoring organisations.

Sponsoring organisations should support the SAC with an appropriate level of resources which includes people, technology and systems.

The sponsoring organisations should ensure an appropriate balance of ‘generalists’ who understand the policy development process and ‘specialists’ conversant with the technical detail required by the SAC remit within the secretariat.

The sponsoring organisations should ensure that the Chairs and members are provided with the necessary resources and training to perform their duties.

The sponsoring organisations should also provide access to key contacts who require the SAC’s advice. This may include the departmental CSA, relevant Ministers, the organisation’s Head of Science and Engineering Profession, Head of Analysis, Head of Policy Profession, other senior officials in the Department, and policy teams in the Department who can utilise the SAC’s advice.

The sponsoring organisations should support SACs in achieving a diverse and inclusive membership throughout the recruitment and appointments process (see also section 5.2).

The sponsoring organisations should consider, in discussion with the Chair, arrangements for periodic independent review, to assure on-going integrity of SAC operations. All SACs should be reviewed by their sponsoring organisations according to the principles and processes set out in Cabinet Office guidance [\[footnote 4\]](#).

Other areas on which the sponsoring organisations may engage SACs include the organisation's science plan and evidence strategy, science funding and the Spending Review, identifying Areas of Research Interest and/or ensuring research ethics and integrity.

2.3. Communication and relationship with the sponsoring organisations

The 'Principles of Scientific Advice to Government' (see Annex A) set out the 'rules of engagement' between government and those providing independent scientific advice. Openness of communication and engagement is expected of both the sponsoring organisations and the SAC. Members of both parties also have responsibility for the maintenance of good working relations, sharing information on request and seeking clarification when necessary.

A SAC will normally report formally through the Chair to the sponsoring organisations. While it is possible that there might be other reporting mechanisms, it is vital that the governance is clear and supports the purpose for which the SAC has been set up by ensuring there is a clear customer for the SAC's advice.

The SAC should be clear on its routine and emergency reporting lines, whether this is direct to Ministers, the departmental CSA, another departmental official or a public body official.

Some SACs may be required to report jointly to more than one organisation, including to departments in the devolved administrations. In some cases, there may also be an additional reporting line to the sponsoring body through the secretariat. Where this is the case, members of the SAC should be made aware of this.

The Chair, or other nominated spokesperson for the SAC, should ensure that current SAC activity and any plans or information of relevance is reported to the sponsoring organisations. The Chair should have a nominated contact for routine engagement (normally the secretariat lead).

Announcements by the sponsoring organisations on subjects relating to the SAC's advice should not be made without clearance from the Chair and members. This is also reflected in the 'Principles for Scientific Advice to Government', under Transparency and Openness (Annex A).

2.4. Operating within the wider science system

2.4.1. General

Given the interconnected and complex nature of many of the topics on which SACs advise, they should operate as an interactive component of the wider science system within which they are based. A successful SAC will be one that collaborates widely to deliver advice that takes account of the wider science system and is integrated and coordinated with other parts of it. This requires SACs to build appropriate connections with the other components of the science system within their sponsoring organisations, and to develop and/or maintain relationships with stakeholders beyond their immediate network.

2.4.2. Relationship with departmental CSAs and Ministers

CSAs play an important role in the science advisory ecosystem in government. Their function and responsibilities have been outlined elsewhere [\[footnote 5\]](#). SACs should make every effort to be engaged with CSAs and the wider science community operating across government to keep abreast of developments.

SAC Chairs with Ministerial departmental sponsors should have regular access to both the departmental CSA and Ministers to build good working relationships.

While there is no ‘standard’ model, Chairs may wish to meet the departmental CSA routinely, with the opportunity for ad hoc access, should issues require discussion or clarification. If the SAC does not report to the CSA, it will still need to work with the CSA to determine a work programme and priorities.

The Chair should also meet the relevant Ministers occasionally, as required, to discuss progress on the SAC’s agenda and planned future work. Depending upon the profile and sensitivity of the SAC remit to the sponsoring organisation, additional ad hoc contact should also be facilitated, as necessary.

Ministers, and Chairs of a non-Ministerial Department as appropriate may have a standing invitation to SAC meetings as observers, while CSA may have a standing invitation either as observers or in their role as CSAs. This is to facilitate engagement with the SAC, but should not influence the independence of a SAC. Meeting minutes should be recorded and published, detailing the contribution of Ministers to discussions. This is to ensure public trust that SACs can maintain close relationships with their government customers, whilst protecting the scientific process from real or perceived political influence.

Members should be made aware of the role of departmental representatives and other officials and advisers having contact with SACs and/or attending meetings as observers (or in any other capacity). Such officials should always respect the SAC’s independence.

2.4.3. Relationships with other SACs

SACs should build links to the wider science system outside of their sponsoring organisations, if appropriate, and network with other organisations’ CSAs and their teams who work in related areas.

Chairs, with support from the secretariat and sponsoring organisations, should keep members informed of the existence of any other relevant SACs and have opportunities to exchange information with them. This might involve giving other SACs advance notice of significant announcements, copying relevant documents, or sharing other relevant documents for discussion. Where appropriate, SACs should develop contacts with relevant international committees.

Where a SAC’s work is closely related to that of another advisory committee, the respective remits should be clarified in their ToR documents. Where there is considerable and/or ongoing overlap between committee remits, the sponsoring organisations and SACs should set out a sensible division of responsibilities to avoid confusion and maximise effectiveness.

Where SAC Chairs have agreed to co-ordinate their work, they may wish to share meeting agendas and minutes on an ongoing basis to facilitate engagement and collaboration and to avoid duplication. There may be a system of cross-representation whereby each SAC includes a member of the other, to develop closer links and avoid inconsistencies of approach in related fields.

2.4.4. Stakeholder engagement with the academic community

Relevant bodies (for example UK Research and Innovation ([UKRI](#)) (<https://www.ukri.org/about-us/>) and University Policy Engagement Network ([UPEN](#)) (<https://www.upen.ac.uk/>) should be engaged by SACs where appropriate, so that all stakeholders are kept abreast of related developments. Activities may include observing meetings, participating in workshops, peer reviewing reports (interim and final drafts), and engaging in external activities.

Members can also act as knowledge brokers and seek opportunities to link individuals from their networks, at any career level, with officials whose work may benefit from the connection.

Where members have contacts with specific expertise relevant to SAC activity, consideration can be given to engaging them on a short-term basis on projects or sub-groups, subject to appropriate procurement or appointment processes.

SACs should have diversity and inclusion at the forefront of all of their stakeholder engagement activities. Reaching beyond existing networks may achieve greater diversity of expertise and views in the development of advice.

2.4.5. Stakeholder engagement beyond the academic community

SACs should consider the potential for experts beyond the academic community to inform their work or contextualise their advice. Experts engaging with or partaking in a SAC can come from industry or the third sector, both to bring in their perspectives and to offer knowledge and expertise.

Where they have relevant expertise, SACs may choose to invite an official from a Public Sector Research Establishment (PSRE) to attend meetings to provide expert opinion or information, or to speak to inform a particular agenda item; although they would not normally be appointed as members of SACs (as it may lead to a conflict of interest or compromise the perceived independence of the SAC) nor take part in SAC decision-making. PSRE officials may offer a valuable perspective as they bridge the gap between academia and industry.

Chairs and secretariats should take care in reporting the contributions of different stakeholders, such as those from the private sector, to each stage of work. SACs should seek to utilise relevant expertise whilst protecting their independence from private interests. The sponsoring organisation's public bodies team can be asked for advice on handling any potential conflicts with commercial interests when bringing in industry representatives.

2.5. Setting up a Scientific Advisory Council or Committee

Discussions on the need or role for a new SAC should include consideration of the wider science system in which it would operate. Further considerations prior to establishing a new SAC are outlined in Annex B.

Where possible, any clarification of a SAC's role should take place before it begins its work. This should include the extent and ways in which the SAC's outputs will inform policy.

3. Roles and responsibilities of Chair and Members

This chapter at a glance:

- sets out requirements for members to declare potential conflicts of interest, the basis upon which they are appointed and guidance to follow in fulfilling their role
- provides guidance for the Chair who plays a significant role in SAC operations and outputs; it outlines their responsibilities in appointing the members, conducting meetings, and communicating the findings of the SAC

3.1. General

Chairs and members are expected to abide by the 'Seven Principles of Public Life' (sometimes referred to as the Nolan Principles, see Annex C), set out in the Cabinet Office guidance 'Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies' (2019)[\[footnote 6\]](#).

Chairs and members of SACs should ensure they understand why they are being appointed and in what capacity, the aims of the SAC and the role they are expected to play on the committee or council.

3.2. Declaration of interests of the Chair and members

Chairs and members must regularly provide the secretariat with a declaration of interests. Members should ask themselves whether the public would reasonably consider that the interest in question might influence them.

Chairs and members must declare any potential conflicts arising due to these interests in their application and must notify the secretariat of any changes promptly throughout the duration of their position. Secretariats should ensure declarations of interest are published on the SAC webpage on gov.uk and up to date.

