

Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting on 11 March 2020.

Those attending:

Professor Ewan Birney FRS
Mr John Bloomer
Dr Belinda Clarke
Professor Ian Graham FRS
Professor Laura Green OBE
Professor Gideon Henderson FRS
Dr Deborah Keith
Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser FRS
Professor Martin Humphries (Chair of the meeting)
Professor Malcolm Skingle CBE
Professor David Stephens
Professor Melanie Welham (UKRI-BBSRC Executive Chair)

Also attending:

Dr Paul Burrows
Dr Amanda Collis
Mr Paul Gemmill (item 6 onwards)
Dr Karen Lewis
Mr Bill Poll
Dr Emma Lindsell (UKRI)
Dr Richard Brown (item 9 only)
Dr Frances Downey (UKRI) (item 10 only)
Dr David McAllister (item 10 only)
Dr Stephanie Williams -Blackwell (item 9 only)
Mrs Sarah Cresswell
Mrs Ksymena Grzybowska

ITEM 1. OPENING REMARKS

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. In particular, he welcomed the following:
 - John Bloomer to his first Council meeting. His appointment started on 1 January 2020.
 - Emma Lindsell, UKRI Executive Director – Strategy, Performance and Engagement, job share.
2. On behalf of Council, the Chair thanked Deborah Keith for her valuable contributions in her Council member's role on both legacy and UKRI-BBSRC Councils over the last five years, Deborah's membership was due to end on 31 March 2020. Deborah would also step down from chairing BBSRC Appointments Board and Ottoline Leyser had been appointed as the Chair of Appointments Board from 1 April 2020.
3. The Chair thanked Paul Burrows (BBSRC Executive Director, Policy, Strategy and Evidence) as he was due to retire at the end of April 2020. Paul steered BBSRC through several Spending Reviews, led on the review of bioenergy and a wide range of other major initiatives. Paul has had a massive influence on BBSRC and its direction over the years. Paul said that it had been a real pleasure to work with everyone during his time at BBSRC.

4. Council members were reminded to check their details currently being held on the conflicts register, available at the meeting, and update as necessary. Members were also asked to raise any conflicts arising during the course of the meeting.

ITEM 2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 DECEMBER 2019 (UKRI BBSRC 01/2020)

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. Council noted the update on actions as follows:
 - Action UKRI/BBSRC 23/2019: Following discussions at the December 2019 Council meeting, BBSRC and NERC established a joint Council Task and Finish Group to explore and develop further opportunities for joint working in areas such as cross-disciplinary approaches to meeting zero-carbon agriculture and biodiversity challenges. The subgroup met for the first time on 6 March, with Belinda Clarke representing BBSRC Council and Louise Heathwaite NERC. Melanie attended UKRI-NERC Council meeting a week before UKRI-BBSRC Council and reported on discussions. There would be a joint paper developed for joint BBSRC and NERC Council meeting in June 2020 [*post meeting note: due to the Covid-19 pandemic the joint BBSRC and NERC Council meeting has been moved from June to 23 September 2020*].
 - Action UKRI BBSRC 24/2019: strategic priorities for each UKRI Council had been circulated to Council members via the CouncilNET.

ITEM 4. EXECUTIVE CHAIR'S REPORT (UKRI BBSRC 02/2019)

7. Melanie Welham introduced the report and the following points were discussed:

Two bullet points were removed as they related to discussion about risks and deemed business sensitive.

 - Council noted the ongoing BBSRC review of Fellowships, which would be discussed by Council in June 2020. Councils need to take a view as to what holders of Fellowship awards were asked to do (teaching and research aspects) and how these align with their best interests.
 - Council noted that 'Pathways to Impact' would no longer be required within grant applications from 1 March 2020. EPSRC and NERC were piloting with new applications to ensure there were no negative consequences. BBSRC could also take part in the pilot. Council talked about the possibility of providing a standard CV, with boxes for evidence and a narrative. This approach could be crucial in shifting the research culture. This aspect was also considered as part of the pilot and Emma Lindsell added that UKRI was opened to different options whilst ensuring the objectives were met. Council emphasised the importance of being open with the community and that the goal was to have one application for all. We need to give reassurance and signal the end point. This should be a way of driving connectivity through the system. A more open and flexible approach would be more efficient. It was noted that the appropriate communication with and guidance for different stakeholders would be crucial.

