

## **SFC Alliances for Research Challenges: Expression of Interest**

### ***Cover Sheet***

*Organisation: Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance (<https://saha.scot>)*

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*Interested Partners: Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow, Robert Gordon University, Queen Margaret University, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities (within SAHA); University of the Highlands and Islands, St Andrews (potential University lead), Stirling, Strathclyde (potential University lead)*

*Relevant Disciplines included: history, art history, environmental humanities, languages, literature, anthropology, archaeology, creative and performing arts, international relations, education*

*Submitted by:*

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Co-chairs on behalf of the Steering Group.*

## SFC Alliances for Research Challenges: Expression of Interest

[The Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance](#) was established to give a public and collective voice to the Arts & Humanities in Scotland both domestically and in a UK and international context. Its members include the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the [Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities](#) and the following HEIs: Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, University of Highlands and Islands, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, Strathclyde University and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Scottish Arts and Humanities research is in a leading position in global citations per capita, and SAHA has 4 member HEIs in the global top 100 in Arts & Humanities (QS 2022<sup>1</sup>), with two in the top 10. In REF 2021, our members had 7 top 10 appearances by GPA and 12 by Research Power in Panel D.

Our core vision is that a coalition in the area of *Climate and Sustainability* should be created as one of the four funded areas under the Alliance for Research Challenges framework, and that the Arts and Humanities across Scotland as represented by SAHA should be a partner in that coalition with a role of delivering events to promote better understanding and acceptance of Sustainability challenges and carrying out research and public engagement on the best means of gaining social understanding of the need to meet these challenges in a specified number of areas, some of which are outlined below. As we go on to demonstrate, narrative is just as important as data, because human beings are part of every research question, and we respond to narrative much more strongly than data: hence some of the key challenges faced by policymakers today can only be addressed by engaging the Arts and Humanities. The improvement of understanding and acceptance of climate consequences is key, as well as knowledge of what those consequences are. Current cultural responses often have deep historical or cultural roots, and identifying precedents for attitudinal change can provide valuable insights for policymakers and other stakeholders.

SAHA is committed to engaging with global challenges, as its four current working groups (Climate Change, Education Policy, Digital and Cultural Economy and Post-COVID Recovery) demonstrate. During COP 26, SAHA and our National Graduate School (SGSAH) collaborated to produce interdisciplinary programming during the event<sup>2</sup>. SAHA is working with SGSAH to deliver a British Council-funded fellowship scheme with a climate focus to bring ECR researchers to Scotland in 2023. As such, SGSAH is completing a scoping exercise across the environmental Arts and Humanities in Scotland.

### Alignment with Scottish Government Priorities

We can demonstrate significant expertise in this area, which fully meets the transdisciplinary goals of the SFC's Review of Coherence and Sustainability and the Scottish Government's response to that review. Our existing work and the proposed work of any coalition also intersects with the National Strategy for Economic Transformation in the areas of *just transition to net zero*, *resilient supply chains* and the Green global leadership pillar of the *Wellbeing Economy* strategy. Likewise, this Coalition would meet the *Green Recovery*, *Resilience* and *Place-based* strategies of the Climate Change Plan, while contributing across the range of its goals. It would address UN SDGs 3 (good health and wellbeing), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate action), 15 (life on land), 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and 17 (partnerships for the goals) within the context of the National Performance Framework, as well as representing the Framework's values more broadly. Net Zero and Building a Greener Future are also UKRI priorities. It would respond also to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report that was released in 2021.

### Multidisciplinary Response

Our aim would be to embed SAHA's offer within a wider HE coalition, engaged with external partners, drawing on the work of relevant research institutes in Climate Change and Sustainability, such as the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2022>

<sup>2</sup> SAHA – SGSAH Cop26 Keynote Lecture <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/sahasgsah-keynote-lecture-julia-corbett-tickets-191571845547>

Centre for Sustainable Solutions (Glasgow), the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance, the St Andrews Network for Climate, Energy, Environment and Sustainability (STACEES) and the Centre for Energy Ethics, Archaeology Institute and Centre for Island Creativity (UHI), Institute for Northern Studies (UHI Orkney) and the QMU Innovation Park. Possible leaders might include Strathclyde or St Andrews.

