

Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting held on 23 September 2020 via Zoom.

Those attending:

Professor Ewan Birney
Mr John Bloomer
Dr Belinda Clarke
Professor Ian Graham
Professor Laura Green
Professor Gideon Henderson
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
Dr Karen Lewis
Bill Poll
Siobhan Peters (items 1 – 6 only)
Sir John Kingman (item 5 only)
Dr Jef Grainger (item 7 only)
Professor Jane Langdale (item 7 only)
Dr Stephanie Williams-Blackwell (item 9 only)
Laura Notton (item 10 only)
Sarah Cresswell
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. The Chair welcomed Siobhan Peters, UKRI Chief Finance Officer, and Helen Major, who attended the meeting to provide secretariat support.
3. 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 10 JUNE 2020 (UKRI -BBSRC 13/2020)

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

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

5. The action UKRI-BBSRC 28/2020 related to changing the rating for the Delivery Plan scorecard action titled 'Future priorities in farmed animal productivity' is closed. Relevant reports were shared with Council.

ITEM 4. EXECUTIVE CHAIR'S REPORT (UKRI BBSRC 14/2020)

6. Council noted the Executive Chair's report, particularly the update on UKRI-BBSRC Council recruitment. Interviews for new Council members had been completed, with recommendations due to be discussed with the UKRI CEO and then sent to the UKRI Remuneration Committee for approval. Martin Humphries, who was a member of the short-listing and Interview Panels, commented that the search agency did a superb job in finding suitable candidates. Council also noted the appointment of Sarah Perkins, Executive Director, Strategic Planning, Evidence and Engagement, and the ongoing recruitment of BBSRC Deputy Chair and Chief Operating Officer.
7. Council asked about the higher number of grant applications received for RM2 2020 and how BBSRC was managing the additional workload. Council noted that the number of applications for RM3 2020 would likely be lower. The importance of EDI, particularly gender, was discussed and BBSRC will monitor the EDI data on submitted grant applications prospectively.
8. Council asked about stakeholder engagement plans, in particular for industry, in Net Zero Agriculture. It was noted that the plans were developing, and John Bloomer offered to provide suggestions to Karen Lewis.

Action UKRI-BBSRC 33/2020 - John Bloomer will provide suggestions relating to engaging with industry to Karen Lewis (John Bloomer)

ITEM 5. UPDATE FROM SIR JOHN KINGMAN (ORAL)

9. Sir John Kingman was welcomed to the Council meeting and provided updates on the current situation, which was challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic and EU exit. One of the positive aspects he highlighted was Government's strong interest in R&D and basic research. He also updated Council on spending review progress, discussed the importance of the balance of funding, translational research and its inseparability from basic research. He also talked about the important role of Innovate UK in the research and innovation landscape.
10. Sir John Kingman said that Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser, new UKRI Chief Executive, was providing very strong leadership and had developed strong relationships with Government that were crucial in tackling the challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Council discussed the importance of translational research and achieving impact in health and environment, working together with the Government. Sir John asked Council to continue to emphasise the importance of translating research.
11. UKRI's response to the outbreak was great and Sir John thanked all in BBSRC for their work related to the Covid-19 outbreak.
12. Council raised an issue of universities' income derived from overseas students' fees being lower given the pandemic, however, Council was hopeful that the impact would not be so great.
13. Council discussed the relationship between science, Government, R&D, and UKRI and how critical this interface was in tackling challenges. Working closely together would be essential and reflecting on Strategic Priorities Fund would provide valuable lessons learnt.
14. Council discussed the importance of researchers and UKRI's focus on people and their skills, and nurturing the pipeline starting from early education.
15. The Chair thanked Sir John for attending the meeting and his useful update to Council.

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

16. Gideon Henderson updated Council on the Defra's spending review preparations, focused on four themes, namely improving the environment and Net Zero, food supply and biosecurity, reducing risks, e.g. flood and other emergency response, and enhancing science and data capability. In addition, Defra was also focusing on natural capital and biodiversity/ecosystem assessment and surveillance and mitigation of zoonoses.
17. Council asked about Defra's work on data availability and was informed that the work to improve accessibility continued.

ITEM 7. UK PLANT SCIENCE RESEARCH STRATEGY (UKRI BBSRC 16/2020)

18. The Chair welcomed Professor Jane Langdale from the University of Oxford and Dr Jef Grainger, BBSRC Associate Director Science Strategy.
19. The UK Plant Science Research Strategy was presented to Council. The development of this strategy had been driven by the community and led by Jane Langdale. The strategy is a result of extensive and intensive community engagement. Council welcomed the strategy and commented that it was timely, given that plant science research has a crucial role to play in safeguarding the future of our planet. Council highlighted the need for active portfolio balancing for PhD studentships, including DTPs, and the need for industry involvement at early stages to support the translation continuum. Trees were discussed as a key aspect of the strategy.
20. Council discussed including food perspectives in recommendation 3 and suggested adding another recommendation around plant health.
21. Further refinement, and consideration of how recommendations would be taken forward, including engagement with different partners (e.g. Defra), would continue and be led by Jane Langdale and Melanie Welham.
22. Council thanked Jane for her leadership in developing this Strategy and recognised the very significant personal contributions she has made.

