

**MINUTES OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF COUNCIL HELD ON 10 MAY 2019
AT THE MRC, 1 KEMBLE STREET, LONDON**

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| Present: | Professor Jennifer Rubin (<i>Executive Chair</i>) |
| | Professor Jane Falkingham (<i>acting Chair</i>) |
| | Sir Chris Wormald |
| | Professor John Aston |
| | Mr Mike Emmerich |
| | Professor Matthew Flinders |
| | Professor Nigel Gilbert |
| | Professor Rachel Griffith |
| | Professor Melinda Mills |
| | Professor James Smith |
| | Professor Anna Vignoles |
| Apologies: | Professor Diane Coyle (Senior Independent Member) |
| Office: | Mr Simon Crine (<i>Chief Operating Officer</i>) |
| | Professor Paul Nightingale (<i>Director of Strategy and Partnerships</i>) |
| | Professor Alison Park (<i>Director of Research</i>) |
| | Dr Tom Roberts (<i>Assistant Secretary to Council</i>) |
| | Mr Doug German (<i>Governance and Secretariat</i>) |
| | Ms Tahia Zaidi (<i>Governance and Secretariat</i>) |
| Guests: | Ms Ruth Elliot (<i>UKRI Finance and Commercial Director</i>) |

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

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| 1. | Welcome and Apologies | Oral |
| 1.1 | Professor Jane Falkingham, Chair, welcomed Council members to the sixth meeting of Council. | |
| 1.2 | Apologies were noted from Professor Diane Coyle. | |
| 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. | |

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| 3.2 | Professor Mills requested the office provide more detailed information on the current legal basis for restricting eligibility for studentships. | Action: Professor Park |
| 4. | Executive Chair's Report | |
| 4.1 | Council were updated on the ESRC re-organisation process including the likely separation of domain-specific and administrative functions designed to achieve greater resource flexibility; a flatter management structure (moving from 7 to 5 layers); and the building of greater social science expertise within the council (which is in progress through the recruitment of rotators and Directors already recruited). Feedback from UKRI had been positive. It was noted how this is serving as an opportunity to think about the organisation that the ESRC will need to become. | |
| 4.2 | Professor Rubin informed Council of plans for an all staff awayday scheduled for 10 July and its vital role in ensuring staff are involved and understand the rationale for organisational change and how it will improve our ability to work across Councils, access and shape UKRI funds. | |
| 4.3 | Council were updated on how UKRI is working with a recruitment agency to recruit council members across the organisation and that ESRC is looking to fill three vacancies. | |
| 4.4 | Professor Rubin thanked Professors Vignoles, Falkingham and Gilbert for their help in producing a chapter of the Infrastructure Roadmap and Professor Aston for his support. The draft Roadmap has been well received by UKRI and will now go through internal UKRI review, to UKRI Board in July with publication in the autumn. | |
| 4.5 | Professor Rubin reported on successful engagement activities with Jesse Norman MP at the Ministry of Transport and TRIB around developing their theme of work around health and wellbeing and transport. | |
| 4.6 | Council noted cross council conversations about providing a greater degree of coordination between councils for input into challenge funds, (for instance ISCF and SPF) and that members should be prepared to be approached. | |
| 5. | ESRC Provisional Budget 2019/20 | ESRC 2019- 11 |
| 5.1 | Mr Crine presented ESRC's indicative budget on behalf of UKRI finance and clarified that Council were being asked to note, advise and comment. | |

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| 5.2 | Council noted the indicative budget and the considerable increase in expenditure and staff numbers. | |
| 5.3 | Mr Emmerich asked why Council were being asked to look at this 6 weeks into the fiscal year. Ms Elliot clarified that the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy had not yet approved the final allocation to UKRI resulting in a delay to the budgetary approval process. | |
| 5.4 | It was noted that headings refer to UKRI central funds, and Mr Crine agreed that in future years provisional budgets will more clearly distinguish between core ESRC and UKRI programmatic funds. | |
| 5.5 | Council asked that future indicative budgets include previous year's expenditure for comparative purposes; disaggregated data by ESRC programme and commentary on ESRC's share of cross-cutting funds. | Actions: Finance to ensure future budgets include: i) previous year's expenditure; ii) disaggregated data by ESRC programme and iii) commentary on ESRC's share of cross-cutting funds |
| 6. | Strategic Delivery Plan | ESRC 2019-12 |
| 6.1 | Professor Nightingale presented the SDP and thanked Council for their inputs before inviting comment on the accompanying two page summary. | |
| 6.2 | Council noted progress on ESRC's Strategic Delivery Plan and that it had recently received approval from Sir Mark Walport subject to some very minor revisions. | |
| 6.3 | Professor Griffith noted there was a typo with regard to a second mention of IFS (CPP) instead of CEP. | |
| 7. | ESRC Strategic Allocation of Budget | ESRC 2019-13 |

