

Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting held on 21 June 2023 in London.

Those attending:

Professor Ewan Birney
Steve Bagshaw
Professor Anne Ferguson-Smith
Professor Gideon Henderson (items 1-7)
Professor Martin Humphries (Chair of the meeting)
Professor Andrew Millar (via Zoom) (items 1- 4)
Professor Christine Orengo
Professor Jo Price
Professor Nigel Scrutton
Professor Malcolm Skingle
Professor Steven Spoel
Professor Melanie Welham (UKRI-BBSRC Executive Chair)
Professor Ijeoma Uchegbu (items 4 - 9)

Also attending:

Dr Amanda Collis
Dr Karen Lewis
Dr Sarah Perkins
Bill Poll
Professor Guy Poppy
Dr Rosie Cornelius
Laura Notton (item 7 only)
Dr Rob Hardwick (item 8 only)
Dr David McAllister (item 8 only)
Professor Jerry Roberts (item 8 only)
Professor Geraint Thomas (item 8 only)
Sarah Cresswell
Ksymena Grzybowska (Secretary)

ITEM 1. OPENING REMARKS

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. The Chair congratulated Melanie on her award of DBE in this year's King's Birthday Honours list recognising her outstanding service to bioscience and Anne Ferguson-Smith, who was awarded a CBE. Other members of immediate BBSRC community honoured in this list included Eleanor Riley (CBE; University of Edinburgh, former Director of Roslin Institute) and Ian Charles (OBE; Director of The Quadram Institute).
3. As this was Melanie's last meeting, the Chair and Council members thanked her for all her successes and valuable contributions during her tenure as the BBSRC Executive Chair and previously the Director of Science.
4. Council asked about the process of appointing the permanent successor and it was confirmed that this was progressing well. Council noted that the interim arrangements had not been approved by the Minister and expressed a concern, given that Melanie's departure was in two weeks' time. The Chair agreed that he would contact UKRI Chair to convey Council's concerns. Council said that Executive Chair's (EC) appointments should be approved by the UKRI CEO. Council also asked whether we could learn from other EC's appointments and BBSRC will investigate that.
5. There were no apologies received for this meeting.

6. The Chair thanked Council members for reviewing their declarations on the new UKRI portal. Members were reminded to declare any changes to their registers. They should be highlighted by Council members at the meeting and the Secretariat would follow up to update declarations via the Portal after the meeting. Members were asked to raise any conflicts arising during the course of the meeting.

ITEM 2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 MARCH 2023 (UKRI BBSRC 08/2023)

7. The minutes were agreed as a correct record of the meeting subject to a minor amendment in Council dinner notes relating to the point about R&D.
8. Council suggested that a follow-on discussion focused on innovation was scheduled for a future Council dinner/meeting.

Action UKRI BBSRC 89/2023: Ksymena to note innovation discussion in the Council forward look.

ITEM 3. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AND MATTERS ARISING (ORAL)

9. The Chair went through the actions and most of them were either in hand or completed. Specifically:
 - *Action: UKRI-BBSRC 85/2023* - providing summaries about interdisciplinary responsive mode applications. The target date is September 2023.
 - *Action: UKRI-BBSRC 86/2023* - sharing Data Policy and an update on Bioinformatics and Biological Resources (BBR) and TRD (Transformative Research Technologies) Funds. The target date is July 2023.

