Minutes for the CCS & BCS Spring 2026 TAC

Wednesday 26th of March 2026, Online

Attendees

Stephen Nortcliff (SN) Chair

Georgia Phetmanh (GP) REAL

Thomas Aspray (TA) REAL Technical Advisor

Oliver Dunn (OD) REAL

Grace Egan (GE) REAL

Duncan Craig (DC) REAL

Gregor Keenan (GK) CCS Producers' Representative

Jo Chapman (JC) BCS Operators' Representative

Roy Lawford (RL) OF&G

David Roberts (DR) NSF

Nicholas John (NJ) ACL

Thelema Nethercott (TN) ACL

Fiona Donaldson (FD) SEPA

Sultan Khan (SK) Lab Representative

Dan Pursglove (DP) Environment Agency

Lara Moggridge (LM) Natural Resource Wales

Helen White (HW) DAERA

Welcome and apologies

SN welcomed all attendees and noted apologies from Kathy Nicholls and Colin Millar.

Update from REAL

CCS/BCS Updates

OD provided an update on CCS and BCS scheme status.

BCS: There were 108 certified BCS participants, processing 6.0 million tonnes of input material and producing over 5 million tonnes of digestate.

- England: 80
- Scotland: 11
- Wales: 9
- Northern Ireland: 8

One process based in the North East of England was withdrawn due to the participant not renewing certification and providing no additional information.

CCS: There were 172 certified processes, receiving 4.2 million tonnes of input material and producing over 2 million tonnes of compost.

- England: 133

- Scotland: 21
- Wales: 13
- Northern Ireland: 5

Since the last TAC meeting, a single process -based in the Republic of Ireland- was temporarily withdrawn while the process was redeveloped from a windrow to aerated static pile process.

Annual Report 2025

OD announced the completion of the Annual Report for 2025, noting that the report was finalised in early March, allowing for its publication prior to the REA's ORG Conference. The report was slimmer and more focused that previous years, following a move away from the technically dense 30+ page statistical deep dives of 2024. The report now features "Schemes at a Glance" sections, focusing on brief high-level snapshots of core data as well a covering key developments of the schemes such as the implementation of the resource frameworks into the schemes, tendering of the Certification Bodies, and development of the Test Method Working Group.

Implementation of NRW and SEPA's EoW positions

GP covered the implementation of the NRW and SEPA End of Waste positions in the scheme was completed. From 9th February, all audits were produced against the new positions. This work primarily involved updating audit checklists, referencing new requirements, and discussing specific requirements with regulators.

GP reported that the Scheme Rules and annexes were updated, and minor changes were introduced for the purpose of clarity and consistency. Furthermore, NRW published RS122, which was noted as being similar to RPS317. It was confirmed that producers in Wales have until December 2026 to meet the new limits, and this was communicated to all producers. The schemes are now auditing against four different standards.

Lab Applicants

GP reported that a BCS lab application was progressing, and a second lab had expressed interest in applying for BCS and possibly CCS. Initial discussions with these labs indicated likely approval by the end of the year, pending successful assessments.

CB appointment: renewed appointment of existing CBs and new contracts

OD announced that the tendering process for the 2026 to 2028 certification body contract cycle has concluded with the reappointment of all three existing Certification Bodies to both the CCS and BCS with several improvements to the contracts that will enhance the Schemes' working relationship with all CBs.

Changes to testing/laboratory related responsibilities at REAL: more capacity for lab work

TA reported that going forward for all matters related to testing or laboratory work please get in touch with TA supported by OD, rather than GP.

Lab appointment: continued appointment of NRM and Eurofins issued with new T&Cs

OD confirmed the continued appointment of NRM and Eurofins as approved laboratories for both schemes for 2026. Updated Terms and Conditions (Version 10) were issued to both laboratories to ensure continued alignment with scheme requirements and the latest regulatory frameworks. These documents are available here.

Laboratory T&Cs revision: summary of changes

TA summarised the changes to the laboratory Terms and Conditions, highlighting three main amendments.

TA noted that, historically, an independent audit of the labs was conducted; however, this has been replaced with an REAL customer audit. TA explained that he now carries out the audit working for REAL.