In engaging SAHA with the central challenge of Climate and Sustainability we aim to draw on our existing research and to form a coalition with universities and external partners to raise social awareness and acceptance of action over Climate and Sustainability and to explore ways of improving social acceptance of these goals. From within the Alliance, we have interest in the themes of researching and promoting Scotland's global engagement with the environment (University of Dundee), environmental change and the Scottish Government's Arctic Strategy/University of the Arctic (Aberdeen, UHI, RGU, St Andrews), Climate Emergency Awareness in Scottish Society, embedding thinking around the interdisciplinary role of arts and humanities in response to climate crisis at PhD/ECR levels (SGSAH), climate change and heritage (UHI), Sustainable Tourism (Glasgow) and global environmental humanities (HfE Observatories). Externally we have recently engaged with the head of corporate affairs at [Mainstream Renewable Power](#) and the MD at [Taste of Arran](#) among others on these topics, and we would anticipate engaging with these and similar organisations in any coalition. We meet the Executive Chair of the AHRC, Christopher Smith, on a quarterly basis, and see this Expression of Interest as meeting the key UKRI 2022-27 Strategic Goals of Diversity, Connectivity, Resilience and Engagement. We are also planning or have discussed joint events and projects with the Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSHau), the Irish Humanities Alliance (IHA) and the Royal Society of Canada (RSC), and contribute to the [European Alliance of Social Sciences and Humanities](#) as a member. There are areas where our proposed programme of research activity intersects strongly with that of these partners, notably the IHA and RSC. Relevant partner organisations in Scotland with which this alliance has strong links are Historic Environment Scotland, National Museums Scotland, Learning for Sustainability Scotland (LfS), Glasgow Life and the National Trust for Scotland.

Misleading information and stories of comfort and value rather than narratives of evidence and fact are only too strong in Western society.<sup>3</sup> In the area of Climate and Sustainability in particular, cultural acceptance of the changes that need to be made has been slow. Although there have been manifest improvements recently, there are major areas such as food production and distribution or health inequalities where carbon impact recognition is underdeveloped. The power of narrative has too often displaced evidence and fact: it needs to return to their service, in order to support the need for behavioural change.<sup>4</sup>

We are interested in engaging with HEIs in Scotland willing to be coalition partners in Climate and Sustainability, and to date two of our member organisations have indicated that they may be willing in principle to lead a research coalition. We see SAHA contributing as proposed above, with the full involvement of SGSAH and the new generation of researchers and influencers undertaking doctoral research across Scotland, which is regarded as a major success by AHRC and UKRI more widely. SGSAH has a key interest in climate change with a new GREEN/GRADUATE Strategy and Operations Plan in place.<sup>5</sup>

The theme is broad enough to ensure that the coalition responds to the needs of several national and international policy initiatives, as discussed above, yet selecting specific sub-themes as identified is key to ensuring the work is manageable within the programme proposed.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example work of the Gapminder Foundation (<https://www.gapminder.org>) in Sweden, founded by Hans Rosling and his family in 2005. The associated popular book, *Factfulness*, has been translated into 36 languages.

<sup>4</sup> See Mike Berners-Lee, *How Bad Are Bananas?* (London:Profile, 2020). Notably although Mike Berners-Lee read science as an undergraduate, he has moved to the Humanities to profile carbon impact in his career as Professor at the Institute for Social Futures at Lancaster.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sgsah.ac.uk/about/ourwork/policy/green/>

We envisage that our part in the coalition will include different activities such as:

- Researching the reaction of different audiences, segmented by demographic, to different climate issues.
- Researching past attitudes to climate and environment and how those attitudes have changed, particularly in response to scientific knowledge and policy intervention.
- Building on our existing SAHA position paper to create future advice papers (How to talk about climate/ how to use history/ how to imagine a sustainable future for use by schools, media and the general public), while also engaging with policy-makers and joint-work with relevant third sector organisations including Creative Carbon Scotland.
- Events on aspects of climate change with RSC (and university of the Arctic Network); DASSHau (on the role of AH in social and environmental change); IHA (food/heritage/island communities), UHI's Coastal History Network on coasts, climate, migration and refugee crises.
- EDI perspectives, considering the equality impact of changing governance and legal frameworks designed to promote climate justice.