Potential conflicts of interest which Chairs and members should declare include private financial or non-financial interests (or those of their close family members) which conflict or may be perceived to conflict with the SAC's duties. Examples include commercial interests (for example businesses owned, contracts awarded), research interests, positions on other SACs, previous provision of expert opinion or testimony, funding secured (past or present) and/or applied for, paid journalism or media activity (note that unpaid media activity in line with guidance outlined in section 6.7, which involves providing expertise in a personal capacity does not need to be included, but anything which goes beyond this should).

Members should withdraw from discussion of matters in which there may be an existing conflict of interest. Where this occurs, it should be reflected in the official record of the meeting.

3.3. Chair: role and responsibilities

The Chair (whether specialist or lay) is the point of contact between the SAC and the sponsoring organisations and plays an important role in SAC operations and outputs.

The workload associated with the position should be carefully considered when appointing the Chair.

For resilience purposes, SACs may want to consider appointing a Deputy Chair, particularly in the event of unavoidable absence of the Chair.

Chairs of SACs have a responsibility for:

- the operation and output of the SAC, including assessing the workload and ensuring that the volume of work does not compromise the rigour of discussion
- Chairs have a role in setting out clearly for their SAC the lines of responsibility, reporting structures; and who will commission reports and who will receive them
- ensuring that the full range of scientific opinion, including unorthodox and contrary scientific views are appropriately considered
- working with the sponsoring organisation to ensure that there is sufficient diversity of skills, expertise and experience within the SAC's membership to offer suitable challenge
- discussing and agreeing areas of expertise, skills and experience required in advance of appointments of members with the secretariat and the departmental CSA
- reporting any concerns regarding the levels of resourcing with the sponsoring organisations
- ensuring that any significant divergence of opinion among members is fully explored and discussed and if it cannot be reconciled is accurately reflected in the minutes and in any other communications with sponsoring organisations
- ensuring that every member of the SAC has the opportunity to be heard and that no view is ignored or overlooked, using, where appropriate, a structured process which ensures that all views are captured and explored
- reporting the SAC's advice to the sponsoring organisations including alerting them to new evidence likely to have an impact on current policy
- presenting SAC advice to the public or the media (unless other specific arrangements have been made)
- ensuring that a record of the SAC's work is maintained and is available to the sponsoring organisation, for the purposes of monitoring and evaluating the performance of the SAC
- acting as an active advocate for diversity and inclusion
- informing the sponsoring organisations about training that members need in order to fulfill their role
- ensuring performance of members is assessed

The Chair should have regular access to the departmental CSA and Ministers to build good working relations to maximise SAC effectiveness (see also section 2.4.2).

The Chair may wish to discuss setting up a standardised process to gain timely access to data for research, based on an agreed set of principles governing where and how access is granted. The Administrative Data Research UK ([ADR UK](https://www.adruk.org/)) (<https://www.adruk.org/>) project offers a potential way to access data. It seeks to maximise the potential of administrative data as a resource for research, by acquiring and curating data around prioritised policy themes and making it available to researchers in a secure way.

The SAC Chair and sponsoring organization should discuss what level of secretariat support is required.

3.4. Members: roles and responsibilities

Members should confirm before accepting an invitation to serve on a SAC that they are clear about the period of appointment and that they can fulfil the commitment required in terms of meeting attendance, SAC business and preparation for meetings. If SAC members hold other roles which may have an impact on how they conduct their SAC role (for example time commitments), they should declare it to the secretariat (see also sections 3.2 and 4.5.1) for more information on conflicts of interests).

Unless specifically stated otherwise, members of SACs are appointed as individuals to fulfil the role of the SAC, not as representatives of their particular profession, employer or interest group, and have a duty to act in the public interest. Members are appointed on a personal basis, even when they may be members of stakeholder groups. Where members declare an organisation's views rather than a personal view, they should make that clear at the time of declaring that view.

Where lay members are appointed to the SAC, the purpose and reason for their appointment should be made clear. The lay member should also understand the role that they are requested to fulfil within the remit of the SAC.

If additional clarification of members' roles is required, this can be done after they are appointed, but before they begin work. Any necessary changes must be agreed by the member, Chair and the sponsoring organisation.

Members should ensure that they understand the particular area of expertise that they have been appointed to the SAC to contribute but should also contribute to the general discussions of the SAC. Members with a particular expertise have a responsibility to make the SAC aware of the full range of opinion within the discipline.

A member's role on the SAC should not be limited by the expertise or perspective he or she was asked to bring to that committee or council. Members should regard themselves as free to question and comment on the information provided or the views expressed by any of the other members, notwithstanding that the views or information do not relate to their own area of expertise. If members believe the SAC's method of working is not rigorous or thorough enough, they should raise this initially with the Chair and subsequently the departmental CSA or other relevant senior official. They have the right to ask that any remaining concerns be put on the record.

All members should regard it as part of their role to:

- ensure the sponsoring organisation and their Ministers (or senior officials as appropriate) receive the highest quality, timely advice
- consider whether the questions on which the SAC offers advice are those which are of interest to (and understandable by) the public and other interested parties outside the scientific community
- examine and challenge if necessary, the assumptions on which scientific advice is formulated and ask for explanations of any scientific terms and concepts which are not clear
- ensure that the SAC can consider contrary scientific views and where appropriate the concerns and values of stakeholders before a decision is taken

All members should share in the general responsibility to consider the wider context in which their expertise is deployed.

Where non-expert lay members are represented within the SAC (see also section 5.2), their role may vary depending on the remit of the SAC to which they have been appointed. They may act as a critical friend, contribute experience from outside the professional membership, or provide an external non-expert perspective to the decision-making process. They may also help to quality assure the SAC's outputs.

4. Roles and responsibilities of the secretariat

This chapter at a glance:

- the secretariat provides impartial support to the SAC by drafting, reviewing, maintaining and updating documents required by the SAC
- the secretariat is responsible for ensuring that the proceedings of the SAC are well documented so that there is a clear audit trail showing how the SAC reached its decisions
- it is common practice for the secretariat to be drawn from the sponsoring organisation

4.1. Impartial support

The primary function of the secretariat is to provide impartial support to the SAC by drafting, reviewing, maintaining and updating documents required by the SAC and its stakeholders, including the ToR, Ways of Working, meeting minutes, SAC outputs and any other information required of the SAC by the sponsoring organisations (or vice versa). Other responsibilities are outlined from section 4.3 below.

The requirement for impartial support is paramount and should be clearly communicated to the secretariat. The secretariat should guard against introducing bias during the preparation of papers, during meetings, or in the reporting of the SAC's deliberations, and should always respect the SAC's independent role.

4.2. Documentation

The secretariat is responsible for ensuring the following documentation is maintained.

Terms of Reference (see Annex D). Annex D provides a checklist of what a SAC's ToR may cover. A SAC's role may change over time, so there should be periodic reconsideration of the ToR, which should be revised if necessary. Secretariats should create periodic opportunities, suggested at a minimum every three years, for members to discuss the SAC's role, activities and resources, and review these for consistency with the formal ToR. Any proposed revisions should be discussed with the Chair and members of the SAC, the secretariat, and any organisation to which it reports. If a Minister has appointed the members, then they might also be consulted. Where a SAC's work is closely related to that of another advisory committee, their respective revised remits should be clarified in writing.

Ways of Working document (see Annex E). A WoW document sets out general approaches and protocols for SAC work, as indicated in the ToR. This is maintained by the secretariat and shared with the Chair and members. This is usually an internal document. Annex E provides a checklist of potential areas a WoW document may cover.

Membership record. The secretariat of the SAC should maintain a record of membership that sets out the core skills, expertise and experience required to deliver the SAC's function. The purpose of the record should be to ensure a balance of expertise. The membership record should be regularly reviewed by SACs and their sponsoring organisations in light of both current and anticipated future work programmes. Where the range of expertise required for a SAC changes, in accordance with section 5.1, the secretariat should amend the membership record to reflect any necessary changes.

Recruitment and induction documents.

Role or job description and person specification (see section 4.5.1).

Induction pack (see section 4.5.4).

Procedural rules and/or protocols.

Handling information safely and securely (see section 4.5.2).

Conflicts of interest (see section 4.5.1).

Dealing with a national emergency (see section 4.5.5).

4.3. Documenting proceedings

The secretariat is also responsible for ensuring that the proceedings of the SAC are well documented in sufficient detail and within a reasonable period after a meeting so that there is a clear audit trail showing how the SAC reached its decisions (see also section 6.3).

The secretariat is responsible for preparing minutes in accordance with the SAC's set format (see also section 6.3). Where discussions are aimed at settling the text of a document to be published, and the discussion continues over several meetings, a version history of the draft document should be annexed to the minutes (in the secretariat's records) to ensure a full record of the SAC's deliberations on the text. Sensitive information may be placed in a non-disclosed annex.

The secretariat should support the SAC in preparing all other outputs (for example reports) in an accessible format, using plain language as much as possible. Where issues require technical discussion, consideration should be given to separate, and additional, production of a ‘lay summary’ to ensure all matters are accessible to all interested parties regardless of specialist knowledge.

