Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting held on 14 March 2023 in London.

Those attending:

Professor Ewan Birney
John Bloomer
Professor Anne Ferguson-Smith
Professor Gideon Henderson
Professor Martin Humphries (Chair of the meeting)
Professor Andrew Millar
Professor Christine Orengo
Professor Jo Price
Professor Nigel Scrutton
Professor Malcolm Skingle
Professor Steven Spoel
Professor Melanie Welham (UKRI-BBSRC Executive Chair)

Also attending:

Dr Amanda Collis
Dr Karen Lewis
Dr Sarah Perkins
Bill Poll
Professor Guy Poppy
Dr Rosie Cornelius
Dr Peter Burlinson (item 7 only)
Dr Tim Shuttleworth (item 7 only)
Laura Notton (item 8 and 9 only)
Charlotte Hamilton (item 10 only)
Sarah Cresswell
Ksymena Grzybowska (Secretary)

ITEM 1. OPENING REMARKS

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked John Bloomer for his valuable contributions in his role of a Council member as this was his last Council meeting before his term came to an end on 31 March 2023.

2. Apologies were received from Steve Bagshaw and Ijeoma Uchegbu.

3. Members were informed that a new UKRI Declarations of Interest self-service portal was being implemented and that going forward Council members would be asked to check their details on the portal and update as necessary. Members were asked to raise any conflicts arising during the course of the meeting.

ITEM 2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2022 (UKRI BBSRC 01/2023)

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

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

5. The Chair went through the actions and most of them were either in hand or completed.

6. *This paragraph of the minutes was deemed business sensitive and was therefore recorded separately.*

ITEM 4. EXECUTIVE CHAIR'S REPORT (UKRI BBSRC 02/2023)

7. 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 3.

8. Council discussed UKRI fellowships and the importance of ensuring focus on both early and mid-stage careers. Council was assured that bringing together people and talent funding across UKRI and working in a more harmonised way would allow UKRI and Councils to support talent where this is required and encourage porosity across all career stages.

9. Council asked about connections with [CGIAR system](#) and how BBSRC can link to this system. Council noted that BBSRC was discussing building further linkages and supporting partnerships with specific Institutes/Centres.

10. Council welcomed the UKRI cross research council responsive mode pilot scheme pre-announced on the UKRI website and expected to open in March 2023. The call aimed to support breakthrough or disruptive interdisciplinary ideas not routinely funded through existing UKRI responsive mode schemes. Council indicated that it would be helpful to have sight of applications received.

    Action: UKRI-BBSRC 85/2023: Council indicated that it would be helpful to have sight of applications received. BBSRC to explore what information can be shared, given data protection requirement (Amanda Collis, when available).

11. *This paragraph of the minutes was deemed business sensitive and was therefore recorded separately.*

12. Council asked about international partnerships and noted that information about this would be made available on the CouncilNET shortly (existing action UKRI-BBSRC 81/2023).

13. Council discussed developing a £20M programme on transforming land use for Net Zero, nature and people with Defra, NERC, ESRC, Welsh Government, Scottish Government, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland (DAERA) and Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT, previously BEIS) under the UKRI Building a Green Future strategic theme. There was very helpful learning from Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF) and this was a broad collaboration and an opportunity for organisations to apply for funding to establish and run a coordination and translation hub for the transforming land use for net zero, nature and people programme.

14. Council asked about an update on the draft data policy and BBSRC confirmed that Transformative Technologies Strategy Advisory Panel's feedback would be addressed first and then the policy shared with Council alongside with an update on Bioinformatics and Biological Resources (BBR) and TRD (Transformative Research Technologies) Funds via the CouncilNET.

    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).

15. Council welcomed BBSRC's offer to fund policy fellowships to engage with UK or devolved government departments to address key national and global challenges. The scheme was also being supported by AHRC and ESRC. BBSRC was working with ESRC on their existing model and extending it.

16. Council asked about the progress to recruit BBSRC Executive Chair and noted that this was ongoing and an approval from the government was required.

17. The Chair commented that the EC's report to Council was very useful and, as it attracted valuable discussions and questions, more time should be allocated for this item on future agendas.

Action UKRI-BBSRC 87/2023: Allocate more time for EC's report on future Council agendas. (Ksymena Grzybowska, noted and completed).

ITEM 5. UPDATES FROM UKRI (ORAL)

18. Rosie Cornelius (UKRI) updated Council on the Horizon Europe Alternatives and the UKRI Target Operating Model.

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

19. Gideon Henderson (DEFRA CSA) shared his updates with Council. The government updates related to the formation of DSIT. Defra specific updates related to the Precision Breeding Bill, the Plant Biosecurity Strategy, avian influenza and COP15.

