

Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting held on 10 June 2020 via Zoom.

Those attending:

Professor Ewan Birney (items 4-7)
Mr John Bloomer
Dr Belinda Clarke
Professor Ian Graham
Professor Laura Green
Professor Gideon Henderson
Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser
Professor Martin Humphries (Chair of the meeting)
Professor Andrew Millar
Professor Malcolm Skingle
Professor David Stephens
Professor Melanie Welham (UKRI-BBSRC Executive Chair)

Also attending:

Dr Amanda Collis
Mr Paul Gemmill (item 4 onwards)
Dr Karen Lewis
Mr Bill Poll
Ms Laura Notton (item 4 only)
Dr Peter Burlinson (item 6 only)
Dr David McAllister (item 7 only)
Dr Abi Reynolds (item 7 only)
Mrs Sarah Cresswell
Mrs Ksymena Grzybowska

ITEM 1. OPENING REMARKS

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and government's guidance on social distancing this meeting was held virtually via Zoom.
2. On behalf of Council, the Chair congratulated Ottoline Leyser on her appointment as the UKRI Chief Executive. She would take up the post on 29 June 2020. As this was Ottoline's last meeting, the Chair thanked her for her valuable contributions as Council member over the last two years.
3. Melanie Welham reminded Council members that BBSRC was seeking to appoint members to our Council, and asked Council members to reach out to people in their networks, who could be suitable and make them aware of the vacancies.
4. Members were reminded to check their details currently being held on the conflicts register, circulated by email before the meeting, and update as necessary and send any changes to Council Secretariat. Members were asked to raise any conflicts arising during the course of the meeting.

ITEM 2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 MARCH 2020 (UKRI BBSRC 07/2020)

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

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

6. Melanie provided Council with an update on the action UKRI/BBSRC 21/2019 about alignment between Industrial Biotechnology and Synthetic Biology across UKRI. The approach that had been taken was to develop a National Programme for Engineering Biology bringing these two aspects together.
7. In relation to the action UKRI-BBSRC 28/2020 about changing the rating for future priorities in farmed animal productivity in the Delivery Plan, it was suggested that this would be covered later under item 8- Biannual Risk Review.

ITEM 4. EXECUTIVE CHAIR'S REPORT (UKRI BBSRC 08/2020)

8. Council noted the Executive Chair's report, particularly the progress against the Near-Term Actions (NTAs), set out in BBSRC's Delivery Plan Delivery Plan, as at the end of Quarter 4 (31 March 2020).

Sections below have been recorded separately as deemed business sensitive.

9. Council discussed the operational benefits of the scorecard, engagement and integration of strategic advice (e.g. social and ethical) as part of the process. It was agreed that the next Delivery Plan discussion should take place in September 2020.

ACTION UKRI-BBSRC 30/2020: It was agreed that the next Delivery Plan discussion should take place in September 2020 (Ksymena to add to the agenda).

11. Melanie informed Council about the ongoing recruitment for the UKRI-BBSRC Deputy Executive Chair (part-time role for an academic) and the UKRI-BBSRC Executive Director for Strategic Planning, Evidence and Engagement to replace Paul Burrows, who retired from BBSRC at the end of April 2020.

ITEM 4. BBSRC RESPONSE AND PRIORITIES IN RELATION TO THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK (UKRI BBSRC 08A/2020)

12. Melanie provided Council with an overview of the response of BBSRC and its community to the COVID-19 outbreak, and areas identified as priorities moving forward. Council was invited to comment on how BBSRC had handled the response to the pandemic and whether there was anything UKRI and BBSRC should pay attention to.
13. In response, Council commented that cross-disciplinary research would be important (e.g. involving social scientists) as well as future zoonotic surveillance at the border between human and animal (at both scientific and operational levels which would involve NHS and DEFRA). In order to understand prevalence in the population wastewater surveillance was identified as key

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too. Council discussed responses to the pandemic and highlighted plant and fungal species collections that could potentially be a source of anti-viral treatments. Council discussed the importance of understanding the immune response to SARS-CoV-2. It was also suggested that inviting entrepreneurial groups to provide challenge and fresh perspectives would be beneficial. Council reiterated the point that investment would be key to the recovery.

