

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

Minutes of the ESRC Council

Date: 22 May 2025

Location: In person

Attendees

Members of ESRC Council

Anita Charlesworth (nominated acting Chair)

Andrew Dilnot

Jane Duckett

David Halpern

Lasana Harris

Ben Page

Sarah Sharples (CSA)

Cecilia Wong

UKRI/ESRC attendees

Stian Westlake (Executive Chair)

Alison Park (Deputy Executive Chair)

Jen Gold (Executive Director of Research)

Claire Graves (Chief Operating Officer)

Emily Clarke (Deputy Director of Strategy and Partnerships)

Nola Hewitt-Dundas (UKRI Board Member)

Secretariat/Observers

Samantha Richardson (Senior Manager, Executive Chair Office)

Flo Bradley Sutton (Governance Manager, Council Secretariat)

Apologies

Todd Landman (SIM) and Kimberley Scharf

Welcome and apologies

Anita Charlesworth (AC) welcomed members to the 30th meeting of Council, and in particular the new Council members (Andrew, David and Cecilia). AC also welcomed Nola (NHD) to the meeting and thanked her for attending the meeting today. NHD is one of the three UKRI board members acting as a liaison between the UKRI board and ESRC in the development of ESRC's Strategic Delivery Plan for 2025-27.

Members were reminded to check their current details on the conflicts register and update as necessary and asked to raise any conflicts during the meeting.

Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising

All outstanding actions have been completed or are in progress. A detailed table is provided in the papers.

ESRC Council Planner Forward Schedule

Suggestions are welcome at any point, please contact the secretariat team. There is work underway to populate future Council agendas; Secretariat is engaging with ESRC's Senior Leadership Team on this regularly.

Executive Chair Report

Stian Westlake (SW) presented the Executive Chair's report. Council discussed the funding profile of ESRC, and how best to maximise the benefit and impact of its funding. Council encouraged ESRC to be bold and use initiative when it came to funding and flagged the importance of maintaining good investment diversity within its portfolio. SW updated Council on the current Research & Development Missions Accelerator Programme (RDMAP), explaining how the work will span UKRI with regular engagement from the Chief Scientific Advisors (CSAs).

UKRI Board Member Update

Council welcomed NHD to the meeting, in the context of her role as UKRI Board member and being partnered with ESRC in relation to its forthcoming Strategic Delivery Plan. NHD shared her reflections on how the UKRI Board operates and her role as a member as well as priorities in the year ahead. AC and ESRC Council thanked Nola for attending the meeting and offering such rich context to conversations.

To discuss: ESRC Strategy 2025-2027

SW presented the ESRC Strategy paper. AC asked council to consider the Strategic Delivery Plan (SDP) as a still evolving document and to focus on the major strategic ideas. SW offered to have further conversations with council members if they would find this

useful. SW reflected on the three key themes - curiosity driven research, delivering citizen benefit and economic growth. Council members confirmed they were happy with the proposed approach to developing a strategy and an SDP. Members also suggested edits to the draft Mission and Vision statement provided. Council members reflected on the curiosity led research funding and citizen benefits sections of the SDP.' Council members discussed the framing of each section and put forward suggested changes such as 'foundational research' may be a better term than 'curiosity-driven research' in the context of the social sciences. Council noted the importance of place, particularly in light of the useful stakeholder roundtable discussions in Leeds on the previous day. SW thanked council members for a helpful discussion. SW noted he would keep council members up to date with the progress of the SDP.

Papers for discussion by exception and any other business

Council members agreed that more in person meetings within the year would be beneficial and enable them to build a stronger group. In light of this, Secretariat proposed that the May and November meetings each year will be in person; they will work on organising an in-person meeting for November 2025. Council members discussed the proposed idea of a newsletter between Council meetings and questioned whether this was the best use of ESRC staff time given the detailed briefings they received at meetings. It was agreed that optional informal meetings between Council meetings, either with Council 'buddies' or SW could be organised if there was a time sensitive update that would benefit from a discussion.