[**scrr**](http://www.scrr.ac.uk/)

[Scottish Consortium
for Rural Research](http://www.scrr.ac.uk/)

**MINUTES**

**148th meeting of the SCRR Executive Committee held on 3rd February 2022 via Zoom**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **In attendance:** |  |  |
| Geoff Simm (GS), Chair | Kathy Velander (KV) | Willie Donachie (WD) |
| Sarah Skerratt (SS)  | Nick Fraser (NF) | David Miller (DM) |
| Tracy Shimmield (TS) | Alex Davey (AD) | Lyndsey Hayes (LH) Minutes |
| Stuart Monro (SM) | David Hopkins (DH) |  |
|  |  |  |

|  |
| --- |
| 1. **Welcome and apologies**
 |
| GS welcomed all. Apologies noted from Karen Halliday and Des Thompson.  |
| 1. **Minutes and maters arising**
 |
| Minutes of the 147th Executive meeting held on 16th September 2021 were accepted.Matters arising:* SM met with Scotia council and noted SCRR paper is to come. SS has produced paper for Scotia, so will send through to SM. ACTION: SS to send Scotia paper.
* LH confirmed that hard copies newsletter had gone to COP events (Green Zone with DM and Dynamic Earth with LI) plus also copies sent to Scottish Parliament for each MSP.
* Congratulations were sent to Julie Fitzpatrick on behalf of SCRR.
* St Andrews membership contact still uncertain. ACTION: LH to follow up with St Andrews.
* Heriot Watt replacement for Tony Weir TBC. ACTION: TS will inquire again about HWU.
* Election of all executive committee members now complete.

