MINUTES OF THE FOURTH MEETING OF COUNCIL HELD ON 30 NOVEMBER 2018 AT THE MRC, 1 KEMBLE STREET, LONDON

Present:	Professor Jennifer Rubin *(Executive Chair)*
	Professor Diane Coyle *(Senior Independent Member; Chair)*
	Professor Jane Falkingham *(Chair, item 12 onwards)*
	Mr Mike Emmerich
	Professor Matthew Flinders
	Professor Nigel Gilbert
	Professor Rachel Griffith
	Professor James Smith
	Professor Anna Vignoles
	Professor John Aston
Apologies:	Professor James Smith
	Professor Melinda Mills
	Sir Chris Wormald
Office:	Mr Andy Gibbs *(Head of Strategy; Secretary to Council)*
	Sir Mark Walport *(Chief Executive, UKRI)*
	Mr Ian Kenyon *(Chief Finance Officer, UKRI)*
	Mr Simon Crine *(Interim Director of Strategy, Operations and Partnerships)*
	Ms Ruth Gibson *(Deputy Director for Capability and Data Infrastructure)*
	Mr Jeremy Neathey *(Deputy Director for Research and International)*
	Dr Tom Roberts *(Assistant Secretary to Council)*
	Mr Thomas Goodsir *(Strategy)*
	Dr Jacqui Karn *(Strategy)*
Guests:	Sir Mark Walport *(Chief Executive, UKRI)*
	Mr Ian Kenyon *(Chief Finance Officer, UKRI)*
	Professor Paul Nightingale *(incoming Director of Strategy and Operations)*
	Professor Alison Park *(incoming director of Research)*

These minutes do not necessarily reflect the order in which items were discussed.

1.	**Welcome and Apologies**	**Oral**
1.1	Professor Diane Coyle, Chair and Senior Independent Member (SIM) of Council, welcomed Council members to the fourth meeting of Council.	
1.2	Apologies were noted from Professors Smith and Mills, and Sir Chris Wormald.	
1.3	The Chair welcomed Professor Alison Park who will join the ESRC leadership team as Director of Research, from 7 January 2019. She	

	joins alongside Professor Paul Nightingale who has been appointed as Director of Strategy and Operations.	
	Professor Park is currently Director of the ESRC funded Cohort and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resources (CLOSER) programme at University College London.	
1.4	The Chair also welcomed Professor John Aston who joins Council as a civil service attendee in his capacity as Chief Scientific Adviser to the Home Office.	
1.5	The Chair informed members that Mr Ian Kenyon, UKRI Chief Finance Officer will join this meeting as an observer. Sir Mark Walport, UKRI Chief Executive will also join the meeting to provide Council with an update on UKRI Transformation.	
1.6	The Chair informed members that she will need to depart the meeting after item 11. She thanked Professor Falkingham for agreeing to act as Chair for the remainder of the meeting.	
2.	**Minutes of the Previous Meeting**	**ESRC 17/18**
2.1	The minutes were **agreed** as an accurate record of the previous meeting.	
3.	**Matters Arising**	**Oral**
3.1	Members were updated on the status of matters arising from the previous meeting. Members noted all items were complete.	
4.	**Executive Chair's Business**	
4.1	Professor Rubin noted the recent letter to Council members clarifying its decision making role and reiterated the importance of Council in providing robust feedback and critical challenge.	
	She emphasised the need for ESRC and Council to continue to marshal and articulate the benefits of social science. She mentioned how she had been encouraged by the recent Spending Review (SR) submission to UKRI which called for innovative and bold ideas in the event of an uplift to funding and the substantial progress made with development of the Strategic Delivery Plan (SDP) which had been led by Professor Nightingale and had benefitted from members considered engagement and feedback.	
4.2	Council were updated on recent Strategic Priority Fund (SPF) bid activity and how submissions had been improved through cross council activity and meetings with departmental Chief Scientific Advisers.	