### **Balance and Specificity**

Our view is that the optimal research coalition addresses four areas: climate science and associated areas of impact (e.g. agriculture, supply chains); governance and legal frameworks including in the areas of climate justice, environmental humanities, and narrative and public engagement and response. Our network and comprehensive organisational reach adds significant value in research power, networking and inter-institutional collegiality in the Arts and Humanities dimension of this work, offering a unified response in a fragmented field. In other words, SAHA provides a specific avenue of response to a broad set of questions.

### **UKRI and other Funding Opportunities**

As the proposed theme aligns with core UKRI goals as outlined in the sections above, we believe there is scope for seeking additional funding to develop the work of the coalition, in particular through the AHRC schemes (e.g. Disability Inclusive Global Development networks, Designing Net Zero, Indigenous Partnerships (with Australian or Canadian colleagues engaged) or the future round of AHRC-Irish Research Council joint funding, given our close working relationship with the Irish Humanities Alliance. Green transition is one of the core themes at European level also. Thus, Scotland could learn from best practices at European level, and though our membership in EASSH and CIVIS/GuildEU/LERU/U21<sup>6</sup> collaboration networks are already in place with potential partners within reach. This coalition will draw on existing expertise across our SAHA membership with a rich knowledge base on the proposed themes.

### **Benefits**

We anticipate that SFC funding of this coalition will deliver the following benefits via SAHA participation:

- The creation of an alliance which will create a platform for Scottish HEIs to pursue major grants.
- Greater awareness of climate issues which at present have only secondary levels of awareness (e.g. carbon impact and food).
- The establishment of an informed framework for understanding the likely reception of policy and governance in climate, with a consequent impact on future policy frameworks.

There are further stakeholder benefits:

- **Policy makers** – evidenced policy-making is key to addressing the major challenges Scotland and indeed the world is facing in relation to climate change. To implement the step-change needed to bring the changes agreed at COP26 and achieve net-zero understanding, the facilitation of acceptance at societal level is key. SAHA can bring a people-centred focus to climate discussions and can provide the narratives needed to bring home to a wide public the

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<sup>6</sup> International academic networks: CIVIS – A European Civic University, The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities, League of European Research Universities (LERU) and Universitas 21.

relevance of local and global challenges, an evidence-based historical understanding of our relationship with the environment, and a creative vision of a sustainable future for Scotland.

- **Early-career researchers** – ECRs across the board in academia continue to face challenges to support long-term sustainable careers, and the work of SGSAH has already made a substantial impact on the sector. The coalition provides an opportunity to bring together academics and non-academics at different levels in their professional careers that are interested in the highlighted theme, but a special focus will be placed on supporting ECR development.
- **Funding bodies** – funding bodies such as the SFC and others will learn the state of play in the field and the research needs of the community to respond to this challenge. Impact is a key aspect of research funding and the coalition through its focus on policy-making and wider societal gains can offer a good mechanism to explore new ways of conceptualising impact to inform future calls for funding.
- **Wider public** – there is both a direct and indirect benefit to the wider public. The direct benefit is derived from being informed on relevant subjects that could inform day-to-day choices. An indirect benefit would be derived from improvements of public communication and perception as a result of the work of this coalition. With the hard choices that are facing society due to the climate change crisis, society buy-in is essential, be that to make more informed choices at dietary level to moving away from fossil fuels. Learning from best practices around cultures of acceptance and communication there is scope to improve existing communication at societal level.