This action was removed as it related to risks and deemed business sensitive.

ITEM 5. UPDATES FROM GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS (ORAL)

8. In his report to Council, Gideon Henderson (CSA, Defra) said that while the focus was on Covid-19, there was continued interest in Net Zero. Biodiversity in the BBSRC and NERC context was compelling and seeing next steps in this area would be reassuring. Managing woodlands and biomass production were raised as important areas that need actioning.

ACTION UKRI-BBSRC 29/2020: Add managing woodlands to Council future items for discussion (Ksymena Grzybowska).

ITEM 6. DISCUSSION ON 2025 UKRI STRATEGY (ORAL)

9. Emma Lindsell, UKRI Executive Director Strategy, Performance and Engagement Job Share, attended the meeting to provide an update on UKRI 2025 strategy, its timeline, draft strategic framework and engagement plans. Council made comments on the goals set out in the framework and how we should work together. Council emphasised the importance of the interface between UKRI and Government departments and their interactions. Council commented that data science and transfer are of pan-government interest and should, therefore, feature in the framework as an underlying theme. Council also said that the system should encourage diversity in research and, most importantly innovation. There is a need for links between people, place and culture. Enabling people to move is key and social infrastructure for science is paramount.
10. Council noted that UKRI planned to publish the strategy in the Summer 2020. Another important aspect of this is measuring success and implementing meaningful metrics.
11. Emma thanked Council members for their feedback on the UKRI 2025 strategy.
12. Emma updated Council on the budget announcement and said that the government committed to increasing research and development (R&D) investment to £22 billion per year by 2025. There was an uplift for Research and Development, which was a very positive outcome. UKRI would allocate the money across different funding schemes and more detail would follow soon.

ITEM 7. DEBRIEF FROM JOINT BBSRC, EPSRC AND MRC DISCUSSIONS THE PREVIOUS DAY (ORAL)

13. Melanie Welham reflected on the BBSRC, EPSRC and MRC joint roundtable discussion session and dinner the previous day. Main themes that emerged from discussions were as follows: quantum computing and its applications in drug discovery; a National Programme for synthetic biology; food for health and environment; data compression; optics and photonics. Council noted that the EPSRC secretariat would synthesise the discussions and share with participants as there was not sufficient time to discuss prioritisation of ideas.

ITEM 8. DATA INTENSIVE BIOSCIENCE (UKRI BBSRC 03/2020)

14. The Chair welcomed Peter Burlinson, BBSRC, to the meeting and invited Amanda Collis to introduce this item. The paper presented the outcomes of the UKRI-BBSRC Review of Data Intensive Bioscience, which had undertaken a holistic, cross-cutting and in-depth review of the area. This review was timely in the context of wider UKRI activities and could help inform UKRI-BBSRC's preparations for the Spending Review.
15. It was noted that bioscience had undergone a shift in the scale and complexity of data being exploited by the research and innovation community in the past decade. Analysis of UKRI-BBSRC's funding portfolio revealed that at least 50% of research grants involved large-scale biological data. Within responsive mode, data-rich research had more than doubled in the last ten years, being a component of over 50% of applications. It was highlighted that this shift should be reflected in Panel/Committee memberships.
16. Andrew Millar, the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, took Council through the findings and recommendations which were presented under seven themes, highlighting key issues identified through the review process and how UKRI-BBSRC should address them. Council agreed the key findings and recommendations of the Tash and Finish Group as below:
- Recommendation 1: UKRI-BBSRC should take specific actions to increase the UK capacity in mathematical and computational skills within the biosciences
 - Recommendation 2: UKRI-BBSRC should catalyse the establishment of professional roles to support data-intensive research within IROs e-Infrastructure
 - Recommendation 3: UKRI-BBSRC should take a leadership role in building coherent e-infrastructure provision for the biosciences.
 - Recommendation 4: UKRI-BBSRC should significantly increase its investment in provision of high-quality software and data resources for the research community.
 - Recommendation 5: UKRI-BBSRC should update its data sharing policy to broaden its coverage and improve its implementation
 - Recommendation 6: UKRI-BBSRC should establish a program to build capacity in data-intensive bioscience through networking and strategic investment and in key areas
 - Recommendation 7: UKRI-BBSRC should ensure its peer review processes fully embed data-intensive research as a way of working.
17. In discussion, Council made the following comments in relation to the recommendations detailed above:
- It was suggested that TRDF and BBR Fund budgets should increase to approximately £25M to address the significant under-resourcing and gaps within existing programmes, and provide a more sustainable programme to address the continuing expansion of need.
 - It was noted that there were global efforts to address issues of international data standards. However, standards should not be an obstacle. The Task and Finish Group would discuss standards when responding to the recommendations.
 - Sharing best practice is important.
 - Engagement with IT departments to emphasise that biosciences have distinct needs.
 - In relation to recommendation 3, it was commented that there was also an aspect of universities deploying e-infrastructure provision and that this may need to be separated out.