ITEM 7. BBSRC RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK (UKRI BBSRC 03/2023)

20. The Chair welcomed Peter Burlinson and Tim Shuttleworth to the meeting.

21. The paper provided a holistic description of BBSRC's role, approach, and guiding principles for the development of BBSRC's infrastructure portfolio. Council welcomed the framework that would provide a platform for engagement with stakeholders (including industry) relevant to bioscience infrastructure and ensure alignment of BBSRC's portfolio of infrastructure activities to a set of key principles and areas of focus, helping BBSRC achieve optimal outcomes while also driving change across the wider research infrastructure landscape.

22. Council members involved in the Task and Finish Group commented that huge progress had been made and it was an important piece of work to complete to fill a gap in this area.

23. Council made the following points in discussion:
    - people element, including finding effective ways of attracting skilled technical staff and creating career structure for technical specialists should be emphasised more in the document. Challenging perceptions, removing barriers and broadening eligibility for technical staff on research grants (an example from University of Glasgow) was also raised.
    - Better access for stakeholders is key and BBSRC is looking at concentration of facilities, addressing barriers, remote access and developing experimental capabilities.
    - Being explicit about industry interface and having clear principles for industry access
    - Having good interaction with research community (an example that was mentioned was Swedish SciLifeLab)
    - Data integrity and sharing best practice should accelerate
    - Local knowledge should be available in facilities
    - Distributed infrastructure in life sciences should work well

24. Council also discussed BBSRC's focus and investment in mid-range infrastructure, the MRC :BBSRC interface and both Councils working closely together.

25. Council noted that the framework would be published and BBSRC Research Infrastructure team would provide oversight of the implementation of the framework in relation to BBSRC's infrastructure portfolio and activities, identifying ways to enhance our infrastructure offer and ensure alignment with

BBSRC and UKRI strategic priorities. This would be coordinated across BBSRC and where possible with other Councils.

26. BBSRC may reach out to the members of the Council Task and Finish Group in relation to the Digital Infrastructure commission to seek advice on setting the portfolio in this area.

27. Amanda Collis thanked all members of the Council Task and Finish Group, including Steve Bagshaw, Andrew Millar, Christine Orengo, Malcolm Skingle, Pete Burlinson, Rowan McKibbin, Tim Shuttleworth, Mike Ball and Clare Salinas.

ITEM 8. REFLECTIONS ON THE NURSE'S LANDSCAPE REVIEW (ORAL)

28. The Chair welcomed Laura Notton to the meeting and invited Sarah Perkins to introduce this item. Sarah presented her slides summarising recommendations from the Independent Review of UK's Research, Development and Innovation Organisational Landscape published in early March 2023.

29. Council welcomed the report and commented that, in general, it provided the assurance of the current direction of travel, strengthened BBSRC's strategic approach to supporting Institutes and emphasised benefits of a model encouraging Institutes' independence.

30. Council discussed the review's outcomes and the following points were made:
    - It provided reassurance to the Treasury, however, Council noted that industry and private sector did not come through that strongly in the report.
    - The report was Institute-focused and did not consider hub and spoke models (e.g. agri-food).
    - National connectivity to support early translation was essential in Council's view.
    - Council emphasised the importance of constant review of the landscape and its evolution, also in the context of BBSRC's Institute Strategy.
    - Understanding interactions between different funding streams (responsive mode, initiatives and Institute funding) and potential opportunities and influence coming from these interactions.
    - The importance of involving industry at key stages and enhancing knowledge of different components of the funding landscape (e.g., famers and growers).
    - Bringing interaction with society to the same level as with industry.
    - Balance between autonomy and collaboration and connecting with different organisations in the landscape, including Public Sector Research Establishments (PSREs).
    - Using industry's convening power to our advantage.

31. Council noted that BBSRC had an opportunity to discuss the recommendations of the review with Institute Directors, specifically in the light of Institutes well-defined purpose and autonomy.

32. Council noted that UKRI Executive Committee would discuss UKRI's position at the end of March 2023 and UKRI would input into Government Framework Response. Council was invited to share any other reflections with BBSRC.

ITEM 9. SUPPORTING LONG-TERM STRATEGIC CAPABILITIES (UKRI-BBSRC 05/2023)

33. The Chair invited Laura Notton to introduce and run the workshop session, which focused on considering BBSRC's role in supporting 'long-term, strategic capabilities for UK bioscience' i.e., the type of research and investment activity that requires critical mass, long-term BBSRC investment (including in partnership with others), provides nationally important or necessary strategic capabilities and that is typically supported through 'directed' or 'managed' investment mechanisms (including, but not limited to, strategic investment in institutes).

