



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Terms of Reference

GCBC Evidence Advisory Group

April 2024

We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We're responsible for improving and protecting the environment, growing the green economy, sustaining thriving rural communities and supporting our world-class food, farming and fishing industries.

We work closely with our 33 agencies and arm's length bodies on our ambition 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 the next generation, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1 Objectives.....	4
1.2 Accountability.....	4
1.3 Background of the Evidence Advisory Group.....	4
1.4 Relationship with other expert groups.....	5
2. Membership.....	5
2.1 Role and responsibilities.....	5
2.2 Members' expertise.....	5
2.3 Types of members.....	6
3. Appointment.....	6
3.1 Recruitment.....	6
3.2 Time commitment.....	6
3.3 Remuneration.....	7
4. Operational Structure.....	7
4.1 Meeting format.....	7
4.2 Quoracy.....	8
4.3 Secretariat.....	8
4.4 Chair.....	8
5. Governance.....	9
5.1 Code of Conduct.....	9
5.2 Conflict of Interest.....	10
Annex A. Notice and termination of appointment.....	12
Annex B. Travel expenses.....	14
Annex C. The Seven Principles of Public life.....	15
Annex D. Governance.....	16

1. Introduction

1.1 Objectives

The Evidence Advisory Group (EAG) is required to provide independent advice and scrutiny on the design, scope, processes, outputs, and strategic direction of the Global Centre on Biodiversity for Climate (GCBC). The purpose of the EAG is to aid Defra in their role as the governing body responsible for ensuring effective spend of public money, and to aid the Strategic Science and Management Leads in their role leading on delivering, and managing research design, outputs, and dissemination.

The GCBC EAG is an advisory group of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

The primary objective of the EAG is to provide independent advice, challenge, and assurance function to the GCBC programme. This includes providing:

- advice, including on the strategic research design, direction, and specific regional and thematic contexts.
- review the plan for the research grant calls and assess the high-level strategic relevance of bid decisions.
- timely and impartial challenge to developing outputs and ongoing projects as required.
- quality assurance of the research outputs from the GCBC, assessing research impact, including partnerships, collaborations, and communications.
- periodic review of the programme direction and impartial strategic advice.

1.2 Accountability

The EAG will provide advice to and work collaboratively with the Defra GCBC Team, the Strategic Science and Management Leads, and key office holders in Defra as required.

The EAG will report, via the Chair, to the Secretariat, who in turn will report to the Programme Board.

1.3 Background of the Evidence Advisory Group

The GCBC Evidence Advisory Group was established in June 2023. The committee is funded through the International Climate Fund Research and Development budget.

The EAG shall comprise senior experts from a range of backgrounds and sectors, including scientific and academic institutions from the global north and south, non-governmental

organisations, and the private sector. The EAG provides knowledge and expertise on biodiversity, climate, poverty, development, rights-based approaches, finance and economics, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks, across marine and terrestrial ecosystems.

1.4 Relationship with other expert groups

Formal and informal linkages between the EAG and existing as well as future related advisory groups and expert committees are currently being reviewed to strengthen the sharing of expertise, knowledge, and best practices.

2. Membership

2.1 Role and responsibilities

Members are responsible for reviewing ongoing progress relating to the development of the GCBC; this includes scoping and mapping outputs, Research Strategy objectives, approach to monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), Research Grant Calls, and communications and engagement, providing verbal feedback and advice during the EAG meetings attended by Defra, the Strategic Science and Management Leads, and others where appropriate.

Members are responsible for reviewing the high level, strategic relevance of bid decisions made by the Strategic Science Lead for GCBC funding, reviewing evidence synthesis products from the Strategic Science Lead and approach to dissemination, and advising on wider strategic engagement activities conducted by the GCBC.

2.2 Members' expertise

Members shall be recruited as individuals based on their expertise on, and experience of, issues relevant to the focus of the GCBC. In appointing Members to the EAG, the GCBC will be looking for candidates who have a breadth of experience in developing country research and can demonstrate a clear understanding of the linkages between biodiversity, climate, and sustainable development.

The range of expertise required may change or evolve over time, and therefore, the balance of skills, expertise and experience of members will be regularly reviewed in light of current and anticipated future work. If necessary, additional experts may be co-opted for a limited period to provide specific input.

2.3 Types of members

The EAG includes a recruited Chair and up to 10 recruited members. The membership of the EAG is provided on GCBC's website.

3. Appointment

3.1 Recruitment

The EAG will initially be constituted to run until 2027 reflecting the existing GCBC funding timeline. At that point, continuation and terms of reference for the EAG will be reviewed.