18. Council expressed its continued support for the EU ELIXIR program and said that BBSRC should not underestimate the opportunity to lead internationally and we should put our leadership forward in technical and scientific aspects.
19. Council noted that BBSRC's role was to influence, drive and shape long-term strategy in this area with support and engagement from universities. Council agreed that this area was extremely important for biosciences.
20. Council noted that BBSRC's response to the recommendations would be brought to Council in June 2020. Data standards would be included in the response.
21. Andrew Millar thanked BBSRC colleagues and members of the Group for their work and contributions.

ACTION UKRI-BBSRC 30/2020: Council noted that BBSRC's response to the recommendations would be brought to Council in June 2020. Data standards would be included in the response. (Peter Burlinson, Ksymena Grzybowska).

ITEM 9. BIOSCIENCE BIG IDEAS PIPELINE (UKRI BBSRC 04/2020)

This item was classed as business sensitive and it was, therefore, recorded separately.

ITEM 10. BBSRC AND THE RESEARCH CULTURE AGENDA (UKRI BBSRC 05/2020)

22. Frances Downey from UKRI provided an update on the UKRI strategic framework for research culture developed with input from colleagues across BBSRC and the other Research Councils. Council commented that it was worth learning from other organisations such as The Wellcome Trust (mentoring and coaching policy) and industry. There should be strong links between UKRI and independent research organisations. Council also highlighted reward and incentives, creating a culture of collective endeavour and valuing a diversity of views. There is an opportunity for UKRI to lead in this area and unify measuring and reporting.
23. Council was invited to consider what areas of enhancing research culture BBSRC should prioritise, and Council suggested that the Professional Internship for PhD Students (PIPS) scheme is recognised and valued across the biosciences community. BBSRC should continue to sign post where professional opportunities exist and provide leadership, mentoring, coaching and good performance management. Council discussed bottom up approaches and initiatives to encourage students to drive and shape culture change.

ITEM 11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS/ COUNCIL FORWARD LOOK (UKRI BBSRC 06/2020)

24. Council noted future items for discussion, meeting dates for 2020 and a possible 'blue skies' dinner discussion.

Council Secretariat
April 2020

Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
	Actions from 4 December 2019			
4	<i>ACTION UKRI/BBSRC 21/2019: There were opportunities for more alignment between Industrial Biotechnology and Synthetic Biology across UKRI, which potentially could be actioned by establishing a Task and Finish group (Amanda Collis, April 2020)</i>	Amanda Collis	Consider by April 2020	
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) (Paul Gemmill, Ksymena Grzybowska, future Council meeting)</i>	Paul Gemmill Ksymena Grzybowska	Future Council meeting	Ongoing
	Actions from 11 March 2020			
4	<i>This action related was removed as related to risks and deemed business sensitive.</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
8	<i>ACTION UKRI-BBSRC 30/2020: Council noted that BBSRC's response to the recommendations would be brought to Council in June 2020. Data standards would be included in the response. (Peter Burlinson, Ksymena Grzybowska).</i>	Peter Burlinson Ksymena Grzybowska	June 2020	On agenda
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