

Cross-Party Group on Science and Technology

Tuesday 23rd April 2023 1800 - 2000

Minute

Present

MSPs

Clare Adamson MSP; Ivan McKee MSP; Brian Whittle MSP

Invited guests

Steph Wright, Calum McDonald, Gordon Johnstone, Elena Connarty, Dawn McAra-Hunter, Carolyne Thomson

Non-MSP Group Members

Stuart Farmer; Chris Rodger; Alastair MacGregor; Paul Beaumont; Alan Purves; Dilraj Sokhi-Watson; Graeme Rough; Derek Young; Fiona Quinn; Kathleen Hill; Allan Colquhoun; William Duncan; Graeme Cook; Alistair Taylor, Sylvia McKay, Juliet Dunstone; Kaitlyn Louth; Adam Surtee; Jenny Brotchie; Mridula Chakraborty; Molly Hillhouse; Thomas Wild; Niall Sommerville; Mark Wilkinson; Stephen Peacock; Jeremy Darot; Carolyne Thomson; Scott Nowbaveh; Judy Robertson; Mridula Chakraborty.

1. Welcome and apologies

- CPG Convenor, Clare Adamson, welcomed the group to the first meeting of 2024. Apologies were noted from Dr William Duncan who had to leave swiftly after the presentations.

2. Approval of meeting minutes 13th December

- The minutes from the last meeting (13th December 2023) were approved. Proposer - Niall Sommerville (RSC). Secunder - Derek Young (IoP)

3. Scottish AI Alliance: Delivering Scotland's AI Strategy

- Steph Wright (SW), Head of the Scottish AI Alliance, introduced the Scottish AI Alliance and outlined their task of developing Scotland's AI Strategy to become a leader in trustworthy, ethical and inclusive AI. Importantly, Steph asked the group "What is AI?" and defined AI as "a machine-based system that, for a given set of explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments. Different AI systems vary in their levels of autonomy and adaptiveness after deployment."
- Gordon Johnstone (GJ), Communications and Events Manager at the Scottish AI Alliance, debunked some of the common myths surround AI, distinguishing between AGI (artificial general intelligence) which does not yet exist and AI as a concept we understand today. This is important because it detracts from conversations that we need to have about holding individuals and organisations behind current AI's to account. GJ noted another big misconception is that AI is coming for our jobs however it is not AI isn't coming for our job, but somebody using AI might be. AI will create a lot of jobs we haven't even thought of yet. There are always people behind the decision-making process, which is why the Scottish AI Alliance is so focused on making sure that decisions in Scotland are made in a trustworthy, ethical, and inclusive way. Another very popular misconception discussed was that AI will fix everything. Unfortunately, AI is just a tool and its efficacy is based entirely on how well we use it, like any tool. GJ briefly spoke about the variety of Scottish AI summits that the Alliance had presented at and looked forward to future events, including an upcoming summit at Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh.
- Carlyne Thomson (CT) from the Scottish Government's AI policy team gave a presentation from the Civil Service point of view. CT spoke about the AI register which is a window into AI that is being used across Scotland, across the Scottish public sector in particular, and is a two fold product. Firstly, it is for the public to see what the Scottish Government developing and offer an opportunity to ask about anything people are unhappy or unsure about. Secondly, it is a library resource and best practise resource for those working in the public sector who are building AI – helping deliver efficiencies and keep people working in the right way. This project also ties into human rights obligations and dialogue is ongoing with the Human Rights Commission. The AI Mandate is a big piece of work for the Scottish Government going forward and the plan is to start with core organisations and getting everyone recorded on there but the team is already connecting with local authorities and health boards, as well as businesses who are delivering AI to the Scottish public sector. It is clear to all organisations, public or private, that demonstrating they are using AI in a trustworthy, ethical and inclusive way will bring great long-term benefits.
- Dawn McAra-Hunter (DMH), Programmes Manager at the Scottish AI Alliance, spoke about the programmes she manages, including the Scottish AI

Playbook and the Living with AI programme. DMH explained that the Scottish AI Playbook is an open, practical guide to how we do AI in Scotland. It is a shared and living asset, embodying Scotland's AI Strategy ethos of openness, transparency and collaboration. DMH noted that the Playbook is currently being re-developed to deliver greater impact around key sectors and themes, such as health, education, and skills. DMH also discussed the Living with AI programme, which is a fun free online course designed to get the people of Scotland engaged, interested and informed about how AI is being used in our lives and society. The programme covers many aspects of AI, from asking what is AI; how we can make AI trustworthy, ethical and inclusive; and the ways in which AI is being used today and developed for the future. The Alliance has ambitious future plans for the programme, from developing a bespoke platform for the course to doing Living with AI for schools.

- Calum McDonald (CM), Engagement and Participation Lead, at the Scottish AI Alliance, discussed how the Alliance are putting people at the centre of the strategy. A major focus of engagement is to go to people where and how they are and endeavour to overcome assumptions and biases whilst fostering inclusive processes for diverse publics. CM noted that the principles of engagement also aim to create transparency and traceable engagement accountability whilst seeking to enable and empower the people of Scotland. Another important project discussed in this section was the “Children and AI Project.”
- Steph Wright (SW) closed the presentations section by emphasising the importance of collaborating with organisations across Scotland to deliver Scotland's AI strategy and invited questions and feedback from the audience.

4. Q&A

- Convenor Clare Adamson chaired a Q&A where CPG members had the opportunity to ask colleagues at the AI Alliance about their work and more broadly, AI policy in Scotland.
- Alastair MacGregor asked about STEM based professional learning to support the education community in Scotland.
- Derek Young asked about increasing AI plagiarism and the impact on assessment in education sector.
- Clare Adamson MSP asked how we can get the education system to move as quickly as the technology that people are operating with.
- Stuart Farmer asked about the importance of teaching critical skills and equipping students with good broad knowledge.
- Derek Young asked about prompt engineering as a framing device.
- Niall Sommerville asked about critical raw materials, precious elements, e-waste and concerns around the energy intensiveness and data storage.

- Clare Adamson MSP asked about shared data and healthcare.
- Kathleen Hill asked members of the AI Alliance where they felt they were making the most and least progress.
- Clare Adamson MSP asked about international comparisons when it comes to political engagement and progress.
- Juliet Dunstone asked about engagement and outreach with SMEs.
- Stephen Peacock asked about case study stories and their role in speeding up progress and communicating the benefits as well as the pitfalls of AI.

5. AOB.

- Next meeting TBC (AGM).
- Convenor Clare Adamson reminded CPG members to send theme suggestions for future meetings to the Secretariat (RSE) and thanked the Scottish AI Alliance for a thought-provoking session.