The secretariat should liaise with, and where necessary support, the sponsoring organisation’s communications team to ensure obligations relating to publication of outputs and supporting documentation as set out in section 6.3 are fulfilled.

The secretariat should also liaise with relevant parties to ensure that the publication of SAC outputs involving bringing into the public domain previously un-published research does not hinder formal publication elsewhere (see section 6.5).

4.4. Relationship with sponsoring organisations and stakeholders

SAC secretariats need competence in analysis, communications and relationship management, in order to facilitate liaison and build trust between the SAC and officials. Secretariats should support SACs in framing advice to ensure that it lands appropriately with decision makers and has impact.

The secretariat should include, or have access to, people with relevant technical and/or scientific expertise. Where suitably skilled staff are not available from within a department it should consider offering secondments to suitably qualified and/or skilled people from other government departments or from outside government.

The secretariat should, as far as it is possible, identify appropriate scientific and policy information held by the sponsors relevant to its remit, and make it available to the SAC as required via regular briefing meetings with the Chair and members. The secretariat should work through senior departmental officials to ensure that SACs can access the key information they need to undertake their role effectively; which may require associated security clearance for SAC members.

Consideration should be given to the necessary processes to ensure that the secretariat is able to effectively engage with science and policy leads to this end. Where information is withheld from the SAC, the secretariat should inform the Chair and provide the rationale for this decision.

The common practice for the secretariat to be drawn from the sponsoring organisations supports a two-way channel of communication between them and the SAC. The secretariat should therefore also inform relevant staff in the sponsoring organisations of the nature of SAC discussions.

The secretariat should regularly communicate the role of the SAC within the sponsoring organisation and facilitate engagement between the committee or council and interested officials with policy remits relevant to the SAC’s activities.

The secretariat should ensure that the balance between officials and members is kept within reasonable limits in any SAC meetings.

When communicating the role or outputs of the SAC to the media, the secretariat should ensure that the Chair and members are aware of relevant guidance within their

WoW document (see Annex E). The secretariat may wish to contact their sponsor's or GOS's communications team to inform their SAC's rules for media engagement (see section 6.7).

The secretariat must not be constrained by normal departmental interests and needs to be free to act independently in supporting the SAC. The secretariat should notify the Chair and members of any emerging issues of concern to the sponsoring organisation to inform the SAC's deliberations.

Where the secretariat does not support the SAC full time, care must be taken to be clear in what role they are operating, flagging potential conflicts of interest on SAC records if necessary.

4.5. Other responsibilities

4.5.1. Declaration of interests

Secretariats should draw up procedural rules for handling conflicts of interest that reflect government guidance. These can be found in the Code of Conduct for Board Members [\[footnote 7\]](#) and the Governance Code for Public Appointments [\[footnote 8\]](#). See Annex G for relevant extracts.

4.5.2. Handling information

The secretariat should draw up appropriate procedures, approved by both the sponsoring organisations and the SAC, for handling information safely and securely, compliant with the requirements of any relevant legislation. These procedures must be communicated to third parties (see also section 7.3).

4.5.3. Appointments

The secretariat should discuss and document areas of expertise, skills and experience required in advance of appointments with the Chair and departmental CSA (or relevant senior official for non-departmental sponsors). These should be reflected in the person specifications and be consistent with the SAC's ToR.

The role description and person specification should be prepared by the secretariat and should set out the personal qualities, skills, competencies, and where applicable, professional qualifications sought. This should be discussed and agreed with the Chair, sponsoring official, CSA or the appointing Minister if applicable.

4.5.4. Recruitment and induction

The secretariat should provide the Chair and members joining SAC's for the first time with an induction, including the opportunity to undertake any identified training (for example on the government policy process) and mentoring support. Members should be required to read, as a minimum, the CoPSAC, the SAC's ToR and WoW document, and any other reading required by the sponsoring organisations. See Annex F. All required reading should be assembled within a single induction pack. This should be provided to new members prior to the commencement of any work. Members should

discuss the content of the induction pack with the secretariat or Chair if they have any concerns and/or require clarifications.

The secretariat should ensure that members of the SAC have the appropriate security clearance if this is required to carry out the work of the SAC. The secretariat should seek guidance from policy leads in the sponsoring departments as to the extent of security clearance necessary.

4.5.5 Dealing with a national emergency

The secretariat should maintain a protocol outlining how the SAC will operate if they are called upon to advise in relation to a national emergency. This should be discussed with the Chair, members and sponsoring organisations (see section 6.9).

5. Recruitment, remuneration, liability and indemnity of members

This chapter at a glance:

- the Chair, secretariat and departmental CSA should agree the areas of expertise, skills and experience required in advance of appointments
- Chairs and sponsoring organisations must be active advocates for diversity. There must be no discrimination based on protected characteristics in the recruitment process
- members should observe The Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies and the 12 Principles of Governance for all Public Body Non-Executive Directors when dealing with sensitive information

5.1. General

The SAC Chair, secretariat and departmental CSA (or relevant senior official for non-departmental sponsors) should discuss and agree areas of expertise, skills and experience required in advance of appointments. These should be reflected in the person specifications and be consistent with the SAC's ToR.

There should be a balance of expertise across the membership as appropriate to the function of the SAC. The SAC may wish to consider issues of coverage for each area of importance to the SAC should an expert not be available for any reason.

In some instances, the range of expertise (subject matter, end-user or other) required for a particular SAC may not become obvious until it has begun its work. This may also change over time and therefore it may be useful to have the option of quick recruitment for identified gaps. In other cases, it might be decided to have early curtailment of membership if the SAC no longer requires the contribution of a member. In such cases the SAC should advise the sponsoring organisations of any instances identified and discuss how best to address them, amending the membership record accordingly .

5.2. Recruitment

The role description and person specification should be prepared by the secretariat and should set out the personal qualities, skills, competencies, and where applicable, professional qualifications sought. This should be discussed and agreed with the Chair, and the appointing Minister if applicable. SAC members may come from academia, industry, third sector or other relevant areas.

The SAC should consider representation from non-expert lay members, who may contribute to the work of the SAC through their understanding of the broader context of the SAC's work, or by representing the broader community potentially affected by their advice. The Chair may be such a non-expert.

In the case of those SACs included in the Public Appointments Order in Council [\[footnote 9\]](#), appointments made by Ministers must be made in accordance with the Governance Code on Public Appointments [\[footnote 10\]](#). Sponsoring departments should contact their departmental appointments team who will be able to advise on the correct appointment process to follow.

For appointments to SACs not included in the Public Appointments Order in Council, there is an assumption, subject to any appointment process prescribed in any relevant legislation or framework document, that they will be made through an open and fair process and follow public law principles.

Chairs and sponsoring organisations should be active advocates for diversity. There must be no discrimination in relation to [protected characteristics](#) (<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>) or social background. During recruitment, sponsoring organisations should endeavour to make the SAC more representative and should seek to achieve a diverse membership referring to Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) principles. When advertising positions, SACs should choose media that will be seen by a broad and diverse talent pool, particularly those from underrepresented groups who have the necessary skills and expertise. Posts should be advertised using inclusive language and descriptions.

Every effort should be made to increase the representation of minority groups and SACs should aim for half of members to be women. Care should be taken to ensure that the way in which interviewing is conducted, and the practical arrangements for members, will not have the effect of precluding or deterring applicants from underrepresented groups.

When agreeing the appointment of members and developing a job description, the minimum and maximum term for membership (including any reappointment) should be specified. SACs included in the Public Appointments Order in Council should refer to the Governance Code and contact their departmental appointments team when stipulating the minimum and maximum term for membership. Similarly, a minimum and maximum term for membership should be determined by the sponsoring organisations of SACs not subject to the Governance Code. The sponsoring organisations, in consultation with the Chair, should actively plan for succession with membership input to ensure quoracy. Wherever possible, SACs should arrange for regular review of members performance with the sponsoring organisation. This review could have a bearing on the length of appointment.

There should be no automatic presumption of reappointment within SACs. Recruitment assessment panels, established by the sponsoring organisation, should consider several factors before recommending the reappointment of Chairs and members,

including but not limited to, a satisfactory performance appraisal, the diversity of the current committee or council and its balance of skills and experience.

Where a SAC lacks the relevant expertise for a particular time-bound project or task (as opposed to their on-going work), the SAC itself can co-opt appropriate experts or ex-officio government officials (for example CSAs) or set up a sub-group of the SAC to include such people on an ad-hoc, time-limited basis. In such cases the appointment and onboarding process can be simplified to reflect the temporary nature of the roles. This approach should only be used for short-term exercises in direct support of SAC business.

Generally, government officials should not be appointed as members of SACs as it may lead to a conflict of interest and could compromise the perceived independence of the SAC. SACs may invite officials to provide expert opinion or information, to speak to inform a particular agenda item; or to join as non-participating observers.