Action UKRI-BBSRC 34/2020 - further refinement, and consideration of how recommendations would be taken forward, including engagement with different partners (e.g. Defra), would continue and be led by Jane Langdale and Melanie Welham. (Melanie Welham, Jane Langdale)

ITEM 9. BIOSCIENCE BIG IDEAS PIPELINE- REVIEW OF THE PILOT (UKRI BBSRC 15/2020)

23. The Chair welcomed Stephanie Williams-Blackwell to the meeting, who presented the paper and took Council through the recommendations.
24. Council was invited to discuss the review of the 'Bioscience Big Ideas Pipeline', a pilot programme aiming to engage with the broad bioscience research and innovation community in a quest to identify adventurous and exciting ideas that have the potential to be transformational. After three rounds of submissions, the pipeline was paused for BBSRC to review the process and its outputs. The review took into consideration feedback from originators, BBSRC Council and BBSRC leadership to consider the outputs of the pipeline against its objectives and to consider challenges and issues that could be addressed should the pipeline continue as a standing programme.

25. Council considered the eight recommendations outlined in the paper and concluded that the pilot was successful and agreed continuation of the programme. Council also recommended early engagement with industry stakeholders and co-development of the ideas, e.g. in Net Zero. Examples of prioritised big ideas should be communicated to the research community in order to stimulate thinking and encourage submissions, particularly in under-represented areas.
26. Council highlighted the importance of engaging with organisations which are not BBSRC funded and coordinating ideas across UKRI, especially at the boundaries of disciplines. Council was informed that there was a cross-Council forum bringing in UKRI to coordinate Council specific pipelines that were developing.
27. On the recommendation relating to soliciting ideas, the focus should be on rules of life and BBSRC could invite researchers to engage in particular pipelines. Council commented that encouraging strategic engagement and sharing priorities would attract a wider and more diverse group of originators. It was noted that Strategy Advisory Panels would review a longlist of ideas and Council offered assistance whereby Council members could review ideas, raise questions and provide feedback. The Executive would consider mechanisms for engaging Council.

Action UKRI BBSRC 35/2020 - The Executive would consider mechanisms for engaging Council in providing advice on the big ideas pipeline programme (Amanda Collis)

28. Council thanked Stephanie and the team for the paper and reiterated that the pilot was a success. BBSRC's model had been used by other Councils as a blueprint. It was also noted that when BBSRC would be looking into implementing the outcomes of the spending review, big ideas would be a valuable source, especially in Net Zero.

ITEM 10. SPENDING REVIEW UPDATE (UKRI BBSRC 17/2020)

29. The Chair welcomed Laura Notton to the meeting, who introduced the paper.
30. Council noted the update on the spending review, the process, timelines and the next steps. The UKRI spending review bid was built around three priorities: uplifting Council core budgets, enabling bottom-up and top-down collaboration and funding system-wide priorities.
31. Council discussed emerging UKRI priorities and the overall balance of BBSRC funding (responsive mode versus strategic funding). As details of potential budget scenarios and conditions start to emerge, Laura Notton will return to Council for advice on the deployment and balance of funding across BBSRC's portfolio at its meeting in December 2020.

Action UKRI BBSRC 36/2020 - Laura Notton will return to Council for advice on the deployment and balance of funding across BBSRC's portfolio at its meeting in December 2020 (on agenda for December 2020 Council meeting)

32. Council considered how to attract companies from overseas to have a footprint in the UK and suggested that commercialisation is captured and not lost amongst other terminology. Council raised the importance of involving Devolved Administrations in the spending review.
33. Council considered what a good spending review outcome would look like and was invited to provide comments by email.

ITEM 11. DEVELOPMENT OF A HIGH-LEVEL UKRI BBSRC INSTITUTE STRATEGY (UKRI BBSRC 18/2020)

34. The aim of the session was to stimulate an initial 'brainstorming' discussion to gather thoughts that would help shape BBSRC's future strategic approach to supporting Institutes and associated campuses. The intended outcome is that BBSRC develops a clear high-level Institute strategy. The feedback received from Council break out groups would be synthesised, and a Task and Finish Group established to take this work forward. An update would be provided at the next Council meeting in December 2020.

Action UKRI BBSRC 37/2020 – An update on the development of BBSRC Institute Strategy would be provided at the next Council meeting in December 2020. (Melanie Welham, on agenda for December 2020 meeting)

ITEM 12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND FORWARD LOOK

35. Council suggested having a discussion about integrating innovation and novel ways of fostering innovation in future.

36. Council commented that break out rooms worked very well and suggested using it for other items on Council agendas, where practicable, to ensure Council meetings are managed effectively and sufficient time is allocated for discussion. Extra Council meetings or subset of Council to focus on specific topic were considered as well.

Council Secretariat

November 2020

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	Completed. On agenda for December 2020
	Actions from 23 September 2020			
4	<i>Action UKRI-BBSRC 33/2020 - John Bloomer will provide suggestions relating to engaging with industry to Karen Lewis (John Bloomer)</i>	John Bloomer	December 2020	Ongoing
7	<i>Action UKRI-BBSRC 34/2020 - further refinement, and consideration of how recommendations would be taken forward, including engagement with different partners (e.g. Defra), would continue and be led by Jane Langdale and Melanie Welham. (Melanie Welham, Jane Langdale)</i>	Melanie Welham Jane Langdale	February 2021	Ongoing
9	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 35/2020 - The Executive would consider mechanisms for engaging Council in providing advice on the big ideas pipeline programme (Amanda Collis)</i>	Amanda Collis	May 2021	Ongoing
10	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 36/2020 – Laura Notton will return to Council for advice on the deployment and balance of funding across BBSRC’s portfolio at its meeting in December 2020 (Laura Notton, on agenda for December 2020 Council meeting)</i>	Laura Notton Ksymena Grzybowska	December 2020	On agenda for December 2020

11	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 37/2020 – An update on the development of BBSRC Institute Strategy would be provided at the next Council meeting in December 2020. (Melanie Welham, on agenda for December 2020 meeting)</i>	Melanie Welham Ksymena Grzybowska	December 2020	On agenda for December 2020
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