Furthermore, TA detailed that laboratories are now required to participate in the WEPAL MARSET proficiency testing programme. TA outlined that this programme contains a significant amount of relevant materials for the schemes, including organic fertilisers and sewage sludges, enabling laboratories to test and check the suitability of their results. TA added that the programme is operated by a UKAS-equivalent provider.

Finally, TA announced a complete rewrite of the complaints section, which followed issues regarding communication between operators and laboratories. TA specified that it is now a requirement for laboratories to keep operators informed whilst investigations are ongoing. While UKAS-accredited laboratories maintain complaints policies as part of their Quality Management Systems, TA concluded that this revision ensures such procedures align with scheme requirements.

Lab applicants: progress of BCS lab application, new approved BCS lab subject to contract signing

OD noted that REAL and the Certification Bodies reviewed the independent audit outcome for the current BCS laboratory applicant during a recent monthly meeting and that no technical issues were identified during the assessment.

OD outlined that the laboratory was approved in principle, with the remaining outstanding barriers being administrative rather than technical. OD concluded that the formal appointment of the new BCS laboratory remains subject to the final signing of the contract; though is likely imminent.

Research Hub updates

Current Call for Proposals

GE presented an update on the current call for proposals, noting that the window remains open until this Friday. Three proposals were received to date. GE indicated that the first proposal addresses machine learning, a topic that has now arisen twice. GE mentioned that SN has been working alongside an operator on a separate proposal regarding the use of a mixture of digestate and compost as a peat alternative, whilst the third proposal focuses on feedstock contamination reduction methods.

GE anticipated that a fourth proposal would be submitted by the end of the week, which focuses on the methodology for distinguishing between compostables and non-compostables in AD and composting.

Update of commissioned projects

GE provided an overview of the four ongoing commissioned projects.

GE stated that the data analysis phase is currently underway for the Plant Response Test spring barley test, though no conclusion date is presently in mind.

Regarding the Risk Assessment for End of Waste, GE explained that the report has been finalised and the methodology is under discussion. GE noted that the steering group raised several clarification points, and it was agreed that the group would work with Jackie Robinson to conclude the matter. GE added that this would be finalised in time for the Resource Framework.

GE highlighted that the University of Southampton will be looking for contractors. GE outlined a central barrier facing the project, describing it as a chicken and egg scenario where the university intends to determine the physical properties of the products, but cannot source the products as no market currently exists for them.

GE reported that for Project 10, regarding a peat alternative for the PRT, physical property testing for peat alternatives is underway, which will be followed by glasshouse testing and growth trials.

GE further explained that the research panel suggested two additional projects, for which steering groups are now in place. GE noted that work to issue the proposals to tender for contractors has not yet commenced.

GE detailed that the first of these, Project 2502, concerns plastics contaminants in biowaste, which has attracted interest from LARAC and other early stakeholders. GE observed that early stakeholder engagement with biowaste suppliers will ensure the project achieves a high impact, with the core objective being to determine which pretreatment techniques prove most effective for the removal of PCs.

GE stated that the second project selected focuses on reducing the duration of the RBP test, which is currently a 28-day test, noting that the BCS has grown significantly since its inception. GE suggested the potential utilization of the REAL dataset for this work.

GE opened the floor to questions.

SN commented that the waste treatment project is highly interesting. SN noted that Ian Martin stated the ultimate goal is for no plastic to emerge at the end of the process, and maintained that to achieve this, focus must be directed toward feedstock.

Update from the Certification Bodies

RL updated the group that Emma and Ella are on maternity leave, and Daisy has been trained up.

RL reported one complaint, which originated from a member of the public regarding bagged compost. RL noted that the complaint was made by an amateur gardener who observed plastic contamination and suggested it might be dog poo bags, though no evidence was present. RL added that LM (NRW) attended a spot inspection which revealed a whole lot of non-compliances, and noted that they are still awaiting their response to the compliance notice.

LM commented that she attended the spot inspection with OF&G, noting that the joint visit was useful and expressing thanks for the notification.