When there is a need to recruit a new Chair or members, details of the role should be advertised through usual civil service recruitment procedures for the sponsoring department and circulated to the full range of stakeholders. Consideration should also be given to how the advert can be best circulated to reach a broad and diverse talent pool. Appointments should be made based on the match to the person specification agreed. Appointees are members in their own right and should not serve as representatives of stakeholder organisations. Whilst recognising that suitably qualified professionals are unlikely to be entirely unconnected or without interest in the area covered by the SAC, they should be professionally impartial in their activity as a member (see also section 3.1).

5.3. Induction of members

Please refer to section 4.5.4 which provides details on the induction of members.

5.4. Remuneration and expenses

Sponsoring organisations are responsible for determining whether remuneration, including for meeting preparation, should be paid to members of SACs and the level at which any remuneration (fees or honoraria) is set. Relevant remuneration guidance of the sponsoring organisation should be distributed to members.

Members are entitled to fair and prompt repayment of legitimate expenses, provided that they follow the rules governing the submission of claims and their timing. Departments and SACs should discuss and formally agree what can legitimately be claimed for reimbursement including travel, overnight accommodation, subsistence, childcare, and loss of earnings.

5.5. Liability and indemnity

The Cabinet Office's Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies [\[footnote 11\]](#), which applies to all non-executive members on the boards of government departments, non-Ministerial departments, executive agencies, non-departmental public bodies and national public corporations, states that: "Board members who misuse information gained by virtue of their position may be liable for breach of confidence under common

law or may commit a criminal offence under insider dealing legislation.” The Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies should be observed alongside the 12 Principles of Governance for all Public Body Non-Executive Directors [\[footnote 12\]](#).

Civil liability can arise from negligent scientific advice. Guidance from the Government Office for Science sets out the potential for liability in negligence of government scientific advisers arising from advice given by them [\[footnote 13\]](#). This relates to individuals providing advice to the government, regardless of whether they are employed by the government.

SACs secretariat should liaise with their sponsoring department’s Public Bodies Team or the Public Appointments Team in order to ensure that appropriate indemnity and support for members is in place from the moment of appointment. The department should record the ways in which it will ensure indemnity for members and the support that will be available to them in the Ways of Working document.

6. Operations and working practices

This chapter at a glance:

- SACs should be guided by the principles of transparency and openness when publishing documents and communicating with the public
- this includes the publication of advice, background information, applications or cases, the ToR and WoW documents, research commissioned by the SAC, and the reporting of risk, uncertainty and dissenting views within the SAC
- SACs should provide objective advice that is independent of government and is written in clear language

6.1. Independence and objectivity

The Principles of Scientific Advice to Government [\[footnote 14\]](#) outline the importance of independence within SAC operations and interactions. SACs should play a role in setting their own agenda as well as responding to their sponsors, reflecting the remit of the SAC and the relevance of their science advice to the organisation. Whether acting proactively or reactively, SACs should expect to operate free of influence from the sponsor department officials or Ministers and remain clear that their function is wider than simply providing evidence to support the development of departmental policy.

Appointees are members in their own right and should not serve as representatives of stakeholder organisations. Whilst recognising that suitably qualified professionals are unlikely to be entirely unconnected or without interest in the area covered by the SAC, they should be professionally impartial in their activity as a member (see section 3.2).

6.2. Transparency and openness

As the Principles note, SACs should operate from a presumption of transparency and openness. The proceedings of the SAC should be open as is compatible with the requirements of relevant legislation (see section 7.3). The SAC should aim to maintain high levels of transparency, for example by timely publication of papers, minutes and other outputs from meetings. The Chair of the SAC should bear in mind the need to

ensure that members are able to speak fully and frankly at meetings so as not to impede debate.

SACs may also choose to hold meetings in public as a way to support transparency and engagement or may consider inviting independent observers to join meetings, such as representatives from devolved administrations, industry, consumer groups or the ‘third sector’ where appropriate.

Decisions on the precise process for achieving the required level of openness will vary between committees but the rationale should be recorded.

In such cases decisions on the release of papers and proceedings of meetings should be guided by the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act.

SACs should adhere to Open Science principles across the entire research lifecycle wherever possible, and pre-register any research protocols and/or analysis plans on relevant platforms (for example Open Science Framework[\[footnote 15\]](#)).

6.3. Publication

In line with the principles of transparency and openness, SACs should have a gov.uk[\[footnote 16\]](#) webpage, usually on, or linked to, their sponsoring organisation’s website, to communicate with the public, outline their ToR, declare Chairs and members’ conflicts of interests, publish reports and provide contact details. Alternative methods of communicating with the public should be considered, including public consultation, dialogue with interested parties and inviting outside experts to attend meetings. Some SACs may publish on stand-alone websites but should keep abreast of government policy on this. Further advice can be sought from the sponsoring organisation’s communications directorate.

All documents published on new or existing public sector websites must meet accessibility standards so that they can be used and accessed by as many people as possible[\[footnote 17\]](#)[\[footnote 18\]](#). Unless exempt, SACs should publish an accessibility statement and regularly review the accessibility of digital communication platforms, ensuring that new features will work on assistive technologies. Any problems identified should be addressed promptly. Documents should have well-structured content and working links. Images and videos must be accessible too. Further guidance may be sought from the local government digital network[\[footnote 19\]](#) and the government accessibility community[\[footnote 20\]](#).

The SAC should establish a policy on which documents are to be published based on principles of openness and transparency. Subject to the paragraphs below, all SACs are expected to publish, as a minimum, programmes of work, meeting agendas, minutes, final advice (where the SAC Chair and members deem it appropriate) and an annual report. Where final advice is not published, the SAC should record the reasons for this. Unless there are specific reasons to the contrary, they should also publish supporting papers. Openness from the outset regarding risks and concerns can sometimes prevent difficult situations arising later on in a SAC’s work.

Where possible, the agenda and meeting papers should be made available to the public in good time prior to each open meeting. Minutes should be recorded and, once they are agreed, published unless there is an exemption.

SACs should publish minutes of their meetings which accurately reflect the proceedings of the SAC. There should be a set format for the minutes. Minutes will generally be written in an unattributable form. They should also be written in terms that make it easy for a member of the public to understand the process by which a decision has been reached. Sensitive information may be placed in a non-disclosed annex. The SAC should generally approve meeting minutes at the next related meeting and publish the final version as soon as possible thereafter. Where meetings are infrequent, SACs should have procedures to ensure the minutes can be agreed and published within three months of a meeting.

To ensure openness and transparency SACs should seek to keep the public and stakeholders informed as they develop advice. Committees and councils should consider publishing interim working papers where this would not compromise their process. All substantive and significant papers should be published as soon as possible once advice has been issued, subject to exemption from disclosure under Freedom of Information legislation.

Advice should normally be made public by the SAC at the time it is given to the sponsoring organisations, or as soon as is reasonably practicable thereafter. Where there are circumstances which justify giving advice on a non-disclosed basis, SACs should consider publishing the advice as soon as is possible, consistent with the reasons for non-disclosure. Reasons for non-disclosure should be consistent with the principles of Freedom of Information legislation.

SACs should publish their future programme of work [\[footnote 21\]](#). They should aim to publish an annual report of their activities. Good practice is to publish annual reports within three months of the end of the year, subject to the nature of the SAC's remit and agreement with the sponsoring organisation. The report should contain details of membership, members' interests, ToR and a financial statement including fee payments to members. Where appropriate, these details can be provided in the report via a link to the website where this information is published.

The SAC should also aim to publish stand-alone reports on specific topics. Published reports should record the sources of information used. Reports may include details of where requests for information were refused, and the grounds for refusal.

The SAC should ensure that its reports list the names of the people or bodies who were invited to give evidence, those who gave evidence and record any declarations of interest. Where possible it should also note authorship for all reports.

Where there is a need to convey advice as quickly as possible, the SAC should have a procedure for early release. For example, the Chair could release an interim statement in a press notice shortly after a meeting, but this should not be allowed to undermine the need for clear communication, awareness and understanding of intentions by both SAC and sponsoring organisation.

SACs should draw the attention of key stakeholders to forthcoming publications [\[footnote 22\]](#) and consider supplementing website publication by circulating a copy of outputs to relevant stakeholders via email or using other communication platforms.

When decisions are taken to delay the release of information, (for example to allow proper analysis, or when dealing with material subject to time-limited non-disclosure), the SAC should also agree realistic deadlines for public reporting.

6.4. Advice

A SAC's advice should be in writing and should be objective and independent of government. Where a situation is urgent, oral advice may be provided but this should be followed up by written communication.

Advice should be communicated in language that can be understood by a member of the public. It should explain the reasoning on which the advice is based, make clear what risk management principles, if any, are being applied, include assumptions underlying the advice and identify the nature and extent of any uncertainty (see section 6.12).

In situations of uncertainty, SACs may offer a range of options or interpretations to their sponsoring organisations. If so, they should distinguish between options which are alternative interpretations of the scientific evidence, those which relate to uncertainty in the evidence itself, and options which involve other factors such as social, ethical or economic considerations.