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| 7.1 | Professor Park introduced a paper on strategic allocation of budget by Jeremy Neathey. Council were asked to discuss and agree strategic level principles underpinning the macro and meso level allocations of ESRC core budget across the main areas of ESRC spend to ensure alignment with SDP objectives. | |
| 7.2 | Council welcomed this initial discussion and noted that the focus should be on increasing headroom for strategic input from Council whilst also maintaining some flexibility in the budget. Council recognised the need for agreement on the principles and rationale that underpin decisions. | |
| 7.3 | Council noted progress in getting to this forward look at committed expenditure and headroom, but expressed a desire for greater disaggregation, more detailed numbers, and evidence based commentaries on the benefits or disbenefits of different investment strategies. The absence of these elements made it challenging to provide informed and impartial advice and decisions on strategic questions. | |
| 7.4 | Council requested a more detailed breakdown and commentary on ESRC's budget, with clarity over what had to be funded out of ESRC core budget relative to what might be redirected from UKRI central and programme funds would be helpful in addressing this when this is next discussed. | Action: Finance & Mr Neathey to circulate detailed breakdown of ESRC expenditure by broad category for 2018/19 |
| 7.5 | Council noted the challenges to the office in feeding into fast-moving cross-cutting funding bids in a timely way, for instance Strategic Priority Fund activity. Professor Vignoles suggested that a more agile approach to responding could be to turn to the community more directly. | |
| 7.6 | Professor Vignoles advised that the partnership principle established between ESRC and DfID and the latter's familiarity with social science had been key to the success of ESRC's engagement with GCRF and that this principle may be instructive for other areas. Professor Smith noted that clarity over plans for the future of the GCRF scheme beyond 2021 would be helpful in this context. | |
| 7.8 | There was a discussion about the future of discovery mode administration. Council requested analysis that would provide an evidence base for understanding the relative impacts and performance of different modes of funding. For instance on | Action: Mr Nightingale/ Mr Neathey to provide |

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| | responsive mode funding, Council expressed an appetite for robust case studies that demonstrate impact and value. | analysis for impacts and performance of different modes of funding |
| 8. | UKRI Spending Review Preparations | ESRC 2019-14 |
| 8.1 | Professor Nightingale presented an update on the comprehensive Spending Review preparations and invited Council to feedback further comments on the SR directly to him. | |
| 8.2 | Council acknowledged the uncertainties and agreed ESRC should be bold and pitch big ideas for the 2.4% scenario that built on existing strengths such as those outlined in the SDP for instance around data science and data science training. Other potential opportunities members suggested may include: leading across UKRI on talent and senior research development and the science of leadership; exploring appetite for demography science with a particular emphasis on diversity. | |
| 8.3 | Council suggested that ESRC consider its offer to early and mid career researchers by looking to emulate an equivalent scheme to the highly regarded European Research Council Starting Grant which - depending on outcomes of EU exit - may no longer be available to UK based researchers. | |
| 8.4 | Council advised: emphasising the benefits of proposed research as this element is often underplayed; focussing on the demand side for social science when thinking about responses to the SR – in particular the overwhelming emphasis of departmental areas of research interest on social science – as an opportunity to showcase the centrality of the social sciences and as a guide to prioritisation; identifying aspects of ESRC’s offer that had resonance amongst other research councils such as the infrastructure roadmap; and clearly articulating why the state as opposed to other players should fund the activity. | |
| 9. | ESRC Brexit Initiatives | Oral |
| 9.1 | Professor Park provided an update. Council noted the progress in identifying future grant applicants’ interest and approach to data and resource requirements as part of the second phase of the Governance after Brexit initiative. | |
| 9.2 | Council noted that ESRC had held helpful discussions with the British Election Survey and Understanding Society investments. | |

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| | Council also noted ESRC had postponed the second phase of calls until June 2019 and had identified a budgetary envelope designed to cover a range of scenarios to cover different circumstances in the lead up to planned EU exit. | |
| 10. | Council Annual Self Assessment | ESRC 2019-15 |
| 10.1 | Dr Roberts informed members all UKRI Councils are requested and required to undertake annual self-assessments of their effectiveness and regular appraisals of ordinary members. | |
| 10.2 | Members reflected on and appreciated the combination of collegiate tone and ability to constructively challenge in meetings. It was agreed that this enabled useful and important critical reflection and discussion while also ensuring that issues continue to move on, are agreed or resolved and acted upon. Council congratulated ESRC for transitioning well from an independent organisation to a subsidiary of UKRI. Members also noted papers and agenda items for Council meetings were cohesive and well-linked. | |
| 10.3 | Some members also expressed a desire for the dates and times of meetings to be reviewed and opportunities for informal discussions following the conclusion of formal business. | Action: Secretariat |
| 10.4 | Professors Gilbert and Mills encouraged the office to involve members in early, iterative stages of papers, and fast moving funding opportunities noting members have limited opportunities to feed in where papers and proposals have been finalised. | Action: Secretariat and paper owners |
| 10.5 | Council reiterated their request for further information of activities they were engaged in. | Action: Secretariat |
| 10.6 | Members agreed to send completed appraisals to the Secretariat by June 3 2019. | Action: Council |
| 11. | Forward Look and Horizon Scan | ESRC 2019-16 |
| 11.1 | Dr Roberts informed members of items provisionally expected to be brought to future Council Meetings and invited Council to suggest additional items. | |
| 11.2 | Council requested a broader horizon scanning activity that went beyond upcoming agenda items which for instance, looked at social innovations over the next 10 years that should be invested in now. Professor John Aston recommended utilising areas of research interest (ARIs) from government departments to inform this activity. Professor Rubin informed members the Office is recruiting a Social | |

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| | Science fellow to inform such scanning and forward-looking activities. | |
| 11.3 | Professor Rubin informed Council that UKRI is interested in collating the top 5 outcomes generated by each constituent Council, and had requested Council could assist with this process by informing the secretariat of notable examples and case studies. | Action: Council |
| 12. | Any Other Business | Oral |
| 12.1 | <p>Professor Mills asked for an update from UKRI on the proposed international discovery fund that would be designed to fill a gap left by the loss of prestigious European Union funding after EU exit Deadline impending.</p> <p>Professor Rubin noted that Professor Thompson, Executive Chair AHRC had been engaging with the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy and the European Research Council and that there was recognition of the particular implications to the social sciences and that issues were being discussed appropriately.</p> | |
| 13. | Close of Meeting | Oral |
| 14.1 | Professor Rubin thanked members for attending and reminded members that the seventh meeting of Council is scheduled for 24 July 2019. | |