NJ introduced Thelema Nethercott (TN), the operations manager in charge of accreditations and quality assurance, welcoming that support.

NJ stated that one complaint was received from a Northern Ireland compost business operating multiple sites, which came through the NIEA. NJ explained that the investigation is ongoing at the moment and should be concluded fairly soon, noting that a site visit was conducted this week. NJ undertook to check that ACL has notified the NIEA. HW mentioned being unaware of this issue but that they would look into it.

DR reported that there is nothing significant to report, but mentioned being signed off as an auditor now. Apart from that, DR concluded there was nothing further to report.

Update from the Approved Laboratories

SK reported that they had just had their REAL audit visit this week, TA still to visit some subcontracting labs, but nothing to report yet.

AOB

Plant Response Test queries

GK raised an issue regarding Plant Response Test failures, detailing an email and a subsequent telephone call received from a gentleman who consults for several sites. GK explained that the issue related to eight marginal failures across different sites, all of which had samples sent to the same laboratory. GK noted that the consultant, who had undertaken the sampling himself, was aware that the laboratory had changed location and queried whether any changes had occurred at the facility to influence the results. GK raised the possibility of examining the statistics for PRT failures, while acknowledging uncertainty as to whether this was feasible.

Furthermore, GK observed that the consultant noted PRT results take a long time to be returned, and there is no obvious steer as to why the tests fail. GK added that the consultant sent the material to an alternative laboratory, which also returned a failure, leaving him unclear as to what corrective actions to take. GK highlighted that the consultant mentioned the cost of the PRT was very high, making the submission of multiple samples very expensive. GK stated that the consultant also queried the 80% critical limit, and mentioned that the RH was looking into this matter. GK questioned whether anyone had seen those laboratory results.

SN questioned whether this matter of PRT performance might be addressed during the lab audits.

TA explained that this would not fall under the remit of an audit, as it is not necessarily part of the test itself or lab performance and might instead relate to feedstock. TA noted that REAL has been informed of the matter, as mentioned by GK. TA detailed that the laboratory is currently carrying out an investigation alongside a partner laboratory specialising in horticultural testing, with the purpose of the work being to understand the potential causes of poor performance in the test. TA stated that from the perspective of REAL, they are investigating the issue and being supportive, concluding that there is nothing further to be done until the investigation finishes. Regarding failure rates, TA added that the quantity of issues raised by scheme participants regarding the PRT is still relatively low.

SN reiterated that the issue might stem from a feedstock problem.

GK emphasised that a distinct factor in this case is that the individual works with multiple processes. GK argued that while a single process might point to an isolated issue, this consultant oversees eight processes situated across the country with varying feedstocks, process durations, and locations. GK highlighted the difficulty in identifying where the fault lies, noting that receiving a PRT result of 78% instead of 80% makes it exceedingly hard to determine the next steps. GK stated that as a representative, it is impossible to offer advice on where to look next, because the cost and length of the

test make it impractical to run numerous tests to obtain a better view of the data. GK suggested that any information regarding overall pass and fail rates might prove helpful.

TA maintained that the test remains valid because it is a comparative test, and the quality control requirement ensures its validity even factoring in seasonal variation.

GK noted that the group does not possess a significant amount of information.

RL observed a substantial rise in PRT failures during February. RL noted that these failures happened to originate from the same laboratory and were spread across numerous companies rather than being confined to a single operator. RL stated that the conclusion at the time attributed this to the summer drought, as the failing material mostly comprised input material from the late summer. RL added that one operator noticed higher sodium chloride levels, which the operator believed was due to the drought conditions.

GK described this as a very good insight and queried whether the facility in question was Eurofins.

RL stated that it was not her place to say.

GK noted that conditions during the summer were exceptional.

SN concluded that the group is aware that there is a potential area to explore, which might warrant further thought and investigation.

Personnel Updates

GP stated that DC no longer works for REAL as of the 5th March and noted that recruitment is currently underway for a new Policy and Stakeholder Relations Manager.

Summer Meeting Date

GP requested that members complete the poll for the summer meeting date by the end of the day. GP added that the poll must be completed so that the date can be fixed by tomorrow.