Minutes

Title of meeting	Home Office Science Advisory Council - 11th July
Date	11 July 2024
Time	14:00-17:00
Venue	2MS / Microsoft Teams

Attendees

<u>HOSAC Members</u>
Prof Brooke Rogers (Co-chair)
Prof Guy Nason (Co-chair)
Prof Tushna Vandrevala
Prof Mark Watson-Gandy
Prof Tom Kirchmaier
Prof Dave Delpy
Prof Gabriella Spinelli
Prof Paul Grasby
Prof Tamsin Mather
Prof Jennifer Rubin
Prof Brian Bell
Prof David Main
Ollie Whitehouse
Prof Lucina Hackman
Prof Stuart Boyd
Prof David C Lane
Prof Helen Margetts

<u>Home Office Officials</u>
Joanna West
Gisela Carr
Tom Bucke

Apologies

Prof Shane Johnson
Prof Owen Bowden-Jones

Item 1: Welcome from HOSAC Co-Chair

1.1 Guy welcomed attendees to the meeting and noted the attendance of Tamsin Mather for her first HOSAC Board Meeting since taking over from Hugh Griffiths as Defence Science Expert Committee (DSEC) Chair.

1.2 Tamsin gave a brief update on DSEC and MOD activities, highlighting the opportunity for helpful join up with the Home Office on innovation.
ACTION 1 – Tamsin to deliver a spotlight session on DSEC at the next HOSAC meeting.

1.3 Guy reflected on the annual review sessions that took place in May and noted that changes had been made in line with the outcomes from the sessions.

1.4 Guy explained that he believed the SAC review was close to completion and would be sent to SAC Chairs soon.

1.5 Brooke thanked members for recent HOSAC successes.

Item 2: Welcome and update from CSA

2.1 Jennifer thanked all members for their fantastic work and explained that HOSAC is mentioned more frequently in the Department.
ACTION 2 - HOSAC associate members to suggest areas across the Home Office where HOSAC, or the CSA, could facilitate helpful links.

2.2 Jennifer summarised some of her recent updates from STAR.

2.3 Jennifer summarised key changes in the Department under the new Government including details of the new ministerial team and strategic priorities for the Home Office going forward.

2.4 Gabriella asked about links to HOX (Home Office Innovation) given wider discussions around innovation. Jennifer explained the focus of 'One Big Thing' this year will be innovation and shared a contact with Gabriella.

Item 3: HOSAC Associate Member Spotlight – Brian Bell

3.1 Brian explained that he is a Professor of Economics at Kings College London and the Chair of the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC).

3.2 Brian added that there are 5 other members of the committee who are obliged to work on MAC projects.

3.3 Brian explained that MAC respond to commissions from the Home Secretary and these projects are always prioritised. In quieter moments, the MAC also produces self-commissioned work.

3.4 Brian highlighted the two mentions of MAC in the labour manifesto as well as recent and upcoming publications.

3.5 Guy asked about whether technology can help with MAC's work. Brian explained issues with data linkage in the Home Office.

Item 4: HOSAC Hosts – Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG)
4.1 Joanna West (Director Tackling Exploitation and Abuse) provided an overview of the VAWG policy area and the range of crimes that fall within it.

4.2 Tom Bucke (Deputy Director in HOAI working on VAWG) summarised the idea for an analytical sprint and added that they are also interested in international comparisons.

4.3 Tom provided a few examples of how HOSAC could help:
- o External Challenge and sense checking
- o Subject expertise
- o Technical expertise
- o Access to networks

4.4 Guy summarised that HOSAC can probably support with everything that Tom suggested and asked how the team get their statistics. Tom explained that the majority of their statistics come from the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

4.5 David L added that he would be particularly interested in supporting on the systems/capability mapping of interventions and levers, and the assessment of policy interventions.

4.6 Tushna noted that she welcomed Joanna's comments about system level thinking and engagement across the entire VAWG system.

