



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Appointment of members to the Social Science Expert Group (SSEG)

Briefing pack for applicants

Closing Date: 10th October 2022, 12am



Science
Advisory
Council



1. Defra mission statement

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) group is here to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener, and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for future generations, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

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

2. The Social Science Expert Group

The Defra Social Science Expert Group (SSEG) is a sub-group of Defra's [Science Advisory Council](#) (SAC). SAC is a Non-Departmental Public Body which plays a vital role in assisting the Defra Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA), by advising on and challenging the evidence that Defra uses in its policy development.

The SSEG is Chaired by a member of the SAC, and reports to the SAC on its activities. This position is currently held by Professor Susan Owens.

2.1. Aim of the Group

The aim of SSEG is to bring high quality external social science expertise to Defra group to complement existing capacity and ensure that social science can inform policy development, delivery and decision making.

The SSEG's agenda and operation are structured to integrate it with the Department's workings while retaining its capacity to provide critical independent advice. The SSEG is both reactive to

Defra's needs and proactive in raising issues that it believes would be helpful for the Department to consider. The SSEG's work plan is a balance between forward looking ideas and initiatives and responding to policy and evidence needs as they arrive.

2.2. Remit and Role

The SSEG's role covers the breadth of issues related to Defra social research and evaluation needs throughout the policy and evidence process, including:

- a) Contributing social science expertise to the other Defra expert evidence groups and more widely across the Defra Group relationships with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the research councils, and other learned bodies.
- b) Identifying suitable candidates to join short term, specific task and finish groups that may be set up by SSEG.
- c) Providing expert advice and independent challenge to current and future policy development including facilitating policy learning on the basis of social science research.
- d) Identifying research needs including broad evidence needs and gaps to address policy priorities and, help to identify the high priorities for social research. This covers both shorter-term, more immediate policy-related research needs, evolving issues, and longer-term strategic research needs.
- e) Quality assuring social science results and outputs with advice and support to Defra's policy and evidence experts during early design, specification, and reporting.
- f) Championing social science and interdisciplinary working – involving the collaboration of two or more differing subjects or areas of knowledge to strengthen research activity – to demonstrate the value of social science in policy design and delivery

3. Role specification

The SSEG are looking to recruit five members with expertise across the full breadth of the social sciences and closely related disciplines. We seek a broad range of expertise across Defra's areas of interest, including but not limited to environmental policy, biodiversity, air and/or water quality, agriculture and rural affairs. **We particularly welcome applicants from across the full spectrum of ethnicity, gender, lived experience and career stage.**

SSEG members provide high-level strategic social scientific advice, support, challenge, and assurance to Defra on developing and implementing an effective strategy and policy across a range of issues including on high-profile and contentious issues. SSEG members provide strategic oversight on Defra's use of evidence, help to identify sources of external advice to input to Defra evidence, and act as a conduit between Defra and evidence providers. They also advise on

broader issues such as how Defra obtains its advice, its access to the social science community and on maintaining and developing its social science capabilities into the future.

These duties are performed through regular SSEG meetings (in-person and online), as well as smaller task groups to explore and report on specific issues.

The successful candidate must abide by the Nolan principles of public service (see [Annex A](#)) and the [Code of Conduct for Board members](#).

3.1. Benefits to members

Members contribute to improving the evidence base of a high-profile policy issues, have the opportunity to produce work that will have a high impact and ensure that evidence is strongly embedded into decision-making. Current members listed the following factors as reasons for why they enjoy being in the SSEG:

- Opportunity to gain insights into evidence needs and policy processes in a major government department.
- Working with colleagues from different disciplines to help bring evidence from across the social science to bear on key issues of public policy
- Opportunity to demonstrate the importance of social sciences in framing of problems and policies
- A contribution towards Defra's core aims and a sense of public service

3.2. Essential Criteria

Candidates must be able to demonstrate the following essential criteria in the 500-word personal statement, clearly defining their experience in each field.

- **UK academic institution:** Candidates must be based at a UK academic institution
- **Social science expertise:** Significant expertise in the social sciences and allied disciplines lying within the broad areas of interest to Defra; this might include knowledge of environmental policy, biodiversity, agriculture, and rural affairs.
- **Critical analysis:** The ability to analyse issues in an impartial way and work across a range of topics drawing on, but not limited by, one's own expertise.
- **Research expertise:** Have significant expertise in social scientific research methods and approaches

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- **Strategy:** The ability to provide strategic advice on matters relating to the use of evidence in policy making in Defra. This will include the broader issue of how Defra obtains and accesses its external advice.
 - **Teamwork:** The ability to work effectively as part of a team, and collaborate with other SSEG members, Defra colleagues, the CSA, senior officials, and senior scientists.
 - **Interfacing:** An understanding of the interface between social science, commerce and policy along with knowledge of UK and international research funding relevant to Defra. Demonstrable ability in strategically assessing the application of evidence in policymaking.
 - **Commitment:** Candidates must be willing to meet the time commitment set out in section 3.3

3.3. Time Commitment

It is expected that SSEG members will:

- a. **Attend up to three full day panel meetings and participate in two virtual meetings per year**, plus preparation beforehand which may include gathering views of others on certain issues.