Minutes of 60th Board Meeting/AGM held 17 November 2021 were accepted with matter arising of strategic direction for SCRR being discussed today. |
| 1. **SCRR Strategic direction discussion**
 |
| SS introduced the papers circulated to help with discussion following the AGM where J. Seckl raised questions about future strategic direction in a crowded landscape. SS described as supporting information the survey of members carried out in 2019, as well as three key policy and societal drivers to which SCRR should contribute in next two years. She stated there is a possibility to bring rural science and networks to the Scottish Government Covid recovery strategy and a rural lens more widely.GS thanked SS for the excellent paper, and several others agreed. TS noted interested in net zero issue for rural communities, and feels the rural lens is extremely important for Scotland. SCRR could act as a critical friend to look at the impact on rural environment.DH commented we can’t get away from the crowded environment for SCRR. We need to become more forward looking, so policy part of this is critical. Rural research increasingly needs to engage on societal impactSS has compared SCRRs small budget with other agencies in this area who have much larger budgets. Also agencies have limits on what they can say when government funded.AD commented that the national planning framework is another element to consider.NF queried how SCRR interacts with SEFARI etc. wondering how to reach a wider audience through Director’s Lunch meetings for example. GS noted wider reach has been achieved through virtual meetings over past couple of years.LI suggested SCRR needs to find its USP – a broad church not beholden to one master. Noted that a lot of policy being required to do is government specific and SCRR allows for wider view. LI thought ECR event is excellent. SS asked LI for an example to delve deeper into her comment on government policy specific research and LI described ‘Eradication of BBD’. WD added that Moredun would always have said in the past that their research was specific and focused, then changed to more policy led. SS asked if we are saying that interpretive and translation space is a missing niche in Scotland despite the strengths we have, noting it was a subtle but important difference.GS commented that it stuck him from JS comments at AGM that he was saying SCRR needs to raise awareness of our work and show its wider relevance, suggesting perhaps that SCRR could join forces with other key partners working in this area, such as the RSE. SM agreed that there are analogies with RSE and government needs that independent voice as it is valuable in enhancing policy being accumulated from other sources. DH thought GS had summarised the key issue; SCRR is unlikely to be in a position to be invited to lead and has perhaps reached an end point in its current evolution, so may be stronger aligning with RSE.DM made a couple of observations on SS’s paper, noting the time for rural is now, as EU has launched rural pact and as many of our organisations receive funding from there, or see our own evolution as joined, he felt this suggests SCRR’s time is now. Could be seen as less appealing to be the rural branch of RSE. He thinks we have all the elements needed in SCRR, just need to work out the best way forward.SS brought in to the discussion comments received via email from Des Thompson: *I’m still not sure about the niche occupied by SCRR, and we need to think about this as well as the SFC review.**Starting with the fundamentals, what about the ‘SCRR’ – it is a pretty clunky name (I often have to check on what the order of words is). Can we step back and think laterally about what is really needed here - ’Consortium for rural research’ is pretty passive – a grouping without any real sense of intent.* *So, we could really do with a discussion about the core purpose of what we are about – my sense from the updates we have is we try to keep up with what is happening rather than being ahead of the curve and setting the agenda. So, I suggest we need to move towards SCRR being the Scottish Rural Voice for Evidence, or simply Scottish Rural Research Advocacy – something that is far more active.**Then we need to think about the other players – SEFARI is occupying a key place, and SAGES and MASTS are examples of effective partnerships. So, where does that leave us? Well, we have strong links with Government, agencies, core programmes of government funding (in Scotland), agencies, RSE and universities/research. We are not strong on ties with young/equality agendas (and SAGES/MASTS are doing well here) but we are uniquely well placed in terms of connecting universities/research bodies/agencies/government. Actually, a SWOT analysis would help.**All of this is probably not that helpful, but my key point is the envelope we used to occupy has shifted, and we now must get ahead of the curve!**Of course, happy to input much more, but my plea is we recognise that we are working in a new and much more challenging climate (not forgetting the climate-nature crisis we have to contribute to tackling). There is not meaningful value in continuing with a passive, consortium that gives a sense of playing catch up rather than seizing agendas!*GS felt a name change was not enough alone to create change. Members busy with several commitments would need a bigger chunk of time/funding to achieve some of this, which was why GS thought alignment with RSE could be helpful. LI agreed that name change not helpful or required at this stage. Instead, setting up a forum for ECRs would help add value and allow a public engagement side. She suggested perhaps a rural science festival could allow us to use one of our strengths – our network. Plus would help raise our profile. TS stated she had a couple of meetings with Ottoline Leyser, CEO of UKRI before COP, and she stressed importance of attracting young people into Geosciences. SCRR could take om looking at young new scientists coming into rural research as one of its key headline activities. GS added that industry feedback he received also stressed the need to tackle schoolkids. WD thought penetrating schools is difficult, but SCRR could provide a bulletin board of job opportunities and that entrepreneurship and connection to industry could be another area to engage with. NS agreed that ECRs are an area where SCRR can make a difference, not only helping them but also creating networks of the future. SS noted that European Crucible work is broad and interdisciplinary and not in siloes. This group by its nature is also interdisciplinary, and that is a strong thread that should be in the remit of SCRR. The Scottish record of collaboration is important and something to be built on.KV added she has a colleague making saw wood and suggested showcasing businesses like that in the newsletter.NF reminded the group of the need to bear in mind the resources we have and not get too ambitious. Need to be effective with minimal resources. SS echoed this as other organisations have multi-million pound budgets and SCRR operates with around £40K annually and part-time staff members. SS very keen on creating networks of the future and recalled the last ECR conference and the connections it made that are still ongoing. Trans-disciplinary also important, so that the third sector and others can hear about research and ECRs can build skill set in presenting to those outside their own area. SS thinks SCRR can occupy a space different to those other networks with larger budgets. ACTION: SS to pull together a reflection paper on this discussion and send to GS.SS added that looking at other organisations to align with is important, but first SCRR needs to get its ducks in order to have a clear idea of what it wants and is about. He felt that if we get the strategy right first, then the way to deliver it will follow. GS suggested a follow on discussion on this to take place after SS had produced the digest paper. GS thanked J.Seckl for prompting this discussion and it was agreed it should be reviewed regularly.ACTION: LH to arrange follow-on meeting on strategic direction. |
| 1. **Membership**
 |
| 4.1 Consortium membership – no updates from SS. 4.2 Executive membership – covered in matters arising. |
| 1. **Events**
 |
| * 1. ECR mini conference, Perth, 17 March

SS proposed this should be postponed until late May or June, stressing the importance of it being a face-to-face meeting, plus allows time to get a 2-year strategy in place. All agreed. 5.1 Peter Wilson lecture, RSE, 10 May 3-5pm Date set and venue secured. SS invited speaker suggestions and thoughts on theme.* GS suggested Ottoline Leyser, CEO of UKRI – how to capture her mission of how science will get us out of this biodiversity climate crisis.
* DH suggested Geoff Palmer of HWU
* AD suggested a report from the biodiversity COP meeting.
* Scottish Human Rights Commission, rural reporter.
* Mike Robinson of Royal Scottish Geological Society (suggested in chatbox by TS)
	1. Members lunchtime meetings 2022

LH wrote out to all members inviting them to host and had received 3 positive responses, though all asked for later on in the year once staff have fully returned to office.  |
| 1. **Member Updates**
 |
| All agreed that written member updates worked well and agreed to continue this format.ACTION: LH to investigate a Teams or SharePoint site for updates and meeting papers. |
| 1. **Finance**
 |
| LH stated bank balance at £30K and all membership fee invoices sent out. |
| 1. **Publicity and Communications**
 |
| Spring Newsletter – biodiversity theme agreed and DM suggested Des Thompson be approached to write editorial. LH appealed for articles to be sent to her by deadline.ACTION: All to send any articles for Spring newsletter to LH by 25th Feb.ACTION: LH to invite DT to write editorial. |
| 1. **AOB/Next meeting**
 |
| Next meeting: 28 April at 10-11.30am. To be held online. |