

# Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting held on 9 December 2025 in London

---

## **Those attending**

Professor Ewan Birney

Dr James Briscoe (BBSRC Senior Independent Member and Chair of Council)

Professor Tim Dafforn

Professor Anne Ferguson-Smith (BBSRC Executive Chair)

Professor Anjali Goswami (Defra CSA)

Andy Griffiths

Professor Christine Orengo

Dr Neil Parry

Professor Jo Price

Professor Steven Spoel

Professor Ijeoma Uchegbu

## **Also attending**

Dr Amanda Collis

Dr Jef Grainger

Dr Karen Lewis

Dr Sarah Perkins

Zahir Sachak

Dr Emma Hudson (Secretary)

Sarah Cresswell

Professor Cristobal Uauy (item 6 only)

Dave Foreman (item 6 only)

Professor Candy Rowe (item 7 only)

Dr Clare Bhunnoo (item 7 only)

Dr Rob Hardwick (item 7 and 10 only)

Emily Finnegan (item 7 only)

Laura Notton (item 8 only)

Professor Sir Ian Chapman (item 9 only)

Nikki Ilbury (item 9 only)

Aidan Grimsley (item 10 only)

### **Item 1. Opening remarks**

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. Apologies were received from Eriko Takano and Laura Dance.
3. Members were reminded to declare any changes to their declarations of interests. They should be highlighted by Council members at the meeting and the Secretariat will follow-up to update declarations via the Portal after the meeting. Members were asked to raise any conflicts arising during the meeting.

### **Item 2. Minutes of the Council meeting held on 23 September 2025 (UKRI BBSRC 23/2025)**

4. The minutes were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

### **Item 3. Progress on actions and matters arising (oral)**

5. The Chair noted that all actions had been completed.

### **Item 4. Executive Chair's report (UKRI BBSRC 24/2025)**

6. Anne presented her report and highlighted the following key points:
  - Ian Chapman has been familiarising himself with UKRI's investment portfolio and visited the Norwich Research Park. This provided a timely and constructive opportunity to familiarise him with the key bioscience aims and outcomes delivered by BBSRC institutes.
  - The National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) funding and governance models are expected to evolve following the recent quinquennial review, with a shift toward greater use of UKRI core mechanisms to deliver 3Rs outcomes and a stronger

NC3Rs focus on policy influence and community training. A UKRI working group will be established to oversee this transition and ensure a coordinated approach aligned with the new cross-government 'Replacing Animals in Science' strategy.

- The 'Innovation for Growth' summit on 24 November 2025 brought together over 300 senior leaders from politics, research, business and investment, particularly those aligned with the government's eight Industrial Strategy sectors. Ian Chapman used the event to outline UKRI's new strategic direction and reaffirm its mission to advance knowledge, improve lives and drive growth. Bioscience was strongly represented, and the discussions will inform future partnerships.
  - The Local Innovation Partnerships Fund (LIPF), announced in the summer 2025 and delivered by UKRI, supports economic growth in places with clear innovation ecosystems and high-potential clusters aligned to national priorities. Bids will be co-created between UKRI and locally led triple-helix partnerships of civic authorities, industry and research organisations. Executive Chairs have been appointed as senior relationship managers for early engagement, with Anne supporting the Belfast/Derry-Londonderry region. We are also gathering intelligence on other prospective bids through our regular partner universities interactions to understand where innovation clusters may build on a region's bioscience strengths.
  - Mid-term reviews for six of BBSRC's strategically supported institutes have now taken place. The focus has been on strategic vision and priorities as national capabilities; with the remaining visits to Babraham and Rothamsted Research scheduled for the new year. Council members were thanked for their contributions.
  - Recruitment for the director of Rothamsted Research is well underway; it is anticipated that an appointment will have been made by the time of the March 2026 Council meeting.
  - Recent visits to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been a valuable opportunity to discuss strategic issues with senior leaders, particularly concerns around sustainability of the sector.
  - BBSRC will be supporting eight new Doctoral Focal Awards in 'Engineering Biology' and 'Data science and AI for biology'. We will also be supporting ten new Industrial Doctoral Landscape Awards, supporting 185 students over three intakes. Announcements will be made later in December 2025.
  - BBSRC has seen an increase in the volume of applications submitted for our Responsive Mode scheme.
7. The following points were raised during discussion with Council members:
- The increase in volume of Responsive Mode applications presents challenges for both BBSRC and the community (e.g., peer-review). The work that BBSRC is currently doing to evaluate and reform its Responsive Mode aims to address these challenges.

- HEI sector sustainability is a concern, but the government remains committed to dual support. The landscape is changing, and the emphasis needs to be on connectivity and collaborative working (e.g., sharing of facilities and resources). Within UKRI, research sustainability is led by Research England, all Executive Chairs are engaged in discussions.
- Industry engagement with LIPF is key to ensure maximum leverage. Major companies are more likely to invest in a single region, rather than support multiple areas.

## **Item 5. Updates from government departments and the wider CSA network**

8. Anjali Goswami (Defra CSA) shared the following comments:
  - Defra's new permanent secretary, Paul Kissack, started in October 2025. He wants the department to be more outcomes focused and recognised both internally and externally as a science department.
  - The new Secretary of State (Emma Reynolds) has slightly different priorities to her predecessor. She is focused on reforming our water system and restoring nature. Biodiversity, nature restoration and water preservation will feature strongly at Conference of the Parties (COP).
  - Defra's Farm Profitability Review will be published soon with Agri-tech a core component.
  - In discussion it was noted that BBSRC's focus (in COP terms) should be agriculture and emissions (i.e., agri-tech), bioeconomy and circular economy, and water (e.g., water pollution – PFAS, microplastics).
9. Tim Dafforn (MoD CSA) shared the following comments:
  - The MoD also has a new permanent secretary, Jeremy Pocklington, who started at the end of October 2025.
  - Budgetary details will be confirmed by April 2026.
  - A greater understanding of BBSRC's investment portfolio (grants) would help inform decisions surrounding MoD future investment.
  - The Chair thanked Anjali and Tim for their updates.