SAC reports and advice should indicate where, in forming a view, the committee or council has relied on any external advice or information provided by others which the SAC has not reviewed.

6.5. Background information

To help provide a full appreciation of its advice and decisions, the SAC should, where appropriate, facilitate public access to documents or information used in the formulation of its advice.

Where documents are already in the public domain it is sufficient for the committee or council to identify the source for the documents concerned (typically a website address). SACs are not under any obligation to provide 'lay' summaries of material it did not itself originate.

Where the SAC has relied on previously unpublished background papers, a decision will need to be made as to whether to request publication of the papers, and consideration given as to whether any of them should be exempt from disclosure under Freedom of Information legislation. The SAC's obligation to provide information could be discharged either by posting the documents on the committee's or council's website, or by allowing enquirers access to the documents concerned.

Where a SAC's disclosure of information would involve bringing into the public domain previously unpublished research, this could hinder formal publication elsewhere. If so, steps should be taken to address this (such as parallel publication).

6.6. Publication of applications or cases

SACs which advise on cases referring to individuals or entities should consider whether to publish information regarding those cases on their websites, so that stakeholders and interested parties can comment in advance of decisions being taken. Assessment should be made of the balance between transparency and public accountability of the decisions being made and the privacy of individuals or entities whose cases are being

considered. Confidential details of cases must be protected, but due consideration should be given to the sensitivity of ‘fact of’ (rather than ‘detail of’) information.

6.7. Communication with the media

The Chair will usually act as SAC spokesperson in media engagement and when responding to requests for media statements regarding the SAC’s advice and proceedings. There may be cases, however, where the Chair is unavailable, or others are better placed. Depending on circumstances, alternative options include departmental or independent press officers, other SAC members or a relevant Minister. Consideration will need to be given to the potential impact of declared interests, costs, and the amount of time such a role would take. The SAC should be made aware of Chairs/members giving interviews on topics related to SAC operations or outputs where possible.

The sponsoring organisation can provide media training to SAC Chairs and members where needed. It should be a mandatory requirement for Chairs who act as the main SAC spokesperson.

Chairs and members may be invited to speak to the media independent of their committee or council and it is their choice to accept or reject such an offer. When speaking in a personal capacity, this should be highlighted at the beginning of any interview and individuals must not comment on SAC operations, outputs and any confidential discussion that might take place. Secretariats and members may contact the departmental communications team for guidance on setting rules of media engagement.

Social media is a public forum and therefore the same considerations apply. Where any personal social media accounts used by Chairs or members make reference to their role within a SAC, they should ensure that it is clear in what capacity they are communicating. Social media biographies should include an explicit line which makes clear that all views communicated via social media are the account holder’s own.

While it is often appropriate for a SAC to use its sponsoring organisation’s press office for advice and support, where there are issues of real or perceived independence, SACs should consider access to independent press advice. When a SAC plans to engage the media independently, they should ensure that they liaise with the sponsoring organisation in advance.

6.8. Public consultation

Public consultations should be conducted in line with the government’s Code of Practice on Consultation (see Annex H). Consultations will generally be designed to enable the SAC to reach a view on the advice it should offer.

Any consultation on policy options will generally be for the sponsoring organisation to conduct. A SAC may however wish to advise government on where it thinks public consultation on policy might be necessary.

6.9. Documentation

6.9.1. Terms of Reference

Regardless of a SAC's Cabinet Office classification [footnote 23] it is vital that they publish a ToR for the sake of transparency and accountability. Information on what may be included in a ToR is set out in Annex D.

The ToR for most SACs are set by the sponsoring organisations. It is that organisation's responsibility to ensure that a SAC's ToR and WoW documents are clear and made in accordance with public law principles. The SAC is responsible for raising any issues they may have regarding their ToR with their sponsoring organisation. The ToR for the SAC will be determined by its role and function and how it will relate and report to the sponsoring organisation. The basis for the existence of the SAC, and the ToR followed, should be regularly reviewed in order to ensure that the SAC maintains relevance, impetus and focus and that the ToR and membership continue to meet the sponsor's needs.

A SAC's ToR may have been set out in statute or be otherwise difficult to change or be so broad as to leave scope for interpretation. In addition, SAC's roles tend to evolve over time. Members may be asked to offer advice on new developments not foreseen when the ToR were set out. Secretariats should create periodic opportunities, suggested at a minimum every three years, for members to discuss the SAC's role, activities and resources, and review these for consistency with the formal ToR. Any proposed revisions should be discussed with the Chair and members of the SAC, the secretariat, and any organisation to which it reports. If a Minister has appointed the members, then they might also be consulted. Where a SAC's work is closely related to that of another advisory committee, their respective revised remits should be clarified in writing.

6.9.2. Ways of working

A WoW document (see Annex E) should reference the SAC's guiding principles or documents (including the CoPSAC), any legislation to which it is subject, and outline how the SAC adheres to its governing documents in practice. The ToR and Ways of Working document should be discussed and reviewed with the SAC's sponsoring organisations, Chair, and members on an ongoing basis and at a minimum once a year.

6.10. Evidence and research

As a part of their role, SAC review, and sometimes commission, scientific research, and offer independent expert judgement, including highlighting where evidence is missing and where uncertainty or disagreement exists. SACs may be required to provide advice on the state of current knowledge, the application of information to specific issues, or both. Depending on their remit, a SAC may have to frame their advice to take account of social and ethical issues and public and stakeholder concerns.

SACs should have processes in place to enable the identification of relevant available research in the SAC's area. Where SACs feel that necessary information is lacking, they should ask that research be commissioned. Where a SAC's research is commissioned through its sponsoring organisation, the relevant sponsor's procurement rules and procedures should apply.

When SACs commission new research, they should adhere to Open Science principles across the entire research lifecycle wherever possible and it is vital that protocols and analysis plans are developed and published in advance of any study being started; for example by pre-registering on relevant platforms (such as Open Science Framework). Open Science principles are about increasing the rigour, accountability and reproducibility of research, and working to promote inclusion, collaboration and information-sharing. In particular, increasing inclusivity and the diversity of those conducting or contributing to research will bring in more varied perspectives, leading to stronger, more relevant, research outcomes. Embracing these principles will reduce bias, improve transparency and foster greater public confidence in any work that SACs commission.

In general, any new work required by the SAC on its own behalf should be commissioned in the name of the SAC, and not on behalf of individual members or associates of members on the committee or council. The results of research commissioned by the SAC should be published (unless there are security or other reasons which prevent this, which must be documented), including literature reviews. When such publication takes place, the SAC should be acknowledged as the source of the work.

SACs must be able to assess or otherwise satisfy themselves as to the reliability of any research quoted or used in their decision-making process. The researchers' consent should be sought for external peer review of unpublished research.

The SAC should have mechanisms for reviewing previously offered advice in the light of new findings, and for submitting fresh advice if necessary. In its reports it should indicate what new information would prompt review, or would further reduce the risk or uncertainty, if it is appropriate.

6.11. Horizon scanning and futures

In order to plan for SACs' future skills requirements and to aid succession planning, SACs may wish to liaise with relevant horizon scanning expertise (such as the sponsoring organisation's Horizon Scanning team, GOS Futures, Foresight and Horizon Scanning [\[footnote 24\]](#) programme) to develop a rolling 3 to 5 year plan, or projection, of anticipated skills requirements.

SACs may wish to draw on, or contribute to, relevant horizon scanning resources in order to provide timely advice. SACs should keep under review potential future threats, opportunities and key developments in their particular areas of responsibility.

6.12. Reporting of risk and uncertainty

SACs should have a transparent and structured framework to examine, debate and explain the nature of the risk where relevant. This should clearly set out what the risk relates to (for example, scientific analysis, non-adherence to advice et. cetera). SACs should decide what form their risk evaluation and communication should take, and the chosen procedure should be documented. Whenever their work involves risk evaluation, SACs should carefully consider the nature and scale of the problem, what precision of estimates is appropriate or realistic, in terms of costs, resources and time.

Where a SAC is asked to provide options on how to manage risk, they should follow a formal structure based on recognised principles of risk evaluation and communication. Where these skills are not available within the SAC's membership, they should be sought from suitable individuals or groups.

Although it is important that decisions are based on the quantity, quality and generalisability of available evidence, sometimes a decision must be taken when there are gaps in the knowledge base and uncertainty exists. Where this is the case, the SAC should use its judgement to decide what it is best to recommend, if anything, based on expert judgement and experience of advising on similar issues in the past. The SAC should ensure that gaps in data and knowledge are carefully recorded.

SACs should use the most appropriate method of reporting outcomes that takes account of the level and type of uncertainty involved. Where practical and verifiable, risk should be reported in terms of the likelihood and consequences of the event occurring. Sources of data should be quoted and the extent of uncertainties in the scientific analysis, and any degree of auditing, described.

When communicating risk to the public, SACs should follow professional guidance on the communication of risk. When deemed necessary, SACs should seek advice from individuals or groups with recognised expertise on risk communication. Risk evaluation should be objective and not affected by considerations around public scrutiny.

