Approved by MRC Council: Tuesday 23 September 2025
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Minutes of the MRC Council Business Meeting

Date: Tuesday 1 July 2025
Location: Walton Suite, Winchester Guildhall
Time: 13:40 – 15:50

Council Members	
Prof. Patrick Chinnery (MRC Executive Chair)	Dr Precious Lunga
Ms Kay Boycott (SIM)	Prof. Sir Munir Pirmohamed
Prof. Sir Mark Caulfield	Prof. Eleanor Riley
Prof. Kim Graham	Prof. Dame Nancy Rothwell
Dr Roger Highfield	Prof. Lucy Chappell
Prof. Simon Hollingsworth	

Attendees	
Dr Louise Jones - MRC Director of Investigator Led Themes	Dr Glenn Wells - MRC Deputy Executive Chair
Dr Alastair Lamb - MRC Chief of Staff & Chief Operating Officer	Dr Ceri Williams - MRC Director of Challenge Led Themes
Ms Helen Morgan - MRC Finance Director	Dr Rebecca Barlow - MRC Head of Strategy and Planning (observing item 8)

Secretariat	
Simone Bryan (MRC Secretariat)	Kathryn Jackson (MRC Secretariat)

Note:

1. Council Private Business

1.1. Before the start of the meeting, Council held a private business meeting.

2. Welcome and Introductions

2.1. Ms Kay Boycott, Senior Independent Member of Council chaired the meeting. Ms Boycott welcomed all members and welcomed Professor Sir Mark Caulfield and Professor Dame

Nancy Rothwell to their first meeting as Council members. Apologies were received from Dr Andy Richards, Dr Nadeem Sarwar and Dr Claire Newland. Professor Eleanor Riley left the meeting after item seven.

2.3 Members were notified that Dr Claire Newland, MRC Director of Policy, Ethics and Governance was leaving MRC and that this would be the last Council meeting for Ms Helen Morgan, MRC Finance Director. Both were thanked for their service to MRC.

3. Register of Declared Interests

3.1 Members were asked to declare any new interests. None were declared.

4. Minutes of Council Business meeting March 2025

4.1 Council approved the minutes of the Council Business meeting held on 13 March 2025.

5. Location of Council meetings

5.1. Simone Bryan, MRC Head of Policy and Governance reminded members that in recent years it was typical to hold at least one meeting of Council per year outside of London. Members were asked their preferred location(s) for Council meetings.

5.2. Members commented that it was important for Council to be visible, and while most meetings could be held at UKRI offices in London, one meeting per year should be held outside London.

5.3. It was suggested that the meeting outside London could be affixed to one of the MRC community engagement visits or could be held at an MRC research facility to allow members to engage with MRC researchers.

5.4. Venues and locations that can be accessed easily and relatively quickly by public transport should be selected.

ACTION: The secretariat to organise one Council meeting per year to be held at an MRC research facility or affixed to a community engagement visit.

6. Updates from the Executive

6.1. MRC Executive Directors updated members on recent activities, decisions, and major issues that the Executive had been addressing. Members noted the updates.

6.2. Council was asked to update on current high priorities facing members in their own domains. Members highlighted the following:

- Financial sustainability, the associated challenges faced by the Higher Education sector and the potential implications for MRC.
- The tight fiscal environment and ensuring spending review plans can be successfully delivered.

- Challenges for the global health research community given the reduction in budget for Official Development Assistance.
- AI and upskilling the workforce.
- How to best seize the current opportunities in attracting overseas researchers into the UK.
- Continued efforts to build long-term trust in how health data is used and the current risks that may undermine these efforts.
- The challenges facing clinical academic careers and how best to attract clinicians into this career path.

ACTION: MRC should consider mapping its investments to better understand financial risks posed by the financial sustainability of the higher education sector.

7. Strategic Finance Update

7.1. Ms Helen Morgan, MRC Finance Director, provided Council with a draft finance report, developed in response to Council's request at the March 2025 meeting and to demonstrate changes in the balance of MRC's portfolio over a 5 year period. A list of in-year financial levers was being developed as was an internal timeline of key decisions points on financial matters which would be clearly articulated in Council's forward plan.

7.2. Council noted the update and welcomed the changes made in response to Council feedback. Members recommended that to fulfil their obligation under Council's Terms of Reference, future reports would need to link finance to strategic planning so there is a clear demonstration of how potential future investments will change projections over time and where disinvestment may need to occur in order to fund new initiatives. It was noted that by changing MRC's risk appetite it is possible to create more flexible headroom.

7.3 It was highlighted that due to aspects like grant volatility and slippage, there is often a need to incur expenditure within a short timeframe. MRC's Senior Executive Team was planning for this by both investing strategically and by developing a range of options that will quickly utilise underspends that arise in year.

7.4. Council noted that although material headroom would not be available until 2027/28, planning would need to start now and that this should be planned into discussions at the next Council meeting. Some members also requested more detail on how MRC's commitment budget was allocated.

ACTION: The finance report reflecting Council's feedback to be presented at the next Council meeting.

8. Update on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) Development

8.1. Dr Glenn Wells, MRC Deputy Executive Chair, and Mr Alastair Lamb, MRC Chief of Staff and interim Chief Operating Officer, provided a status update on the development of KPIs both for UKRI corporately and for the activities of MRC. The MRC executive team has sought to create a set of KPIs that could indicate success in delivering outcomes for its research funding and its corporate functions.

8.2. Council noted the update and highlighted the importance of; transparency in explaining how public money is spent; the impact of MRC's research on the public and engagement with the public; how MRC works with the industrial sector. These aspects should be better reflected in the list of KPIs.

8.3. Members raised questions about how the recommendations from the National Audit Office report on *UK Research and Innovation: Providing support through grants* were being considered and it was confirmed that there was some work to do to understand UKRI's different risk appetites relating to research funding functions and to corporate functions.

8.4. Members agreed that KPI reports to Council should focus on strategic indicators and outputs, and that each KPI should have quantifiable measures which can be used to evaluate success in achieving MRC objectives.

ACTION: The Senior Executive Team to develop a strategic subset of KPIs that focus on outcomes of MRC funding and that are nested with UKRI corporate objectives and key results, to be presented to Council at a future meeting. The KPI report should be linked to the Finance report and once finalised, should be presented at each meeting.

9. Council Self-assessment and Future Forward Plan

9.1. Ms Boycott and Professor Chinnery presented a brief summary of how feedback from members' annual self-assessment exercise is being implemented through Council's forward plan and meeting structure.

9.2. It was noted that MRC Council meetings had evolved to be less operationally focused, and with fewer, strategic items coming earlier to Council for consideration. This shift aims to create space for earlier engagement and advice from members and deeper debate.

Items for Information

None

10. AOB

None.

Meeting End