ITEM 4. EXECUTIVE CHAIR'S REPORT (UKRI BBSRC 09/2023)

10. Council noted a performance summary highlighting key achievements, future plans and a scorecard summarising progress against the Near-Term Actions (NTAs) set out in BBSRC's Delivery Plan as at the end of Quarter 4. Specifically, Council noted the update about the public dialogue on Genome Editing in Farmed Animals and Council advised learning from earlier successes of precision breeding.
11. Council noted the update on The Funding Service (TFS) and its scale-up to the first responsive mode call for vowel Councils (AHRC, EPSRC and ESRC). BBSRC was scheduled to launch its calls on the new system in the second phase with the remaining Research Councils. Council also noted that there was a task and finish group at BBSRC looking at the TFS.
12. Council thanked for a useful update on the implementation of the Review of Data Intensive Bioscience included in the EC's report. Council was also pleased about the success of BioFAIR, a virtual infrastructure for biological and biomedical sciences data and noted that this was progressing and BBSRC was looking into appointing an interim Director for BioFAIR. Council briefly discussed their role, different type of leadership needed for different stages of the investment and the importance of engaging with stakeholders, including Council. Council emphasised the importance of ensuring a dialogue between BioFAIR and HEIs and other research institutions.
13. Council welcomed the update on progress against the BBSRC EDI Action Plan which had been published alongside the UKRI EDI strategy and a summary of the discussion by BBSRC's EDI Expert Advisory Group on this topic. Council commented that the EDI strategy had some limitations and specifically discussed the emphasis of increasing the diversity of the pool to ensure boards representation and avoiding overburden on the underrepresented. Council was also interested to know whether there was any benchmarking of the Institutes carried out and it was noted that data gathering exercise covered that aspect. It was noted that there were different challenges at the Institutes, especially for those that were not embedded within a university. Council suggested replicating Institutes research culture forum in the HEI sector and noted that this was something that UKRI has been thinking about to synthesise and share best practice.

14. Council asked about publishing EDI targets and their potential impact to drive change. It was important to recognise that there were different issues in different disciplines and areas of BBSRC activities and BBSRC has been thinking about this and its commitment to identify EDI targets was reflected in BBSRC EDI action plan.
15. Council noted that 'place' agenda was becoming a significant area of focus in UKRI and in this context BBSRC had established an internal task and finish group to develop BBSRC's corporate position on 'place'. This would include consideration of how, when and where funding mechanisms could be delivered, refocused, or tilted across a range of scenarios and business areas to address place-based policy drivers and / or R&D investment targets as required, as well as considering the risks and consequences of these interventions on the broader BBSRC funding portfolio. BBSRC was feeding into UKRI's work and it was confirmed that this topic would feature on the agenda for the next Council meeting in September 2023.
16. Council was interested in the update on the discussions with Shell and noted that the Executive Chair had visited the Shell Energy Transition Campus in Amsterdam [*this section of the minutes was deemed sensitive and has been recorded separately*] to discuss strategic priorities and further explore areas of shared interest. It was noted that BBSRC recognised the importance of addressing potential conflict of interests via UKRI wide discussion to involve other multinational companies (e.g. consortium approach).
17. Council was interested to see the outcomes of the ongoing evaluation relating to BBSRC attributable spin outs. This information would be shared with BBSRC Council when available.

Action UKRI BBSRC 90/2023: Karen will share the outcomes of the evaluation relating to BBSRC attributable spin outs when available.

18. Council asked about Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA), its role and interactions with UKRI and noted that the Chair of ARIA's Board had attended UKRI Board dinner in January 2023. Council also noted that creating a network of directors was ongoing and there probably be an announcement at the end of Summer 2023.
19. Council noted the update on the Infrastructure Fund Wave 3 submissions of ideas for the next spending review – ideas/concepts that are being developed by other Councils in UKRI and BBSRC was approached as involved or interested party. BBSRC Executive Team reviewed the ideas and identified those that were of interest to BBSRC.