6.13. Dealing with dissenting views

SACs should not seek unanimity at the risk of failing to recognise different views on a subject. These might be recorded as a range of views, possibly published as an appendix to the main report. However, any significant diversity of opinion among members and the reasons for it should be accurately reflected in the report.

Whilst achieving consensus should be the objective, where this is not possible the record should include the majority and minority positions, explaining the differences and reasons for them and residual uncertainties. It is not necessary to name those holding majority or minority positions unless the individuals holding those positions so request.

Once a position (or major or minor positions) is established by the SAC and conveyed to the secretariat and department, members should support that decision and recognise their responsibility not to undermine the authority of the committee or council.

6.14. Ethical issues

Where a SAC is offering advice on ethical considerations bearing on the scientific advice, the SAC should make explicit what processes or expertise it has drawn on in reaching its conclusions.

Members of SACs should be aware of, and encouraged to adopt and promote, the principles of the GOS 'Universal Ethical Code': Rigour, Respect and Responsibility (Annex I). Any research conducted or commissioned by the SAC must comply with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity [\[footnote 25\]](#). In particular, it is essential that there is transparency and open communication around research conducted or commissioned by SACs.

6.15. Peer review

A SAC's draft findings may benefit from peer review by a wider range of experts than those on the committee or council. Final publication of advice should be in sufficient detail to allow other experts to evaluate the SAC's judgement. Any peer review reports should be governed by the SAC's publication policy.

6.16. Drawing conclusions

SACs should agree on the mechanisms by which the committee or council is to reach its final position or advice. Members should understand when they are expected to reach a consensus on particular issues.

Open and frank discussion should be encouraged, and differences of interpretation and opinion should be impartially and unattributably recorded in meeting minutes. It is recognised that advice includes expert judgement in addition to objective or factual information, and wherever possible the degree of certainty and the rationale for judgements should also be recorded.

Where decisions are particularly significant, SACs may decide to seek views on preliminary drafts of its advice from relevant organisations, other parts of the scientific community or, in appropriate cases, a representative sample of members of the public. Where there is a written consultation, appropriate elements of the Cabinet Office's Consultation Principles (see Annex H) should be followed.

Whatever mechanism is used for agreeing the advice a SAC offers, it is essential that the minutes of the meeting clearly set out the results of the discussions.

6.17. Handling disagreements (with sponsoring department or Ministers)

There may be occasions when the sponsoring organisation draws conclusions and makes decisions that do not appear to reflect the advice provided by the SAC (see also sections 4.3, 6.3 and 6.4). The Principles of Scientific Advice to Government (Annex A) set out the appropriate relations and responsibilities in such an event. The sponsoring organisation should respect the independence of the SAC, and the SAC must bear in mind that policy decisions are based on a range of factors in addition to its own advice.

When differences of opinion arise, the SAC Chair should seek to discuss the decision with the sponsoring body's policy makers to ensure that the science advice has been considered and understood by the sponsoring body. If, after discussion, the Chair still has reservations about how science advice has been interpreted, resolution should be sought through engagement with the departmental CSA, or other agreed escalation route where the sponsoring organisation does not have a CSA. SACs and their sponsoring organisations may consider developing and publishing a protocol outlining how disagreements may be most appropriately handled in practice for their particular context. If issues are particularly complex or have a potentially high impact, the Permanent Secretary (or a similarly senior official) and the Government Chief Scientific Adviser (GCSA) may be involved in the resulting discussions.

Where differences remain and cannot be resolved, the Chair of the SAC should be able to explain the science advice and evidence openly, both privately and publicly. Both sides should endeavour to explain the rationale behind their views.

The sponsoring organisation's public bodies team can be asked for advice on handling any potential conflicts with commercial interests when bringing in industry representatives to provide advice.

6.18. Impact and evaluation

SACs should have mechanisms in place to enable them to measure and evaluate their outputs against their objectives. This might involve surveying or interviewing their government customers to learn if, how and why their advice was used.

6.19. Dealing with a national emergency

SACs should have a protocol outlining how they will work if they are called upon to advise in relation to a national emergency. This should set out how their structure, reporting lines and ToR may change. It should also set out how the SAC would take on and clear additional experts, if needed within a short timescale.

SACs should have an understanding of the risk areas that their sponsoring organisation owns in order to be prepared for any advice they may be required to give. They should also support the risk identification and analysis process.

SACs should discuss with their sponsoring organisation what additional resources and support would be available to Chairs and members during an emergency, which may include: media training, enhanced secretariat support, remuneration of experts, and IT and cyber security support. This should be proportionate to the nature, scale and length of the emergency.

SAC secretariats should also consider what additional support members may need to maintain their wellbeing during an emergency situation, particularly if the emergency has a high profile and the work is pressured. Employee Assistance Programmes may be available which can provide support and advice to SAC members.

Members may need additional guidance on dealing with the media during an emergency that is likely to attract interest. This should include what clearance they have to comment if they are approached.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies [\[footnote 26\]](#) (SAGE) provides advice to support government decision makers during emergencies when activated. It is not a scientific advisory committee or council in a formal sense. SAGE has no membership. Its participants are called upon depending on the nature of the emergency and the issues under consideration change from meeting to meeting. While alignment with the CoPSAC is sought as far as practical, several sections of the CoPSAC do not directly apply (although for some emergencies, SAGE may work with existing SACs which are covered by CoPSAC). SAGE's guiding documents are published [here](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/scientific-advisory-group-for-emergencies/about>).

In order to support government decision makers during emergencies, SACs should keep an up-to-date record of members' expertise, experience in government and

security clearances to enable suitable expertise to be identified in a timely manner.

7. Environmental, electoral and legal considerations

This chapter at a glance:

- SACs should consider the environmental impact of operations and outputs in all their working practices and review this on an ongoing basis
- SACs may continue to work and draft advice during an election period but should be aware that scientific advice could be politicised
- SACs must have procedures in place for handling information safely and securely that are compliant with the relevant legislation

7.1. Environmental impact

SACs should consider, in all of their working practices, the environmental impact of operations and outputs and review this on an on-going basis. Changing travel-related behaviours is most likely to have the greatest impact on the carbon footprint associated with a SAC. SACs should promote virtual or hybrid meetings wherever possible, taking into account the importance of the meeting and the quality of discussion. It should also be noted that hybrid meetings can enable greater diversity of meetings, permitting access for individuals who may otherwise be unable to attend. Where virtual or hybrid meetings are not possible or are likely to have a considerable negative impact on the quality of discussion and/or output, SACs should seek to minimise the environmental impact of in-person meetings. This may involve promoting paperless and plastic-free meetings and removing unsustainable foods from SAC-related meals. SACs should continue to engage with their sponsoring organisations to discuss how their policies (for example, travel expenses) align with the UK's 2050 Net Zero target.

7.2. Operations during an election period

During an election period, SACs may continue to work and draft advice. Chairs and members should be aware that scientific advice could be politicised during an election period, and government officials may be advised not to attend meetings. SACs should not publish advice nor seek to generate any publicity during this period.

As per the principles outlined in the Civil Service Code [\[footnote 27\]](#), and relevant Cabinet Office guidance [\[footnote 28\]](#), secretariats “must not engage in, or appear to engage in, party politics or be used for party ends. They should provide consistent factual information on request to candidates of all parties, as well as to organisations and members of the public and should in all instances avoid becoming involved or appearing to become involved, in a partisan way, in election issues.”

7.3. Knowledge and information management

The SAC must have procedures in place for handling information safely and securely. These procedures must be compliant with the requirements of any relevant legislation

(for example, the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and/or Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) legislation).

These procedures must be shared with any third parties, and the SAC must advise third parties on the potential impact of this legislation for them (for example making information available to meet a Freedom of Information (FOI) request).

SAC should have processes in place for creating documentation, where needed, to meet any relevant legislative requirements. SACs must consider time periods for retaining data and have processes in place to manage deletion. Where personal information is being held, Privacy Notices will need to be issued by the SAC. SACs should contact the relevant Data Protection Officer if they have any queries.

SACs may be subject to information legislation [\[footnote 29\]](#) and therefore under a statutory requirement to disclose certain information on request and to abide by commitments set out in a [Freedom of Information Publication Scheme](#) (<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-freedom-of-information/publication-scheme/?q=clarification>). Those that are not subject to Freedom of Information legislation are expected to abide by the spirit of Freedom of Information legislation. The guidance on openness and transparency in the CoPSAC is to be understood in this context.

SACs will need to assure themselves that they abide by the Data Protection Act 2018 [\[footnote 30\]](#) [\[footnote 31\]](#) and UK General Data Protection Regulations 2021. Further advice on the application of the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulations 2021 is available from the Information Commissioner's Office [\[footnote 32\]](#).

7.4. Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs)

A NDA, or confidentiality agreement, is a legal contract that sets out how you share information or ideas in confidence.

NDAs should not normally be required by SACs, if normal government protocols for handling classified material are adopted and professional standards of most academic institutions are followed. However, there may be certain circumstances where the Chair and sponsor organisation may agree to use NDAs on a case-by-case basis, although they should be seen as a measure of 'last resort'.