34. Council was invited to consider the following questions and a summary of feedback from break-out groups was as below:

I. How can BBSRC identify those areas of UK bioscience in which there is a clear need for long-term, strategic capabilities (on a national scale)?
- Being proactive and listening to stakeholders
- Engaging with a diversity of communities to ensure new emerging areas are captured
- Constantly reviewing BBSRC's portfolio, mapping UKRI and BBSRC's strategic themes to identify any gaps, identifying/exploring any themes repeatedly funded
- Looking for opportunities for longer-term funding (both responsive mode and Institutes' strategic funding) and reviewing Institutes portfolio in discussion with Council
- Recognising the tension between public and economic views when identifying long-term strategic needs
- Improving current interactions within the landscape and recognising that existing investment can add value
- Using data to identify trends and testing (how to test whether we should invest or not?)

II. How can BBSRC ensure, and demonstrate, that its approaches to supporting long-term, strategic national capabilities remain fit for purpose?
- Taking an evidence-based approach that is fit for purpose
- Striking a balance between oversight of investment and trusting to do the job without monitoring
- Evolving the current portfolio whilst ensuring it is fit for purpose and meets strategic needs
- Recognising and valuing diversity in the portfolio
- Top-down approach enabling clarity of purpose and bottom-up approach enabling connectivity
- Strong leadership
- Attracting the best talent (within the UK and internationally)

35. The Chair thanked all Council members for their contributions and made positive comments about seeking input from Council members using the break-out group format.

ITEM 10. BIANNUAL RISK UPDATE, REVIEW AND DISCUSSION (UKRI BBSRC 06/2023)

36. The Chair welcomed Charlotte Hamilton to the meeting and invited her to introduce the paper.

37. This paper provided Council with regular updates and oversight of UKRI risk management activities operated by BBSRC.

38. *This section of the minutes was deemed business sensitive and was therefore recorded separately.*

ITEM 11. OUTCOMES OF THE ANNUAL APPRAISAL OF COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE (UKRI BBSRC 07/2023)

39. The Chair invited Ksymena Grzybowska to introduce this paper, which provided outcomes of the annual appraisal of Council's performance. Overall, comments from Council members were positive. Council members were clear of their advisory role and have been acting in that spirit since UKRI Councils' Council Terms of Reference was set out.

40. Responses related to connectivity with the wider UKRI and UKRI Board have not changed since last year's survey. Council also expressed its desire for early engagement in strategic developments.

ITEM 12. AOB AND FROWARD LOOK (UKRI BBSRC 08/2023)

41. Council noted the dates for future meetings and reviewed future agenda items. Council suggested that:

- It would be a good opportunity to discuss future of land / biofeed stocks at a joint Council session with NERC Council
- Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning could be a potential topic for dinner
- Holding joint dinners with other Councils

Action UKRI-BBSRC 88/2023: Review and update the forward look to reflect above suggestions from Council members (Ksymena Grzybowska, ongoing)

Council Secretariat

May 2023

Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
	Actions from 29 September 2022 meeting			
4.	*Action UKRI-BBSRC 79/2022: The Terms of Reference for Councils' Councils were still under review and when finalised would be shared with Council. (Ksymena Grzybowska, when available).*	*Ksymena Grzybowska*	*When available*	*Completed*
	Actions from 14 December 2023			
4.	*Action UKRI-BBSRC 81/2023: Provide information on international prioritisation approaches and engagement strategies with different countries (bilateral vs multilateral).*	*Amanda Collis*	*June 2023*	*Completed (available via CouncilNET)*
4.	*Action UKRI-BBSRC 82/2023: Council asked for more detailed Data Intensive Bioscience reporting within the Executive Chair's report (Jas Kular, ongoing).*	*Jas Kular/Ian Lewis*	*March 2023*	*Completed*

	Actions from March 2023 Council meeting			
4.	*Action: UKRI-BBSRC 85/2023: Council indicated that it would be helpful to have sight of applications received. BBSRC to explore what information can be shared, given data protection requirement (Amanda Collis, when available).*	*Amanda Collis*	*When available*	*Ongoing*
4.	*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).*	*Amanda Collis*	*When available*	*Ongoing*
4.	*Action UKRI-BBSRC 87/2023: Allocate more time for EC's report on future Council agendas. (Ksymena Grzybowska, noted and completed).*	*Ksymena Grzybowska*	*May 2023*	*Noted and completed*
12.	*Action UKRI-BBSRC 88/2023: Review and update the forward look to reflect suggestions from Council, including a joint session with NERC to discuss the future of land / biofeed stock, AI and ML as potential dinner discussion and joint dinners with other Councils (Ksymena Grzybowska, ongoing).*	*Ksymena Grzybowska*	*June 2023*	*Forward look updated*