ITEM 5. UPDATES FROM OTTOLINE LEYSER (ORAL)

20. The Chair welcomed Ottoline Leyser to the meeting and expressed Council's concern relating to delays with the interim Executive Chair's appointment. Ottoline responded that public appointments process was challenging and UKRI was doing everything they could to ensure an announcement was made shortly.
21. Ottoline went on to thank Melanie for her great work in her role of the EC and how she valued working with her when Ottoline joined UKRI as the CEO.
22. Ottoline provided UKRI updates as follows:
 - It was an exciting time for UKRI, one year in to the five-year UKRI Strategy. A number of strategies/activities that cut across were more visible to communities: strategic themes where value can be added by joining budgets; interdisciplinary responsive mode call pilot; ability to look at cross-Council investment (e.g. UKRI Food Deep dive); EDI strategy (enabling entries to careers at different stages, joining different communities, narrative CVs etc.)
 - Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) – there has been a shift of focus since the formation of DSIT. Before UKRI was a small part of a large government department and now UKRI was core activity of the department. There were opportunities for UKRI in ensuring all parts were connected. Data analysis would be key to address government's input-output way of looking at things.

23. Council was interested to hear about UKRI's vision for how the EDI success would look like and noted that there were different lenses to look at this. A lot of work had gone into identifying issues and ways of addressing them, e.g. double-blind schemes, randomisation. The success would be when the data is published and there are no discrepancies between underrepresented groups. The important aspect was how we assess ideas and are more inclusive about it.
24. In relation to translation of research, there was good data regarding start-ups, however, scaling-up was a major focus and supporting people developing skills in managing scale-up was recognised as important. More churn in different communities would create better knowledge of the system and improve such skills.
25. Council asked about the research landscape and its diversity in the context of the Nurse Landscape Review, specifically about Public Sector Research Establishments (PSREs) and that they were not so well connected within the landscape. Council noted that UKRI managed the portfolio and its balance to provide stability and allow agility at the same time.
26. Council asked about set targets by the government to reduce headcount (Full Time Equivalents) by 17% (and operating budget by 25%) by the end of March 2025 across UKRI. From a local Research Council's perspective there were associated risks such as significant ongoing staff turnover, coupled with increasing workloads. Council noted that there was an opportunity for UKRI to work differently and that the target of 17% FTEs was probably achievable without compulsory redundancies. UKRI was reviewing the way it operates (through UKRI Operating Model workstreams) to deliver UKRI's Strategy efficiently. Council also noted that overall staff morale was low.
27. Council was interested to hear Ottoline's views about how UKRI would deal with government's 'place' and levelling up' agenda and noted that UKRI considered this agenda in every aspect of its activities. This was not about creating competition between organisations in different parts of the UK but ensuring diversity of organisations. UKRI was also thinking of some pragmatic approaches such as allocating lead researchers.

ITEM 6. UPDATES FROM GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND THE WIDER CSA NETWORK (ORAL)

28. Gideon Henderson (DEFRA CSA) shared his updates with Council. The government updates related to Science and Technology Framework published in March 2023, Powering up Britain: Net Zero Growth Plan and Prime Minister Food Summit.
29. Gideon spoke about successful joint calls between UKRI and Defra such as Land use for net zero programme. Melanie added that at one of the UKRI Executive Committee meetings it had been recognised that DEFRA was a co-founder in all areas of strategic importance.
30. Gideon talked about PSREs and that they were not well integrated in the system and still seen as outside of the landscape. It was therefore important to involve them in bidding and training and Council noted that BBSRC was trying to get institutes to encourage them to connect with PSREs, with The Pirbright Institute and Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) being a positive example of such connection.

ITEM 7. UK BIOSCIENCE: REFLECTIONS ON THE LAST DECADE AND FORWARD LOOK (UKRI BBSRC 10/2023)

31. The Chair welcomed Laura Notton (BBSRC Associate Director, Strategy and Planning) to the meeting and invited Melanie to present first part of this item. It was her personal reflection on the last decade in bioscience during her tenure at BBSRC, initially as Director of Science and subsequently as Executive Chair and it focused on three themes: research – progress and trends, policy – a changing landscape and partnerships -enhanced collaboration.