4.3	Council noted that Professors Rubin and Coyle had been invited to join the Industrial Strategy Council and that the first meeting had been successful with good awareness of the ESRC. ESRC will be involved in the metrics workshop to help shape the future measurement of progress of the Industrial Strategy Council (ISC). The ISC will be seeking secondees to work on specific projects. Council members were encouraged to follow up with Professor Rubin if they knew of suitable colleagues.	
4.4	Council were updated on the success of recent trips to China and Scotland. Professor Rubin met with the Scottish Chief Scientist and then led a strategic engagement lunch with colleagues from leading Scottish Research Organisations. Thanks in absentia were made to Professor James Smith for his help hosting this activity. Council will continue to be appraised on regional visits as more of them take place.	**ACTION** Jennifer to circulate a brief update to Council on future regional visits
4.5	Council were also updated on organisational matters and Professor Rubin welcomed the appointments of Professor Alison Park as ESRC Director of Research, Professor Paul Nightingale as Director of Strategy and Operations, and Emma Gordon as ESRC Director of the Administrative Data Research Partnership (ADRP).	
5.	**Report by Chair of UK in a Changing Europe Hub Panel**	**Oral**
5.1	Professor Rubin and Mr Goodsir recused themselves from the meeting for this item only.	
5.2	The Chair invited Professor Flinders, Chair of the UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE) Hub Panel to provide an update of the Panel's outcome.	
5.3	Professor Flinders provided Council with an update on the independent review panel for this further phase of funding to the UKICE initiative led by Professor Anand Menon at King's College London. It was noted that the process had been rigorous and had helped to refine and polish how the investment should link with other ESRC Brexit related initiatives.	
5.4	The panel recommend further funding be subject to the following issues being addressed: 1. That the proposal be stress tested to cope with the unfolding of different Brexit scenarios 2. That the leadership team is broadened to incorporate a deputy director role. 3. That the contribution from the host research organisation is updated to reflect this requirement.	

5.5	Council welcomed the increased capacity of this hub through its fellowship activity and the extension to the UKICE hub being granted subject to satisfactory resolution of the issues identified.	**ACTION** Mr Neathey to provide Council with an update on progress at a future meeting.
6.	**Meeting Overview**	**ESRC 18/18**
6.1	The Chair invited Council to note this paper for information and informed them it provides context for the subsequent discussion on the research portfolio and strategic planning.	
7.	**Research Portfolio update and discussion**	**Oral**
7.1	Mr Neathey, Deputy Director of Research and International introduced this item for discussion.	
7.2	Mr Neathey, explained that the current paper was the beginning of a conversation around what sort of evidence Council wanted to support strategy development. It responded to an earlier request from Council for an analysis that would provide Council with a deeper understanding of the rationale and shape of ESRC's current Research Portfolio. The presentation also helped situate subsequent Council discussions about the draft Strategic Delivery Plan (SDP) and how it fits within the new UKRI challenge-led context.	
7.3	Council noted the opportunities around the cross cutting funds and how the ESRC SDP aligns with these. Council noted the UKRI context provided: a strong emphasis on discovery driven and challenge led research; a commitment to maintain the 'talent pipeline' and health of the UK science base; a big commitment to research infrastructure; an emphasis on global connectivity and leadership; and the fundamental importance of translational activities and societal impact.	
7.4	Council expressed concern over the budgetary pressures on the ESRC Standard Grants scheme (discovery science), which had experienced significant cuts and consequently success rates as low as 15%. Council shared the office's concerns that this lack of funds was impeding ESRC's ability to fund high quality research and moreover risked demotivating a whole cadre of new researchers and their research organisations from applying to the ESRC.	
7.5	There was also concern about the attractiveness of the UK's research offer to leading social scientists already threatened	

	(depending on the outcome of Brexit) by the potential decline in the availability of funds from European Research Council (ERC) grants. This was making it increasingly hard for UK based academics to gain access to the scale of research funds needed to carry out meaningful impactful research.	
7.6	Council recognised the significant challenges involved with rebalancing ESRC's core budget and recommended that: 1. There was a need to look again at the balance of funding between strategic and discovery mode with the aim of raising the success rates of the latter whilst keeping it as open and free from demand management restrictions as possible. 2. Further funding was required around knowledge exchange and mobilisation given the emphasis in the ESRC Strategic Delivery Plan and the UKRI Prospectus. However, to inform a sensible strategy, it would be important to evaluate the efficacy of Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAAs) supported by data on their performance as well as ESRC's approach to Knowledge Exchange (KE); 3. Given the availability of UKRI cross cutting funds, there's an ongoing need to reflect upon where ESRC should invest for social science in relation to these opportunities. 4. The scale of funds being invested in the talent pipeline warrant an analysis of professional career trajectories to ensure an ecosystem of academic careers moving through and alignment between ESRC's portfolio and the different support modalities offered beyond PhD studentships. This analysis should also include mechanisms that support intersectoral mobility e.g. Wellcome's re-entry fellowship for those who have left the academe to re-enter. 5. The ESRC needs to ensure it has flexibility to act as matchmaker between grants and funding modes in ways that increase impact and add value to the grant portfolio. 6. There was a need to better understand the full impact of the ESRC's portfolio, suggesting that a programme of cross cutting evaluations by broad research areas should be initiated.	
8.	**Data and Infrastructure Strategy**	**ESRC 20/18**
8.1	Professor Vignoles reminded Council of her dual role as a Council member seconded part-time to support the office with special responsibility for data and infrastructure. She described the unique role that ESRC plays in curating data and outlined how data remains a key long term investment that underpins so much social science and other research capacity (for instance both the productivity and public services priorities are data heavy). Professor Vignoles highlighted the difficulties ESRC is facing given cuts to ESRC's capital baseline which have led to a 45% funding shortfall to data	