In addition to the panel may also be asked to contribute in the following ways on an ad hoc basis:

- b) Face-to-face/virtual expert advice on social science with policy officials about specific policy issues.
- c) Quality assuring social science outputs including commenting on, or peer reviewing research proposals and specifications, research designs, research outputs, multidisciplinary evidence strategies for Defra Group.
- d) Undertaking short 'think-piece' type outputs or brief analysis that may align with work already or currently underway (either independently or as part of a small group).
- e) Participating in seminars/briefings with Defra policy colleagues.

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

3.4. Term of Office

- Two appointments will begin in early 2023 and three in spring/summer 2023, exact dates to be confirmed.
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- SSEG members will be committed to one term of three years, with an option to apply for an extension for a second term, not exceeding a maximum of a further three years.

3.5. Remuneration and expenses

SSEG members will be remunerated as described below; but not for travelling time to and from meetings (although travel and subsistence costs will be payable).

- SSEG members are paid an hourly rate which is currently set at £39.00. Full day meetings (based on a five-hour meeting and including an average preparation time per meeting of two and a half hours): £293 per meeting.
- Monthly teleconferences (based on a one-hour teleconference and an average preparation time of half an hour): £59 per teleconference.
- Reasonable (only standard class rate) travel and subsistence expenses are also paid.

Additional SSEG activities: members may be asked to participate in other Defra or Government activities as a direct result of their SSEG membership. Reimbursement may be available for the time (and expenses incurred) on these activities, but given the limited budget available, any attendance should first be agreed with the Secretariat.

Expenses may also include reimbursement of reasonable additional childcare or other carer costs that are occurred due to SSEG commitments, and the reimbursement of reasonable additional expenses of disabled people. Details available on request.

3.6. Terms and Conditions

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

4. The Recruitment Process

It is essential that your Expression of Interest (EOI) application gives full but concise information relevant to the appointment, clearly demonstrating how you meet each of the requirements of the role. Applications will be sifted, and successful candidates will be invited to an informal online interview via Microsoft Teams and will last for approximately 45 minutes.

The Interview Panel will consist of:

- **Professor Susan Owens** OBE, FBA ,Chair of SSEG

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- **Kieron Stanley**, Head of Science, Monitoring & Evaluation, Environmental Land Management, Defra
 - **One other current SSEG member**
 - **One other member of the SSEG Secretariat**

4.1. How to apply and submit your application

To apply, please complete the EOI, attached to the original email, setting out how you meet the role requirements and what attracted you to the role. Additionally, please attach a short CV (2 page maximum).

Completed EOI and CV should be sent to matt.ensor@defra.gov.uk by 12am, 10th October 2022.

If you have any questions about the appointments process, require additional assistance to support you in your application, or would like an informal discussion about the role please contact on of the following contacts:

- **Kieron Stanley** (Kieron.stanley@defra.gov.uk).
- **Rachel Peden** (Rachel.peden@defra.gov.uk)
- **Simin Davoudi** (Simin.davoudi@newcastle.ac.uk)

5. Diversity and Inclusion

We welcome applicants from across the full spectrum of ethnicity, gender, lived experience, career stage and academic discipline. All public appointments are made on merit following a fair and open competition as regulated by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Equal Opportunities

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

Disability

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

6. Ineligibility criteria

You cannot be considered for a public appointment if:

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

7. Conflicts of interest and due diligence

If you have any interests that might be relevant to the work of the SSEG and which could lead to a real or perceived conflict of interest if you were to be appointed, please provide details in your application.

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

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

8. Data protection

Defra is committed to protecting the privacy and security of your personal information and does so in accordance with data protection law including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All the information you provide will be used to proceed with the public appointment listed in this information pack and in the case of diversity monitoring information may be anonymised and used solely for monitoring purposes.

Annex A – The seven principles of public life

- **Selflessness:** Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
- **Integrity:** Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships
- **Objectivity:** Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- **Accountability:** Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- **Openness:** Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- **Honesty:** Holders of public office should be truthful.

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

Annex B – Current membership of the SSEG

*There is no requirement to have a specific academic title for the role

- Professor Susan Owens OBE (Chair), FBA Susan Owens is Professor of Environment and Policy (Emerita) at the University of Cambridge, and Fellow of the British Academy and the Academy of Social Sciences
- Professor Andy Jordan, Professor of Environmental Policy at the University of East Anglia, and a Research Fellow at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research.

Members coming to end of their term:

- Professor Steve Hinchliffe, Geographer and Science and Technology Studies scholar who works on social and material aspects of risk, culture, and knowledge.
- Professor Simin Davoudi, Professor of Environment Policy and Planning and Director of the Global Urban Research Unit (GURU) at Newcastle University.
- Professor Peter Jackson, Professor of Human Geography at the University of Sheffield and co-Director of the Institute for Sustainable Food.
- Professor Nigel Gilbert, Distinguished Chair in Sociology at the University of Surrey and Director of the Centre for Research in Social Simulation.
- Professor Jeremy Phillipson, Professor of Rural Development at the Centre for Rural Economy in the School of Natural and Environmental Sciences at Newcastle University

Full biographies of SSEG Members can be seen at: [SSEG membership and biographies \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)



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