14. Council discussed whether the COVID-19 pandemic would affect the 2.4% aspiration and acknowledged that this was still the ambition, especially in light of the R&D Roadmap. Dan Hodges provided Council with an update on the development of the R&D Roadmap.
15. Council discussed business continuity and prioritisation both in BBSRC and more widely at the UKRI level. It was noted that some activities were paused to enable responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this time of uncertainty, UKRI focused on staff and their welfare. There were weekly BBSRC and UKRI update webinars which were well attended and widely appreciated by staff. These approaches have enabled people to be more connected and helped build a sense of cohesion across UKRI. Overall, it was commented that UKRI had managed its response very well for such a young organisation and that BBSRC's response was strong and clear.
16. Ottoline Leyser stressed that UKRI was one organisation and its employees were at the heart of it and going forward integration, learning from each other, interdisciplinarity and strong interfaces with stakeholders were key.
17. Council noted that UKRI-BBSRC Executive Team had carefully considered the timing for the next Institute Assessment Exercise (IAE) – planning for which had been due to start immediately with proposals being submitted in Spring 2021. Given the continuing impact of the pandemic on the sector, the pivoting of key BBSRC staff to support the UKRI COVID-19 response, alongside the role of BBSRC's strategically-funded institutes in contributing to the COVID-19 research effort, and also in the context of uncertainty over future budgets owing to delays in the CSR, the decision was made to delay the IAE by one year. This was supported by Council.

ITEM 5. UPDATES FROM GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS (DEFRA) AND THE WIDER CSA NETWORK (ORAL)

18. In his report to Council, Gideon Henderson (CSA, Defra) raised the importance of environmental monitoring of virus transmission.
19. Gideon said that Public Sector Research Establishments (PSREs) were an important component of the research ecosystem, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this was recognised within the R&D Roadmap.
20. There was continued interest in Net Zero and biodiversity in the BBSRC and NERC context. Another key area was environmental land management.
21. In the context of agriculture and land use, systems thinking was required, and this would need to be addressed soon. It was noted that the Scottish Government was working on a national nitrogen budget, which was a programme for government commitment and this framework allowed systems thinking.

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ITEM 6. DATA INTENSIVE BIOSCIENCE REVIEW – RESPONSE (UKRI BBSRC 09/2020)

22. The Chair welcomed Peter Burlinson to the meeting. Amanda Collis introduced this paper by saying that the review's recommendations had been presented to Council in March 2020 as seven main themes. Since then the Task and Finish Group had met once more and BBSRC was keen to get views from Council as to where the priorities should be.
23. Council discussed BBSRC's response to the review's recommendations and, in relation to data sharing policy, commented that currently there was a focus on outputs and monitoring, but not planning. Council agreed that random sampling, e.g. dip-stick monitoring could be a way forward. Providing examples of how to share data would be very useful for the research community. An important aspect to consider is how to deal with commercial sensitivities when sharing data. There is a lot of interest in the data that research supported by BBSRC collects and joining up would be beneficial.
24. Some recent analysis of UKRI-BBSRC's Pool of Experts and membership of Responsive Mode Committees 2011-2019 highlighted that self-reported expertise in bioinformatics and systems biology by Pool of Experts members was sometimes overstated when their background was examined. Further, while representation of Committee members with specialist expertise in these areas had generally increased across the Committees during the time period investigated such expertise appeared quite underrepresented across the Committees, particularly outside Committee C. Council was happy with the proposal to establish a programme of work with UKRI-BBSRC's Appointments Board to consider this topic further to ensure there is the right disciplinary mix on each Committee to address interdisciplinary review issues.
25. Council discussed higher demand for data scientists in relation to the above points and emphasised the need for flexibility, e.g. involving early career researchers and people from non-traditional communities. A key question was how to identify the right people proactively and the answer could be incentives – a much wider range of success measures, with an understanding that different people will have a different portfolio of equally valuable contributions.
26. Council agreed that there should be significant funding in software development and engineering and BBSRC would continue discussions with EPSRC and MRC. BBSRC committees and reviewers should be encouraged to support funding software development.
27. Council reiterated support for BBSRC's leadership in this area and was content with the approach set out in the paper.

ITEM 7. BBSRC FELLOWSHIP REVIEW (UKRI BBSRC 10/2020)

28. The Chair welcomed Abi Reynolds and David McAllister to the meeting, and they introduced this paper.
29. BBSRC fellowships support individuals on a pathway to independence through two schemes: the David Phillips Fellowship (DPF) and the Discovery fellowship (DF). Since the previous review of BBSRC fellowships in 2014, the fellowships and wider funding landscape have changed significantly.