	investments in the short to medium term. Professor Vignoles also explained that a submission to restore ESRC's capital baseline is being made to the UKRI CEO.	
	She then presented Council with ESRC's prospective longer term ambitions for an integrated data portfolio which would include multiple datasets and services and facilitate greater cross council collaboration. This data initiative would offer services to a much broader range of disciplinary data users and allow ESRC as a constituent of UKRI to be more strategic about what to fund.	
8.2	Council acknowledged the critical role that data infrastructure plays in underpinning research and maintaining the research talent pool. Council noted that ESRC was in a challenging position due to its dwindling budget and that a strategic approach to cutting investments might be needed if the 2019/20 gap request to UKRI to restore the baseline was unsuccessful. It was noted that this was at a time when expectations were being raised through UKRI to address social science questions and when over 60% of the government's areas of research interest (ARIs) related to social science questions.	
8.3	Council understood the attempt to reconcile long term data planning with short term needs and welcomed the longer term proposal for an ambitious interdisciplinary pan-UKRI data portfolio lab. It was suggested the initiative be badged as a key piece of national research infrastructure and that the name for the initiative, when decided, should reflect this.	
8.4	There would be a need for UKRI and ESRC to ensure other Research Councils and stakeholders such as government departments as well as commercial users also demonstrate their appetite for this. For example tech companies, government start-ups, and small firms would also benefit from appropriately administered access to departments and other forms of data, but Council noted the need for caution here.	
9.	**Strategic Delivery Plan update**	**ESRC 21/18**
9.1	Professor Nightingale thanked Council for their valuable input to the ESRC's draft SDP to date and for the work of Professor Vignoles and the Data and Infrastructure team. He outlined how he would be taking on board all comments, and how the next draft would be edited down further to go online. Professor Nightingale described the appetite for the two immediate priority areas of Productivity and Improving Public Services, which include investments at scale, contingent on success in bids for UKRI central funds and budget allocations to facilitate an appropriately resourced research infrastructure to support an ambitious uplift in investment in skills, impact generating activities and data infrastructure.	

9.2	Council congratulated Professors Nightingale and Rubin on the draft SDP and endorsed it as a major step forward.	
9.3	Members made the following suggestions:	

9.3 Members made the following suggestions:

1. Welcomed the emphasis on interdisciplinary skillsets, and reskilling throughout academic career pathways.

2. There is considerable potential for data investment and linkage to stimulate cross-government/ cross-disciplinary collaboration e.g. on tackling mental health in criminal justice and education etc.

3. Skills development to leverage that potential will be important.

4. Data investments could be more threaded through (e.g. ADRP, European social survey etc).

5. That the SDP communication strategy considers how to direct various audiences to relevant content and consider how it would land with different communities. In particular, reassure the community that social science methodological pluralism and qualitative research is valued. Include more mention of communities and families (e.g. needs to be strengthened in the education priority).

6. How to make best use of the UKRI emphasis on a language of a research ecosystem and nurturing which speaks to our communities.

7. That objectives in the SDP were better but could still be SMARTer; avoid a language of improvement which implies ESRC is not good now.

8. That the section on prosperity, productivity and growth would benefit more from mention of regional inequalities and connect this section to the 'place' agenda.

9. To consider how to better illustrate the intended cross-cutting impacts and interactions between the priorities in the text and through the diagram: e.g. transforming productivity and education which would in turn help tackle issues around inequality / sustainability /skills/wellbeing and place. UKRI could be pivotal in informing teaching / learning and the pipeline of talent into HEIs.

10. Welcomed the inclusion of mobility between sectors and building skills across sectors. Should also consider how to better link researchers who are engaged with stakeholders but less engaged with ESRC.