32. Following the presentation, Council was invited to discuss the most significant developments in/ affecting UK bioscience over the last decade and the following were mentioned:
- Data science
 - Artificial Intelligence (AI)
 - Superb UK science response to the pandemic
 - Structural biology
 - A change in narrative for climate change
 - Technology impact
 - Focus on translation of research (due to immediacy of issues)
 - Genomics
 - Imaging
 - Antibodies
 - Neurology
33. In response to a question relating to what surprised Council in the last decade, Council mentioned being less successful with bioeconomy in the UK as opposed to other countries and identified multiscale biology and recognition of systems as a challenge. Council also identified infrastructure as an area where we have not been maximising opportunities.
34. The Chair invited Sarah Perkins to introduce the second part of this item relating to forward look and invited Council members to discuss key themes, challenges and opportunities for UK bioscience and the following points were made in the discussion:
- resilience of food supply would be a challenge
 - interdisciplinary research was vital to addressing key challenges
 - social context and interactions between sociology and biological disciplines will be very important e.g. when applying new technologies
 - tackling risk aversion would be another challenge. How we encourage creativity and high-risk programmes e.g. through cross-sector activities and greater porosity
 - Council pointed to forward looking themes that emerged from the Pioneer scheme which was hugely successful. When we look ahead, we should learn from this scheme (quicker decisions, more freedom) and whether that could help stimulating different approaches in other calls. Council was keen to see a summary of the Pioneer Scheme call.
Action UKRI BBSRC 91/2023: Council was keen to see a summary of the Pioneer Scheme and this information would be provided via the CouncilNET when available.
 - continuation of 'two-way traffic' from generating data, designing the experiments to engaging with stakeholders and understanding their needs.
 - how UK bioscience can capitalise on talent, e.g. through different career pathways, bringing people from different backgrounds and developing shared language. Training students to learn more about design (e.g. when human no longer drives the machine)
 - it will be important to tell the story for the next five years and building trust within the community on new strategic themes and learning from the pandemic. Council emphasised the importance of explaining AI and gene editing and socialising science outside laboratories using appropriate language for different stakeholders.
35. BBSRC will continue engaging Council on future key themes and some of that would be discussed at the Annual Strategic Workshop in September 2023.

ITEM 8. PRINCIPLES FOR INVESTING IN DOCTORAL TRAINING PROGRAMMES (UKRI BBSRC 11/2023)

36. The Chair welcomed David McAllister, BBSRC Director Talent and Funding, Rob Hardwick, BBSRC Head of Research and Innovation Talent, Jerry Roberts, current Chair of the BBSRC People and Talent Strategy Advisory Panel, (PAT SAP), University of Plymouth, and Geraint Thomas, former Chair of PAT SAP, University College London.

37. David introduced his slides and set out the context of this session. Council noted that the pan-UKRI collective talent funding model and developing a New Deal for Postgraduate Research (PGR) Students in consultation with the research and innovation community was progressing and workstreams were underway to work on harmonising approaches across policies and programme delivery mechanisms for doctoral training.
38. David described the principles that would guide the development of new BBSRC doctoral programmes and they related to health of disciplines, user engagement and place.
39. The aim of this session was an opportunity for UKRI BBSRC Council to frame the strategic principles that would guide the development of new BBSRC doctoral programmes. Council members were invited to consider the following questions in break out groups and a summary of feedback is as below:
- A. *How should BBSRC balance its doctoral investments to include both responsive and strategic opportunities? How will this work when considering place?*
- Responsive opportunities were identified as key
 - In relation to strategic opportunities, it was important to identify gaps and undertake constant reviews of the gap analysis, also including international dimension
 - Another consideration was how to ensure it all fits within the funding envelope
 - When considering place, the doctoral investment would need to be balanced at UKRI level. There was an advantage of strategic funding, e.g. Institutions that did not receive responsive funding could apply for strategic opportunities ('hot spots')
 - In considering place, data (especially students' location) and its robustness was emphasised
- B. *How should end-users of research and employers of doctoral graduates be engaged in the development, delivery, and leadership of BBSRC doctoral programmes? How will this work when considering 'place'?*
- More work was needed to identify and share best practice on how to engage with industry
 - Problem with stakeholder groups and clusters of smaller entities (encouraging aggregation)
 - Improving communications with SMEs and considering ways of incentivising them
 - Considering any financial barriers from SMEs
 - Rotating students out to SMEs
 - Being mindful of a lag between employer surveys and their actual needs
 - 'Place' is best addressed through strategic investment, linked to industry and regional stakeholders
 - Learning from AHRC and EPSRC as they have had some experience with place as criterion
 - Review of international partnerships and learning from them.
40. In terms of the next steps, Council noted that their input would be taken to the PAT SAP meeting for further discussion and consultation and an update on this (and collective talent more widely) would come back to Council in December 2023. The plan was to launch the doctoral training competition early in 2024 with the assessment in July and students starting in October 2024.