For year one (2023/2024), independent appointments are to be made through invitation. From year two (2024/2025), independent appointments are to be made through open competition, in line with [OCA guidelines on best practice for making public appointments](#). Recruitment will look to ensure adequate representation of Global South countries and institutions, in particular those within the GCBC target regions.

For year one (2023/2024), initial appointment will be for 1 year, with the possibility of reappointment for a further term where GCBC funding allows, and subject to approval and needs of the programme at the time. From year 2 (2024/2025), appointments will be for 3 years, with the possibility of reappointment for a further term, subject to an assessment of performance over the initial 3-year period and due consideration of the composition of the EAG and the range of strategic expertise and knowledge required by the GCBC. Consideration is given in appointment and reappointments to:

- the performance and availability of the member to continue.
- the phasing and length of appointments to ensure continuity and fresh perspectives.
- the diversity of membership (including gender, age, and ethnicity).
- the strategic expertise and knowledge required by the GCBC.

To serve more than 2 terms, members are required to apply again through open and fair competition.

For information relating to the notice and termination of appointment, see Annex A.

3.2 Time commitment

EAG members will be required to provide **up to 10 days** of their time to review progress of the GCBC, engage in quarterly EAG meetings and provide verbal feedback and steer to the Strategic Science and Management Leads and Defra.

3.3 Remuneration

Claiming remuneration and travel expenses for Expert Committee related work is optional. Where claims are made, remuneration will be paid at a rate of **£39 per hour**. This includes any time for preparation for the meeting, for example to review papers for the meeting, read and assess pre-meeting papers and any other preparatory work. Reimbursement of reasonable travel and subsistence costs for attending hybrid-format Advisory Group meetings in person (where UK-based) will also be considered. Members will be paid through Defra payroll; remuneration is treated as income and will be subject to NI and tax deductions (see Annex B for further information).

4. Operational structure

4.1 Meeting format

It is expected that the EAG will convene approximately 4 to 6 times a year. Meetings will be virtual and will occur via MS Teams, with the possibility of written correspondence in-between meetings. Some meetings may be hybrid format with an opportunity to attend in person. Each member is expected to attend all planned meetings where possible. Meeting(s) may be changed or cancelled, without notice, if it becomes apparent that non-attendance will interfere with the good running of the EAG.

Members shall be provided with a copy of the official paper, presentation, or questions and are expected to have read these documents before the meeting and come with advice prepared, or other pre-meeting work as appropriate. These documents are typically confidential and classified as [official-sensitive](#) and should not to be circulated outside of the meeting attendees. Agenda items shall be introduced by the Chair, then briefly explained by officials, to which members provide advice.

The meeting will be minuted by the Secretariat for the purpose of capturing advice given to officials. The minutes represent the official advice given and capture Actions which the Defra teams and the Strategic Science and Management Leads are expected to follow up on. The process of creating minutes is first through notes, recording, or transcript of the discussion. The notes are checked with officials and members to ensure their accuracy. The Chair will provide a final check of the minutes before they are circulated.

The Secretariat will endeavour to give as much notice as possible with regards to meetings dates, and at least 1 month wherever possible. The agenda items for discussion and supporting papers will be emailed to the members, and any other person required to attend, before the meeting, with the aim of sending papers to members at least 10 days prior to the meeting.

4.2 Quoracy

The quorum for a EAG meeting is at least one third of its members, in addition to the Chair. Members can be deemed to be in attendance via live tele or video conferencing as appropriate. Attendance at meetings cannot be delegated.

If a meeting of the EAG is not quorate, its proceedings will not have any effect and the meeting will be re-scheduled.

4.3 Secretariat

The Secretariat will provide a strategic steer and facilitate the panel Chair and members so they can target their challenge and support to the Strategic Science and Management Leads, and the Defra GCBC Team.

The Secretariat will be responsible for:

- promoting the EAG and communicating its role within the Department and making sure that it delivers value for money in line with any independent review
- the preparation and circulation of agendas and papers for meetings in consultation with the Strategic Science and Management Leads and Defra GCBC Team. Papers will normally be seen by the Strategic Science and Management Leads, Defra GCBC Team, and Chair prior to circulation to members
- supporting the EAG by assembling and analysing information and recording conclusions of the meetings

The Secretariat function to the EAG shall be provided by Defra officials with appropriate advice from the Chief Scientific Advisers Office as required.

The Secretariat will be the main contact point for EAG Members.

4.4 Chair

The Chair will act as the principal figurehead for the EAG, representing and promoting the EAG and its interests at the most senior levels across all sectors, including public, business, academic and non-governmental.

The Chair will work in a closer capacity with the Defra GCBC Team and the Secretariat than other members.