11. A need to make sure that case studies are more powerful and illustrative of impact; a suggestion to make more of ESRC's impact through GCRF funded projects as illustrating the UK's role in the world

ACTION
Professor Nightingale to make amendments to the draft

	12. Welcomed an 'advancing methods' section but this needs more development on capacity building – data lab and Q Step is mentioned but this does not amount to the ambition.	
9.4	Council noted that the draft Plans for all UKRI Councils will be reviewed at the Executive Committee meeting in December and there will be a short teleconference on 7th February for Council to give its final approval before the SDP goes forward to the UKRI Board for sign-off at the end of February.	
10.	**UKRI Transformation update from Sir Mark Walport**	**Oral**
10.1	Sir Mark joined the meeting for this item only.	
10.2	Sir Mark thanked Council for all the work they do and said that he recognised that ESRC has a particular set of challenges given the breadth of societal issues that social science was expected to address. He expressed his desire for ESRC to be given more funds and underscored the decisive role that ESRC Council plays in supporting Professor Rubin and in holding her to account. Sir Mark also welcomed Jennifer's role as the UKRI champion for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I).	
10.3	In outlining what UKRI is about - knowledge made useful - Sir Mark explained that considerable effort goes into the grants assessment process, but is not matched by a corresponding effort to look at and identify research impacts. This needs to be redressed given it is what interests the public and underpins their trust. There remains a need to catalyse interest from our communities to address this challenge and to think about the incentives and metrics for their engagement.	
10.4	He outlined the task for Research Councils in facilitating the best possible research to happen by applying their project and domain expertise, ensuring the quality of peer review processes and acting as effective shareholders in flagship investments as well as acting as an effective transmission mechanism between Councils and government departments.	
10.5	Sir Mark explained that the role of UKRI was in making councils even more effective and the user interface more efficient and consistent so that it was better equipped to tackle an interdisciplinary challenge-led world. He explained that there was still some way to go within UKRI so that staff resource better reflected UKRI's budget and the uplift from the National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF).	
10.6	In discussion with Council, Sir Mark noted the importance of the SDP in conveying ESRC's aspirations to government in an exciting way. He highlighted the necessity for good planning and execution	

	of major projects, and the importance of track record in the criteria for decision-making. He also drew attention to the importance of research cultures in the development of capacity to conduct excellent interdisciplinary research.		
10.7	Sir Mark advised that a meeting of members from all UKRI Councils was being planned, to help build links between the Councils and their agendas.		
10.8	Professor Coyle and Sir Mark Walport left the meeting and Professor Falkingham stood in as meeting Chair for the remainder of the meeting.		
11.	**ESRC Impact Prize 2019**		
11.1	The Executive Chair introduced this item for discussion.		
11.2	Council noted the internal review of the Celebrating Impact Prize and were encouraged to think about how they can further support the initiative.		
11.3	Professor Griffith suggested ESRC could make better use of the case studies it collects and that it could be counterproductive to request this information and to not use it. She requested a future discussion on research impact and telling the impact story.		
12.	**Future Council Meetings**		**Oral**
12.1	Mr Gibbs updated members on governance and recruitment issues and plans for Council meetings in 2019. Council were informed that there will be a coordinated UKRI recruitment campaign during 2019 and that ESRC had gaps to fill in a number of areas including policy and business engagement.		
12.2	Council noted the new paper format. Mr Gibbs explained that a task and finish group comprised of Council members would shortly be established to identify information requirements and resources for Council members and meetings.		
12.3	Council were asked to comment on and add to the shared internal list of future items for discussion, and provide feedback to the Secretariat.		
12.4	Council requested that knowledge exchange and impact be put on the next agenda. It was also suggested that there was a regular horizon scanning item to look at the ideas pipeline.		
13.	**Any Other Business**		**Oral**

13.1	Professor Falkingham led a debrief discussion on Sir Mark Walport's item.	
13.2	Members suggested there was a need for improved connections at every level of UKRI and a clear role for UKRI Strategy Unit to help make cross cutting initiatives more visible and to drive synergies. Suggestions included inviting UKRI Strategy Unit or Challenge Directors to Council periodically; and UKRI Strategy Unit to support a Council member buddying and exchange programme between Councils.	
13.3	Members suggested a number of potential shared areas of interest across UKRI. a) determining interest in training on quantitative skills and coding; b) Using existing substantive interdisciplinary areas such as health and social care as pilot areas to stimulate enhanced cross council working; c) understanding research career trajectories and leadership ; d) better selling the role of social science tech transfer to other research councils.	
13.4	No other business was raised.	
14.	**Close of Meeting**	**Oral**
14.1	The Executive Chair thanked members for attending and reminded members that the fifth meeting of Council is scheduled for 27 February 2019.	