4.7 Dave said that he enjoyed reading the evidence stocktake and would have liked to have seen some prioritisation of the gaps to fill which accounted for the feasibility of data collection. Paul added that it might be good to divide packages into primary, secondary, and tertiary to show where the best inroads can be made.

4.8 Guy summarised that there was a lot of enthusiasm from HOSAC to support VAWG on their priorities.
ACTION 3 – HOSAC Secretariat to arrange a follow up meeting between VAWG colleagues and a focussed group of HOSAC members to progress with plans for HOSAC support.

Item 5: News Round
5.1 Guy congratulated Shane for being recently appointed as a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE), for public service.

Item 6: HOSAC Member Spotlight – Helen Margetts
6.1 Helen presented an overview of Public Policy Research at the Alan Turing Institute (ATI). The focus of this activity is to help the public sector to make the most of AI, including data science and AI, for the public good.

6.2 Helen explained that data science can help optimise policy making and would have been particularly useful during Covid for economic and social models that could have helped identify policy impacts.

6.3 Discussion of concerns around AI exacerbating VAWG / online harms and activity in relation to regulating AI safety including working with the AI Safety Institute.

Item 7: Associate member updates
7.1 The Chair of the Biometrics and Forensics Ethics Group (BFEG) Mark WG provided an overview of key activity since the last HOSAC meeting.

7.2 The Co-Chair of Age Estimation Science Advisory Committee (AESAC) Stuart provided an overview of key activity since the last HOSAC meeting.

7.3 The Chair of the Animals in Science Committee (ASC) David Main provided an overview of key activity since the last HOSAC meeting.

Item 8: HOSAC Forward Look
8.1 Guy introduced the HOSAC forward look and summarised the key ideas.

8.2 Members discussed HOSAC Branded work.

8.3 Dave explained that the proposed model was similar to that used by DSEC who worked collaboratively with departmental policy colleagues to highlight areas that could benefit from consideration, with CSA sign-off. This included instigating and undertaking scientific capability reviews.

8.4 Paul noted that there is a balance to be struck, in terms of the capacity of the Council, between high priority/commissioned work and lower priority work that has not been commissioned.

8.5 Gabriella noted that any HOSAC work that has not been commissioned will still require time from HO officials and it may not get the same level of engagement.

8.6 Brooke reflected that HOSAC is building up trust in the Department and HOSAC branded work would formalise the process for bringing ideas to the table.

8.7 The CSA added that a paper on forensics may warrant consideration. What is missing in the market and what are the most important places to focus the limited funding available?

8.8 Members discussed the idea for an emerging technology / AI subgroup.

8.9 Helen questioned whether emerging technology would be the right focus/name for this group when many of the issues in the Department are brought about from legacy systems and issues with data.

8.10   Jennifer explained that the ideal scenario would see the creation of a group with flexibility and absorptive capacity as a hub to advise on all issues referenced. This would include emerging technology and the threats they pose, with links to relevant teams across the Home Office.

8.11   Brooke added that the benefit of the sub-group model is the additional capacity it can bring. Paul noted that, in the Terrorism Risk Advisory Board (TRAB), bringing in relevant external experts was important and useful.

ACTION 4 – Secretariat to arrange a scoping meeting with Data & Identity Director on creation of the emerging technology/AI sub-group.

Item 9: Thanks and Close
9.1 Guy thanked all for attending and looked forward to the next HOSAC meeting, scheduled for late October.

Summary of Actions
1. **Tamsin to deliver a spotlight session on DSEC at the next HOSAC meeting.**

2. **HOSAC associate members to suggest areas across the Home Office where HOSAC, or the CSA, could facilitate helpful links.**

3. **HOSAC Secretariat to arrange a follow up meeting between VAWG colleagues and a focussed group of HOSAC members to progress with plans for HOSAC support.**

4. **Secretariat to arrange a scoping meeting with Data & Identity Director on creation of the emerging technology/AI sub-group.**