The Chair is responsible for:

- chairing meetings, influencing the agenda, and managing conflicts of interest

- guiding strategic discussions of objectives, priorities and developments to support the adaptive and agile delivery of the GCBC and strengthen its ability to deliver impact
- sitting as Chair on the recruitment panel for new members of the relevant Expert Group
- assessing the EAG's performance and reporting on the EAG's work to senior civil servants as required

5. Governance

5.1 Code of Conduct

Members of the EAG must provide independent advice and operate in line with the [Government's Principles for Scientific Advice](#), the [Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees \(CoPSAC\)](#), and [Rigour, respect, responsibility: a universal ethical code for scientists](#). Members are required follow the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life (see Annex C).

Members must observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the advice they provide. Members must at all times:

- not misuse information gained for personal gain or professional purpose, nor seek to use the opportunity to promote their private interests or those of connected persons, firms, businesses or other organisations
- declare and register any interests they have that are relevant to the remit of the Evidence Advisory Group

You must not misuse information gained in the course of your membership for personal gain or for political purpose.

If you believe you are being required to act in a way which:

- is illegal, improper, or unethical
- is in breach of constitutional convention or a professional code
- may involve possible maladministration
- is otherwise inconsistent with the Seven Principles of Public Life

You should report the matter to the EAG Secretariat. You should also report to the appropriate authorities as evidence of criminal or unlawful activity by others.

You may also report if you are required to act in a way which, for you, raises a fundamental issue of conscience.

5.2 Conflict of Interest

5.2.1 Definition of a Conflict of Interest

A connection or relationship where a member's objectivity, integrity or judgment can be or be perceived to be compromised or impaired, and potentially attract perceptions of bias and unfair treatment.

Members are valued and appointed to the Evidence Advisory Group as individuals for their capabilities, knowledge and experience. Conflicts of Interest have the potential to impact on the quality of assessments/recommendations that will result in reputational damage, or reduced value for money and impact of the programme.

5.2.2 Potential Conflicts of Interest

Members must declare any private financial or non-financial interests of their own, or of close family members which may, or may be perceived to, influence their judgement in performing their functions.

Each member should consider and declare the following examples of potential sources of Conflicts of Interest:

- the organisation which employs or has employed the member within the past 5 years
- On the board of, or a trustee of, an organisation
- Consultant or unpaid advisor to an organisation, including recent collaborations
- Personal connection with the programme's partners or core team
- Close relative, extended family, friend or household member, neighbour employed or involved in the organisation

This list is not exhaustive, and where a member has a doubt as to whether there is a potential conflict of interest, the interest should be declared to support transparency.

Given the range of the partners involved, an interest may only be identified once the review process begins or during the discussions at a meeting. If this occurs, it is the responsibility of the member to declare the interest quickly so that the review of strategic documents is conducted by a different member, or they can leave the room and cease to play a role in the consideration of the specific task in hand.

During the Evidence Advisory Group meetings, all members will be expected to be present unless there is a Conflict of Interest that requires their absence.

The Chair is responsible for managing the Conflicts of Interest during the meetings, requiring members with conflicts to leave the room.

A record will be kept, with the potential to be published, where members have withdrawn from a discussion due to a Conflict of Interest.

5.2.3 Register of Interests

To manage and prevent conflicts of interests from impacting the objectives or reputation of the programme, it is the responsibility of the Evidence Advisory Group members to identify and declare at the earliest opportunity any factor or interest that may result in a real or perceived Conflict of Interest.

The Defra Secretariat will maintain a Register of Interests to support the identification of potential conflicts of interest. The Register of Interest will be reviewed prior to any assessment carried out but can be updated at any point to ensure it is kept up to date. Members must actively confirm, at a minimum annually, that the information held about them is correct.

In support of transparency, Defra will make available the Register of Interests, via the GCBC website.

5.2.4 Privacy

The names of all members will be made public, in the interests of transparency. This will include, for example, the inclusion of the Members' names on the GOV.UK and GCBC website, and in relevant reports and publications published by Defra.

For further information on governance see Annex D.

Annex A: Notice and termination of appointment

Defra withholds the right to serve notice or terminate an appointment in the following circumstances:

- Either you or the Department may terminate this appointment for any reason before the expiry of the fixed period by giving 3 months' notice in writing to the other
- No notice period is applicable if this appointment is terminated early by mutual consent
- Should the Evidence Advisory Group be dissolved, restructured, or concluded during the period of your appointment, your appointment would cease with effect from that dissolution, or such other date as is specified in any relevant legislation
- The Department may terminate your appointment immediately by writing to you to that effect if:
 - you become bankrupt or make an arrangement with creditors (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are made bankrupt)
 - 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 have been absent from meetings for a period of more than 6 months without the permission of the Secretariat
 - your attendance becomes so erratic as to interfere with the good running of the Evidence Advisory Group
 - you are disqualified from acting as a company director (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are disqualified from acting as a company director)
 - you have been convicted (whether before or after appointment) of a criminal offence, (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are 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 (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are subject to a debt relief order)
 - or if you are unable or unfit to discharge the functions of the appointment for any other reason of whatsoever nature
- if the Department is considering whether to terminate your appointment prior to the expiry of the fixed term, you will be notified of the proposal and of the reasons for it and will be offered an opportunity to have a meeting with the Secretariat before any final decision is taken. If your appointment is subsequently terminated you will receive notice in writing of this fact, such notice will contain a statement of reasons for termination
- on termination of this appointment, you shall only be entitled to accrued fees as at the date of termination together with reimbursement of any expenses properly incurred prior to that date

- in the event of you being notified that the Department is considering whether to terminate your appointment pursuant the committee's dissolution (point 5), the Department may require that you do not carry out your role as a committee member

Annex B: Travel expenses

Some meetings that are in-person may require members to travel far and stay overnight, especially if the meeting is over 3 hours long. Accommodation will be booked by the Secretariat or can be reimbursed, in which case a receipt is required. For claiming for travel and subsistence expenses members will be provided with a claim form (non-taxable expenses). Any queries regarding claims should be referred to the Secretariat.

For all day meetings, lunch/refreshments will be provided so subsistence rates should not normally be claimed. Where this is not the case and has previously been agreed in advance with the Secretariat, payment will be for actual expenditure within the ceiling limits:

- £5 (when on expert group business for 5 hours or less; one meal)
- £10 (5 to 10 hours; 2 meals)
- £15 (10 to 12 hours, 3 meals)
- £25 for a 24-hour period.

Hotel rates:

- London: £140 per night
- key locations – Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Reading, Truro, Warrington, Weybridge and Weymouth: £100 per night
- all other locations: £85 per night

Remuneration is subject to tax and National Insurance Contributions (NIC). Defra will make the appropriate deduction of tax or NIC on member's behalf. Any figures of tax or NIC will be reflected in members' P60 annual summary. The payment of remuneration will be classed as income for anyone completing a self-assessment form at the end of the tax year.

Annex C. The Seven Principles of Public life

The Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles) apply to anyone who works as a public officeholder. Expert group members are expected to apply these principles in their approach to their term on an Expert Group.

Selflessness

Act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

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

Act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

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

Be truthful.

Leadership

Exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Annex D. Governance

C1. Political activity

Members cannot occupy paid party-political posts or hold particularly sensitive or high-level roles in a political party; or lobby against Government policy. Members need to inform Defra of any intention to accept a prominent position in any political party and should understand that their EAG membership will be terminated; and resign from the advisory group if they accept nomination for election to the House of Commons, Northern Ireland Assembly, Scottish Government or the Welsh Government.

Members must be, and be seen to be, politically impartial. Specific guidance, leading up to key political events, such as local and general elections may be issued by the Cabinet Office and shared with members.

C2. Confidential information

All members are subject to the provisions of the Official Secrets Act 1989. Unauthorised disclosure of any information gained in the course of this appointment, or its use by you or others for personal gain or advancement, could result in the appointment being terminated early, or even criminal prosecution.

The Department will hold and process information about you for legal, personnel and administrative purposes and to the processing of any sensitive personal data (as defined in the Data Protection Act 1998). Furthermore, consent allows the Department to make such information available in appropriate circumstances, including within the Civil Service in reporting to Parliamentary Committees or National Audit Office or otherwise.

Public papers are those which include already published work, such as working papers and peer reviewed articles. This might include analysis published for consultation being prepared for final assessment.

Confidential papers will consist of those designated under the Government Security Classification as official sensitive (or higher). All EAG members will be required to sign non-disclosure agreement prior to handling confidential information. A record will be maintained by the EAG Secretariat.

C3. Media policy

Communication with the media is covered in the [Government Office for Science's Code of Practice on Scientific Advisory Committees](#). The Chair will be the primary spokesperson for any contact with the media unless the Chair or the Secretariat has made other specific arrangements.

If a member receives an approach for an interview connected in any way to their role on the EAG, the request must be referred to the Secretariat. The Secretariat will liaise with the Defra press office, and the Chair.

The EAG will follow a 'no surprises' policy when dealing with the media. This is to ensure that Defra remain informed and are able to respond or offer their own input to the media as appropriate.

Chairs should not make any announcements on issues relating to the EAG's advice (including policy announcements where the EAG has been asked to provide advice on the associated evidence) without communicating their intention and the nature of the message to the other.

Chairs and members may be invited to speak to the media independently of their EAG membership 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 should refrain from commenting on the EAG operations and outputs.

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 on the EAG, 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.