## **Item 6. Next generation infrastructure (UKRI BBSRC 25/2025)**

10. This section of the minutes is deemed commercially sensitive and has therefore been removed from the main body of the minutes.

## **Item 7. BBSRC equality, diversity and inclusion action plan 2026–2028 (UKRI BBSRC 26/2025)**

11. The Chair welcomed Candy Rowe, Newcastle University and Chair of the BBSRC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Expert Advisory Group, Clare Bhunnoo,

BBSRC Senior Portfolio Manager – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Research Culture, Rob Hardwick, BBSRC Interim Associate Director, People, Talent, and Culture, and Emily Finnegan, BBSRC Portfolio Manager, Capability and Innovation.

12. The Chair invited Clare and Candy to introduce the paper. This paper presented the refreshed BBSRC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan for 2026 to 2028 that has been developed following consultation with the BBSRC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Expert Advisory Group, BBSRC People and Talent Strategy Advisory Panel as well as through wider consultation and internal consultation with BBSRC staff. Additionally, BBSRC continues to contribute to wider efforts across UKRI in implementation of the UKRI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.
13. The following points were raised during discussion with Council members:
  - It is important to demonstrate the impact of previous equality, diversity and inclusion activities and interventions in this refreshed action plan, to understand which actions are most effective and how best to prioritise activities.
  - The action plan needs to be outcomes-focussed, thinking about how success can best be measured.
  - Valuable data surrounding impact and outcomes will be drawn from activities linked to neurodiversity, career pathway diversity and networks such as Women in Wheat (JIC).
  - A second Connecting Culture Conference in 2026 aims to strengthen connectivity between Higher Education Institutions and institutes. This, along with fora such as the UKRI Good Practice Exchange, will better facilitate shared learning.
  - Engaging with other networks that are not directly funded by BBSRC, e.g., Black in Plant Science, would be valuable.
14. The Chair thanked Candy, Clare, Emily and Rob for attending the meeting and presenting the paper.

## **Item 8. Update on spending review (UKRI BBSRC 27/2025)**

15. The Chair welcomed Laura Notton, BBSRC Associate Director of Strategy and Planning, to the meeting.
  - Laura presented an update on Spending Review (SR) 2025 and UKRI allocations. Council noted the proposed approach to reshaping BBSRC's investment portfolio in response to the UKRI allocations framework. Key points from subsequent discussion were:
  - The concept of three 'buckets', first introduced by the Science Minister, has been socialised through community engagements (e.g., visits to Strategic Partner Universities).
  - The delivery of priority programmes will require new ways of working within UKRI.

- Focusing bucket 3 around priority programmes will be welcomed by industry, it offers the opportunity to leverage funds to meet shared priorities.
  - Council members would appreciate early sight of timelines surrounding community communication plans.
16. The Chair thanked Laura for attending the meeting and presenting the SR update.

### **Item 9. Ian Chapman (UKRI CEO) meeting BBSRC Council (oral)**

17. The Chair welcomed Ian Chapman to the meeting.
18. Ian shared his vision and priorities for UKRI, emphasising that future investments will be aligned with UKRI's mission to advance knowledge, improve lives and drive economic growth.
19. He noted that UKRI will need to be more choiceful in the investments it makes, focusing on areas where the UK can lead globally. He reiterated that the organisation is undergoing a strategic realignment to government priorities, adopting a new three 'bucket' funding model to support curiosity-driven research (~50% investment), strategic priorities (~25%) and support for innovative companies (~25%). This new funding model will improve efficiency, providing clear accountability to support faster decision-making.
20. Ian also noted that UKRI was aiming to build deeper, longer-term partnerships across the ecosystem, to deliver outcome-focused investment and position R&D as the engine for economic growth.
21. Council members shared their views and questions which Ian noted and addressed.
22. The Chair thanked Ian for attending the meeting and presenting his vision for UKRI.

### **Item 10. BBSRC fellowships: strategic review and future direction (UKRI BBSRC 28/2025)**

23. The Chair welcomed Rob Hardwick, BBSRC Interim Associate Director, People, Talent, and Culture, and Aidan Grimsley, BBSRC Portfolio Manager, Capability and Innovation, to the meeting.
24. Rob and Aidan presented a paper outlining the strategic review and future direction of BBSRC fellowships and gave an overview of the 2025 triage process to Council members.
25. Council noted the strategic context, outcomes, and current landscape of BBSRC Fellowships, including their alignment with the new UKRI Fellowship Investment Framework.
26. Council members discussed the targeted career stage for BBSRC fellowships and shared suggestions to address the challenges associated with the increased volume of applications.

27. It was suggested that opportunities be explored with other organisations (e.g., The Wellcome Trust and Royal Society) to support shared training and development programmes.
28. The Chair thanked Rob and Aidan for attending the meeting and presenting the paper.

### **Item 11. AOB and Council forward look - agenda items (UKRI BBSRC 29/2025)**

29. Council noted the schedule of meetings for 2025 and 2026 and future items for discussion.
30. It was suggested that further discussion should be had around public communication of science, as public trust in science is low. It was noted that a paper surrounding the Ultra-Processed Food public dialogue would be shared with Council at the March meeting, so this offered an opportunity for a broader discussion.

Council Secretariat

February 2026