Circumstances for which NDAs may be considered include when a SAC is party to business critical and commercially sensitive information or information likely to effect public safety, particularly where SAC members are not otherwise subject to profession standards, as may be the case for lay members. Access to some governmental classified material will also be subject to additional government vetting procedures.

In cases where NDAs are used, the length of duration and conditions of their application and completion should be clearly specified. A register of the number of NDAs issued should be kept and published by the SAC secretariat.

Annexes

Annex A: Principles of Scientific Advice to Government

The Principles of Scientific Advice set out the rules of engagement between Government and those who provide independent scientific and engineering advice. They provide a foundation on which independent scientific advisers and government departments should base their operations and interactions. The Principles apply to Ministers and Government departments, all members of SACs (the membership of which often includes statisticians, social researchers and lay members) and other independent scientific and engineering advice to Government. They do not apply to employed advisers, departmental CSAs or other civil servants who provide scientific or analytical advice, as other codes of professional conduct apply.

Clear roles and responsibilities

- Government should respect and value the academic freedom, professional status and expertise of its independent scientific advisers
- Scientific advisers should respect the democratic mandate of the Government to take decisions based on a wide range of factors and recognise that science is only part of the evidence that Government must consider in developing policy
- Government and its scientific advisers should not act to undermine mutual trust
- Chairs of SACs have a particular responsibility to maintain open lines of communication with their sponsor department and its Ministers

Independence

- Scientific advisers should be free from political interference with their work
- Scientific advisers are free to publish and present their research
- Scientific advisers are free to communicate publicly their advice to Government, subject to normal confidentiality restrictions, including when it appears to be inconsistent with Government policy
- Scientific advisers have the right to engage with the media and public independently of the Government and should seek independent media advice on substantive pieces of work
- Scientific advisers should make clear in what capacity they are communicating

Transparency and openness

- Scientific advice to Government should be made publicly available unless there are over-riding reasons, such as national security or the facilitation of a crime, for not doing so
- Any requirement for independent advisers to sign non-disclosure agreements, for example for reasons of national security, should be publicly acknowledged and regularly reviewed
- The timing of the publication of independent scientific advice is a matter for the advisory body but should be discussed with the Government beforehand
- Government should not pre-judge the advice of independent advisers, nor should it criticise advice or reject it before its publication
- The timing of the Government's response to scientific advice should demonstrably allow for proper consideration of that advice

- Government should publicly explain the reasons for policy decisions, particularly when the decision is not consistent with scientific advice and, in doing so, should accurately represent the evidence
- If Government is minded not to accept the advice of a SAC the relevant Minister should normally meet with the Chair to discuss the issue before a final decision is made, particularly on matters of significant public interest

Applying the Principles

SACs and government departments should consider the extent to which the Principles in this document are reflected in their operation and to make changes as necessary. Issues relating to the function and working of scientific advisory bodies that are not reflected in these high-level Principles are discussed in more detailed guidance such as the CoPSAC or the Guidelines on scientific analysis in policy-making.

Government departments and their independent scientific advisers should raise issues of concern over the application of the Principles, or other guidance, with the relevant departmental CSA. If the matter of concern cannot be effectively resolved or is especially serious CSAs should approach the GCSA and Ministers should approach the GCSA and the Minister for Science. The matter will be examined against a clear set of criteria, which include a breach of the Principles or CoPSAC.

Annex B: Considerations when establishing a new SAC

This list sets out guidance on what should be considered when setting up a new SAC.

- Set out the objectives for the SAC and a first draft Terms of Reference (to be refined and agreed when SAC is established). See Annex D
- Ways of Working document that sets out how the SAC will operate and adhere to the CoPSAC, and any other relevant guidance in practice. This can be updated and refined once the SAC is established. See Annex E
- Consider how the SAC will contribute to the sponsoring organisation's strategic objectives, science plan and evidence strategy
- Consider the status of the SAC and identify whether there needs to be a formal appointments process (refer to departmental appointments team and [Cabinet Office guidance \(<https://publicappointments.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about-appointments/2019-public-appointments-order-in-council/>\)](https://publicappointments.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about-appointments/2019-public-appointments-order-in-council/)
- Consider which model of SAC will deliver what the sponsoring organisation needs
- Identify clear peacetime and emergency reporting lines for the SAC (probably CSA or senior official)
- Establish a flexible recruitment process, to allow for changing membership and accessing additional expertise
- Consider how the SAC will link to the sponsoring organisation, including science networks, policy teams and analysts, and whether SAC members will be paired with officials
- Consider how the SAC will link to existing SACs which work in related areas (inside or outside of sponsoring organisation)
- Identify the key policy customers and what form of advice they need

- Publicise plans for the SAC within the department, so officials have the opportunity to set out their needs
- Identify how the evidence and advice drawn together by the SAC will be disseminated
- Identify how the SAC will work on futures issues (and join cross-government futures and horizon scanning networks)
- Consider how the SAC will operate transparently and openly
- Draw up measures to evaluate the benefits and impact derived from the SAC's work
- Consider costs of establishing and maintaining the SAC, particularly the need for secretariat support and remuneration of expenses (travel and subsistence) of SAC members
- Consider whether members should be remunerated for their time (remuneration may aid diversity)
- Consider data protection issues and the need for a Privacy Notice, setting out how members' personal data will be used (refer to sponsoring organisation's Data Protection Officer)

Annex C: The Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles)

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

Annex D: Terms of Reference (ToR) guidance

A SAC's Terms of Reference may cover the following (those underlined are considered to be necessary as a minimum):

- overall purpose of the SAC
- mission statement, vision, aims and objectives
- SAC status: fulfilling any statutory or framework document function; whether SAC is a non-departmental public body or expert group, whether members are publicly appointed
- responsibilities of the Chair and Members
- what the governance arrangements and reporting lines are (during peacetime and emergencies)
- key tasks
- scope of subject areas that the SAC advises upon
- areas of expertise covered by SAC members
- engagement with Ministers and officials
- register of interest and conflicts of interest
- information about liability of members
- measuring and evaluating outputs
- appointments and membership, including affiliations and areas of expertise, period of appointments, time commitment and remuneration, whether members may be needed at short notice
- the role of the SAC Secretariat
- sub-groups (if any), when they will be established and supported
- policy on openness and Freedom of Information, including confidentiality of papers and communications (i.e. circumstances in which members can speak openly or publicly, including to the media)
- the approach to officials observing meetings
- list of SAC members
- links to guiding documents, including this CoPSAC

Annex E: Ways of Working (WoW) document guidance

A WoW document should cover how the SAC will operate in practice, as indicated in the ToR. This is maintained by the secretariat and shared with the Chair and members.

This is usually an internal document. The following provides a checklist of potential areas a WoW document may cover:

- what recruitment process will be followed, including allowing for changing membership and taking on additional expertise; and succession planning to ensure new recruitment exercises are started in good time
- how the SAC is linked to the sponsoring organisation's policy teams and analysts (identifying key policy customers and what form of advice they need); evidence strategy; science plan; and Areas of Research Interest document Mechanisms for engaging with ministers and officials
- how SAC will work with the departmental CSA when they do not directly report to them
- mechanisms for reaching conclusions (including how disagreement will be handled) and for recording this process; and any mechanism for reviewing previously offered advice in the light of new findings
- how the SAC will disseminate its evidence and advice and engage with the media
- how the SAC will operate transparently and openly and adhere to Open Science principles, including reasons for when meetings are not transparent and open
- how the SAC will operate in the absence of a Chair, for example appointing a Deputy Chair
- what mechanisms will be used for measuring and evaluating outputs
- how the SAC will link to other SACs and other science networks which work in related areas or are relevant to work being undertaken (inside or outside of sponsoring organisation)
- how the SAC will work on futures issues (and join cross-government futures and horizon scanning networks)
- how secretariat support will be provided and what other resources are available to the SAC
- how data protection issues will be handled, whether the SAC has a Privacy Notice, and how members' personal data will be used (refer to Data Protection Officer)
- how the SAC will maintain and regularly update a register of interests and handle conflicts of interest, with SAC members' involvement
- the SAC's framework to examine, debate and explain the nature of the risk Protocol for dealing with national emergencies
- protocols for handling classified material and any use of non-disclosure agreements

Annex F: Guidance on Induction of Chairs and Members

Induction should cover the following issues, particularly referencing the ToR and WoW (notwithstanding that some of these may have been dealt with by the sponsoring organisations during the appointment process):

- explanation of the committee's official remit
- the committee's status
- who sets the committee's agenda
- on what basis decisions are made
- the committee's current work and its future agenda

- the role of the secretariat and other officials
- whether meetings are open to the public
- how the public can find out what is discussed
- rights and responsibilities of members
- conflicts of interest
- the commitment required for meeting attendance, committee business and preparation for meetings
- confidentiality of proceedings and papers
- how members should deal with media contact and social media attention (including covering safeguarding, duty of care)
- disclosure of members' personal details to the public, bearing in mind personal security and other considerations
- the rules governing declarations of outside interests, potential conflicts of interest, and gifts and hospitality
- how conflicts of opinion are resolved
- terms of appointment of the chair and members
- remuneration (if any) and reimbursement of expenses
- personal liability
- cyber and physical risks (including information about safeguarding, duty of care)
- mental health support available
- risk management and the escalation procedures