Action UKRI BBSRC 92/2023: Ksymena to add an update on investing in doctoral training and collective talent on the agenda for Council meeting in December 2023.

41. Any further consultation with Council members would take place in between the meetings.

42. Council asked about UKRI statement about marking assessments boycott and noted that this was on UKRI's radar.

Action UKRI BBSRC 93/2023: David will talk to Francis from UKRI to raise Council's concern about marking assessments boycott.

ITEM 9. AOB AND FROWARD LOOK (UKRI BBSRC 12/2023)

43. Council noted the dates for future meetings and reviewed future agenda items.

44. Council was keen on holding joint meetings/dinners with NERC, MRC and EPSRC.

Action UKRI BBSRC 94/2023: Ksymena to arrange joint meetings/dinners with NERC, MRC and EPSRC. An update will be provided in forward look paper for the next Council meeting in September 2023.

Council Secretariat

August 2023

Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
	<i>Actions from March 2023 Council meeting</i>			
4.	<i>Action: UKRI-BBSRC 85/2023: Council indicated that it would be helpful to have sight of applications received for cross-Council responsive mode pilot scheme. BBSRC to explore what information can be shared, given data protection requirement (Amanda Collis, when available).</i>	<i>Amanda Collis</i>	<i>September 2023</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
4.	<i>Action UKRI-BBSRC 86/2023: BBSRC to share Data Policy and an update on Bioinformatics and Biological Resources (BBR) and TRD (Transformative Research Technologies) Funds via the CouncilNET (Amanda Collis, when available).</i>	<i>Amanda Collis</i>	<i>July 2023</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
	<i>Actions from June 2023 Council meeting</i>			
2.	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 89/2023: Ksymena to note innovation discussion in the Council forward look.</i>	<i>Ksymena Grzybowska</i>	<i>July 2023</i>	<i>Noted.</i>

Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
4	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 90/2023: Karen will share the outcomes of the evaluation relating to BBSRC attributable spin outs when available.</i>	<i>Karen Lewis</i>	<i>When available</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
7.	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 91/2023: Council was keen to see a summary of the Pioneer Scheme and this information would be provided via the CouncilINET when available.</i>	<i>Amanda Collis</i>	<i>August 2023</i>	<i>Completed</i>
8	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 92/2023: Ksymena to add an update on investing in doctoral training and collective talent on the agenda for Council meeting in December 2023.</i>	<i>Ksymena Grzybowska</i>	<i>July 2023</i>	<i>Completed</i>
8	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 93/2023: David will talk to Francis from UKRI to raise Council's concern about marking assessments boycott.</i>	<i>David McAllister</i>	<i>June 2023</i>	<i>Completed?</i>
9	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 94/2023: Ksymena to arrange joint meetings/dinners with NERC, MRC and EPSRC. An update will be provided in forward look paper for the next Council meeting in September 2023.</i>	<i>Ksymena Grzybowska</i>	<i>September 2023</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>

