

Joint 60th Anniversary Event: The past, present and future of SPRU-STIS Research

Thursday 28th May 2026, 9.00-15.00
Science Policy Research Unit
Jubilee Building (1st Floor; 144)
University of Sussex Business School
Falmer, Brighton, UK

Marking approximately 60 years since the founding of SPRU and the Science Studies Unit, and the “Gathering of the Clan” in Edinburgh (Walsh 1966), this half-day event will celebrate the collaboration between two of the original centers of what has come to be known variously as science studies/science policy research/ science and technology studies/ science, technology and innovation studies/ innovation studies/ innovation management/ economics of innovation and the sociology of scientific knowledge. The event will take the form of panel discussions involving colleagues from each institution, discussing the legacy of previous collaboration, the opportunities and challenges facing our field, and the future of the field, as envisaged by the next generation of scholars. The event is made possible by the UK Association for Studies in Innovation, Science and Technology (AsSIST-UK) and the University of Sussex “Science, Politics and Decision-Making” Research Mobilisation Group.

Programme

9.00-9.30	Coffee + registration
9.30-10.00	Welcome and Introductions (Andy Davies & Robin Williams) Session 1: The legacy of Sussex (SPRU) - Edinburgh (STIS) collaborations over the ages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome & thanks (Adrian Ely & Katerina Psarikidou) • Reflections from PICT to the present day (Andy Davies, Robin Williams & Robin Mansell)
10.00-11.00	Session 2: Critical and instrumental STS and innovation studies research in the UK’s current environment Andy Stirling & Jane Calvert <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the UK’s contemporary political environment shaping STS and its role?
11.00-12.00	Session 3: The future of an inclusive and coherent field at SPRU and STIS Early-mid career researchers from Edinburgh (Xiao Yang, Simone Sambento, Yujia Ji) and Sussex (Steve Scholte, Isaac Lemo, Pablo Ayala-Villalobos) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the emerging questions in our field? • How can we collaborate to strengthen the efforts of the next generation of SPRU and STIS scholars?
12.00-13.00	Lunch sponsored by “Science Politics and Decision-Making” Research Mobilisation Group

14.00-15.00	<p>Science Politics Decision Making RMG session*: “Reflections from the Day: Exploring collaborative research initiatives”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the short/medium term priorities that have emerged from the day? • How do we transform these into concrete plans and proposals for research collaboration? <p><small>*This is an SPDM RMG session, optional for colleagues from Edinburgh who are welcome and encouraged to attend. From this session, we will schedule follow-on discussions around specific funding bids, channels for policy engagement and joint publications.</small></p>
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The Gathering of the Clan (historical perspective)

Excerpts taken from a News and Comment piece in Science magazine, December 1966

“The occasion for an International Science Studies Seminar in Edinburgh from 3 to 5 November was the inauguration of a science studies unit at the University of Edinburgh. Among the roughly two score who attended the seminar were researchers-most of them from Western Europe and the United States-and government officials concerned with the making, and the results, of science policy. An original purpose of the meeting was to consider whether activities in the field of science studies added up to a coherent whole. A consensus was reached very early in the meeting that any attempt to define the scope and methodology of these activities or even to give them a name (“science of science” was a main contender) was at least premature.”

“The muster of researchers at the meeting not unexpectedly showed the United States and the United Kingdom leading in the number of university-based groups specializing in science studies. In Britain, while there is interest but as yet no formal organization in the subject at Oxford and Cambridge, groups are in 'being, or are being established, at Manchester, Birmingham, the new University at Sussex, and Bath University of Technology, as well as at Edinburgh.”

“It was obvious that the question of whether the methodology of science can be extended into the process of making decisions for society still holds attractions for at least some who were at the meeting, and that hopes for “empirical government” are not dead. The sense of the meeting, however, was clearly that major attention should be given to more accessible problems. The suggestion was made, for example, that science studies are now at a stage analogous to medicine's “descriptive and anatomical phase”-that science studies should be regarded as a technology rather than a science.”

“The practical problems in the ambit of science policy studies are numerous and formidable. As the cost of R & D rises, every country must try to choose the best ways to deploy finite resources in money and manpower. How to organize national science policy apparatus, how to measure the productivity of research, how to improve the management of basic and directed research, have all become international problems.”

“That science, education, and the economy are vitally interconnected is now so generally recognized as to be a truism. But prescribing action in these areas involves science policy researchers and economists, dealing with unknowns and uncontrollables. The demand for answers here is most insistent, however, and nobody at the meeting disputed the assertion of one speaker that, at least for the present, science policy studies will be the center of the science of science.”

“To the outsider it appears that those engaged in studying science are faced with the chronic problem of the social sciences: how to make research more "scientific" and, at the same time, more significant. At the Edinburgh meeting, because the host country is going through a protracted and fairly agonizing reappraisal of its governmental science organization, the discussion kept swinging in that interesting direction and the dichotomy received little attention.”

Walsh, J. (1966) Science Studies: A Gathering of the Clan in Edinburgh, *Science* 154, 1150-1151