Incoming SAC Chairs may find it useful to meet with:

- the sponsoring organisation's CSA
- whoever the SAC reports to (may be the CSA)
- the relevant minister who oversees the SAC's area of work
- the secretariat for the SAC
- the Director of Analysis and other analytical Heads of Profession, the Head of Science and Engineering Profession (HoSEP) and the Head of Policy Profession (HoPP)
- for Science Advisory Committee Chairs, they should meet the Chair of any other relevant advisory committees within the sponsoring organisation
- subject to the advice of the CSA and /or secretariat the SAC chair may also wish to establish links with UK Research and Innovation and the National Academies (the Royal Society, the British Academy, the Royal Academy of Engineering) to gain an understanding of how the SAC's work relates to planned research funding programmes and any relevant work being conducted or planned by the leading Academies

Incoming SAC members may find it useful to meet with:

- the SAC Chair prior to joining their first meeting
- the CSA Official or whoever the SAC reports to
- the SAC secretariat

Reading

New SAC Chairs and members should familiarise themselves with:

- the ToR for the SAC
- the SAC's Ways of Working document
- this Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees and other guidance to which it refers
- those sections of their sponsoring organisation's evidence plan, science plan and [Areas of Research Interest](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/areas-of-research-interest) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/areas-of-research-interest>) document which relate to the work of the SAC
- the work of the sponsoring organisation's Science Advisory Council, if it has one
- [The Seven Principles of Public Life](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2>) and the Cabinet Office guidance [Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-conduct-for-board-members-of-public-bodies) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-conduct-for-board-members-of-public-bodies>)
- The Science Capability Review [report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-science-capability-review) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-science-capability-review>)

Annex G: Declaration of Interests

Extract from Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies June 2019 [\[footnote 33\]](#)

Please note that this extract is relevant at the time of publication, it may have been updated and the most recent version should be referred to.

4. Conflict of Interest

- 4.1. When accepting an appointment to the public body you should consider if any conflicts of interest arise from your private interests or by virtue of any other roles you hold. You should consider, with advice from the appointing department how these should best be managed, and agree these with the organisation.
- 4.2. You must ensure that no conflict arises, or could reasonably be perceived to arise, between your public duties and your private interests, financial or otherwise.
- 4.3. You must comply with the rules of the body on handling conflicts of interests. As a minimum, these will require you to declare publicly, usually in the body's register of interests, any private financial or non-financial interests of your own, or of close family members, which may, or may be perceived to, conflict with your public duties. The rules will also require you to remove yourself from the discussion or determination of matters in which you have a financial interest. In matters in which you have a non-financial interest, you should not participate in the discussion or determination of a matter where the interest might suggest a danger of bias.
- 4.4. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are familiar with the body's rules on handling conflicts of interests, that you comply with these rules and that your entry in the body's public register of members' interests is accurate and up-to-date.

Extract from Governance Code on Public Appointments 2016^[footnote 34]

Please note that this extract is relevant at the time of publication, it may have been updated and the most recent version should be referred to.

9. Standards in public life and handling conflicts

9.1 It is important that all public appointees uphold the standards of conduct set out in the Committee on Standards in Public Life's Seven Principles of Public Life and are expected to adhere to the Code of Conduct for board members of public bodies. The Advisory Assessment Panel must satisfy itself that all candidates for appointment can meet these standards and have no conflicts of interest that would call into question their ability to perform the role. Candidates must be asked to declare potential conflicts of interest in their application. All potential conflicts of interest and how they might be managed must be discussed with an individual at interview. A potential conflict should not preclude a candidate from being shortlisted or appointed provided that appropriate arrangements are made. The departmental official on an Advisory Assessment Panel is responsible for seeking advice within their department and/or the Cabinet Office on handling any conflicts, which should be included in the final advice to Ministers. If the appointment is subject to a Parliamentary pre-appointment hearing, the advice to the Select Committee should cover the handling of any conflicts of interest.

9.2 Political activity should not affect any judgement of merit nor be a bar to appointment or being a member of an Advisory Assessment Panel, with the exception of Senior Independent Panel Members. It should be publicly disclosed however if a panel member, or a successful candidate, has, in the last five years, been employed by a political party, held a significant office in a party, has stood as a candidate for a party in an election, has publicly spoken on behalf of a political party, or has made significant donations or loans to a party.

Annex H: Consultation Principles 2018

Consultations should be clear and concise

Use plain English and avoid acronyms. Be clear what questions you are asking and limit the number of questions to those that are necessary. Make them easy to understand and easy to answer. Avoid lengthy documents when possible and consider merging those on related topics.

Consultations should have a purpose

Do not consult for the sake of it. Ask departmental lawyers whether you have a legal duty to consult. Take consultation responses into account when taking policy forward. Consult about policies or implementation plans when the development of the policies or plans is at a formative stage. Do not ask questions about issues on which you already have a final view.

Consultations should be informative

Give enough information to ensure that those consulted understand the issues and can give informed responses. Include validated impact assessments of the costs and

benefits of the options being considered when possible; this might be required where proposals have an impact on business or the voluntary sector.

Consultations are only part of a process of engagement

Consider whether informal iterative consultation is appropriate, using new digital tools and open, collaborative approaches. Consultation is not just about formal documents and responses. It is an ongoing process.

Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time

Judge the length of the consultation on the basis of legal advice and taking into account the nature and impact of the proposal. Consulting for too long will unnecessarily delay policy development. Consulting too quickly will not give enough time for consideration and will reduce the quality of responses.

Consultations should be targeted

Consider the full range of people, business and voluntary bodies affected by the policy, and whether representative groups exist. Consider targeting specific groups if appropriate. Ensure they are aware of the consultation and can access it. Consider how to tailor consultation to the needs and preferences of particular groups, such as older people, younger people or people with disabilities that may not respond to traditional consultation methods.

Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted

Consult stakeholders in a way that suits them. Charities may need more time to respond than businesses, for example. When the consultation spans all or part of a holiday period, consider how this may affect consultation and take appropriate mitigating action, such as prior discussion with key interested parties or extension of the consultation deadline beyond the holiday period.

Consultations should be agreed before publication

Seek collective agreement before publishing a written consultation, particularly when consulting on new policy proposals. Consultations should be published on gov.uk.

Consultation should facilitate scrutiny

Publish any response on the same page on gov.uk as the original consultation, and ensure it is clear when the government has responded to the consultation. Explain the responses that have been received from consultees and how these have informed the policy. State how many responses have been received.

Government responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion

Publish responses within 12 weeks of the consultation or provide an explanation why this is not possible. Where consultation concerns a statutory instrument publish responses before or at the same time as the instrument is laid, except in very exceptional circumstances (and even then publish responses as soon as possible).

Allow appropriate time between closing the consultation and implementing policy or legislation.

Consultation exercises should not generally be launched during local or national election periods

If exceptional circumstances make a consultation absolutely essential (for example, for safeguarding public health), departments should seek advice from the Propriety and Ethics team in the Cabinet Office. This document does not have legal force and is subject to statutory and other legal requirements.

Annex I: Universal Ethical Code – rigour, respect and responsibility

This is a public statement of the values and responsibilities of scientists. They are intended to include anyone whose work uses scientific methods, including social, natural, medical and veterinary sciences, engineering and mathematics. It aims to foster ethical research, to encourage active reflection among scientists on the wider implications and impacts of their work, and to support constructive communication between scientists and the public on complex and challenging issues.

Individuals and institutions are encouraged to adopt and promote these guidelines. It is meant to capture a small number of broad principles that are shared across disciplinary and institutional boundaries. They are not intended to replace codes of conduct or ethics relating to specific professions or areas of research.

Rigour, honesty and integrity [footnote 35]

- Act with skill and care in all scientific work. Maintain up to date skills and assist their development in others
- Take steps to prevent corrupt practices and professional misconduct
- Declare conflicts of interest
- Be alert to the ways in which research derives from and affects the work of other people, and respect the rights and reputations of others

Respect for life, the law and the public good

- Ensure that your work is lawful and justified
- Minimise and justify any adverse effect your work may have on people, animals and the natural environment

Responsible communication: listening and informing

- Seek to discuss the issues that science raises for society. Listen to the aspirations and concerns of others
- Do not knowingly mislead, or allow others to be misled, about scientific matters. Present and review scientific evidence, theory or interpretation honestly and accurately

There are already powerful incentives for individuals and for institutions to adhere to the principles set out in these guidelines. These include: the high professional and ethical standards upheld by the scientific community; structures put in place by employers, professional bodies and funders to enforce these standards; and national and international conventions, treaties and laws.

Scientists and institutions are encouraged to reflect on and debate how these guidelines may relate to their own work.

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↑ Back to top



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