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30. Council discussed the options for change, in light of the evidence, and recommended pausing DPF in the short-term. Council was happy with DFs and considered them as an important component of the career ladder.
31. In the long-term, Council suggested that BBSRC should focus on DF and Platform Fellowships and noted that the latter overlap with Flexible Talent Mobility Awards and there was potential for alignment. Council emphasised the need for flexibility (e.g. to consider a joined-up offering with multiple entry points) and commented that UKRI's portfolio needs to be diverse and balanced to provide opportunities for individuals.

ITEM 8. BIENNIAL RISK UPDATE, REVIEW AND DISCUSSION (UKRI BBRC 11/2020)

32. Bill Poll introduced this item on behalf of Lucy Davidson, who had sent her apologies for this meeting. The aim of this paper was to provide regular updates and oversight of UKRI Risk Management activities operated by BBSRC, so that members are kept informed and can input, question and challenge where appropriate. Council noted that two new risks had been added to the register.
33. Council reviewed the risk register and noted the apparent shift in scoring due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the mitigations in place.
34. Council was content with the paper and had no further comments.

ITEM 9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND FORWARD LOOK

35. Council noted the paper and suggested that the natural capital and systems approach should be discussed by Council in the future. It was commented that a topic for discussion entitled 'BBSRC always the bride maid never the bride' was timely to discuss too.

ACTION UKRI-BBSRC 31/2020: Council suggested that the natural capital and systems approach should be discussed by Council in the future. It was commented that a topic for discussion entitled 'BBSRC always the bride maid never the bride' was timely to discuss too (Ksymena to note for future agendas).

36. Council asked about the BBSRC survey on the use of models, the aim of which was to consult the research community (including academic, industrial and other researchers) on their current use of experimental systems or models for human and animal research, as well as their future perspectives. The deadline for submissions was 28 June 2020 and the results would go to the new advisory structure and possibly come to Council in the future.

ACTION UKRI-BBSRC 32/2020: The results of the BBSRC survey of the use of models would go to the new advisory structure and possibly come to Council in the future (Amanda, Ksymena, note for future agendas).

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Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
	Actions from 4 December 2019			
10	<i>ACTION UKRI BBSRC 26/2019: Council suggested that it would welcome views from the Executive on how they see Council perform, e.g. 360 degrees approach (Ksymena Grzybowska, next appraisal).</i>	Ksymena Grzybowska	Next appraisal	Ongoing
7	<i>ACTION UKRI BBSRC 27/2019: It was agreed that a broader discussion about Institutes would be scheduled for a future Council meeting (e.g. brainstorm session) Ksymena Grzybowska, future Council meeting)</i>	Melanie Welham Ksymena Grzybowska	September 2020	Ongoing
	<i>Actions from 11 March 2020</i>			
4	<i>This section was recorded separately as deemed business sensitive information.</i>			
5	<i>ACTION UKRI-BBSRC 29/2020: Add managing woodlands to Council future items for discussion (Ksymena Grzybowska).</i>	Ksymena Grzybowska	Future Council	Noted

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9	<i>ACTION UKRI-BBSRC 31/2020: Council was invited to provide comments/reflections on the big ideas pipeline process to feed into the review paper which would be on the agenda for Council meeting in June 2020 (Richard Brown, Stephanie Williams-Blackwell, Ksymena Grzybowska). [post meeting note: due to the COVID-19 pandemic and June 2020 Council meeting held virtually, this item is postponed to September 2020].</i>	Richard Brown Stephanie Williams-Blackwell Ksymena Grzybowska	September 2020	On agenda
Actions from 10 June 2020				
4	<i>ACTION UKRI-BBSRC 30/2020: It was agreed that the next Delivery Plan discussion should take place in September 2020 (Ksymena to add to the agenda).</i>	Ksymena Grzybowska	September 2020	On agenda
9	<i>ACTION UKRI-BBSRC 31/2020: Council suggested that the natural capital and systems approach should be discussed by Council in the future. It was commented that a topic for discussion entitled 'BBSRC always the bride maid never the bride' was timely to discuss too (Ksymena to note for future agendas).</i>	Ksymena Grzybowska	Future meeting	Noted
9	<i>ACTION UKRI-BBSRC 32/2020: The results of the BBSRC survey of the use of models would go to the new advisory structure and possibly come to Council in the future (Amanda, Ksymena, note for future agendas).</i>	Ksymena Grzybowska	Future meeting	Noted