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UKRI ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL

EDITED MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 10 MARCH 2021

Council Members: Professor M E Smith (Chair)
Professor Dame L Gladden
Professor Dame M Calder
Professor A Etheridge
Professor N Jennings
Ms S John
Professor M Schröder
Professor S Sharples (from 10am)
Dr J de Sousa
Professor I Walmsley
Professor T Whitley (until 1pm)
Dr P Williams
Professor A Wright
Professor S Belcher

Executive: Dr A Bourne
Ms K Daniel (item 9 only)
Professor C Deane (from 10am)
Ms S Francis (item 8 only)
Mr G Mapstone (until 1pm)
Ms J Nicholson
Dr K Pandya
Professor M Parsons
Mr A Paul (item 9 onwards)
Dr N Viner
Dr A Wall (items 7 and 9)

Others: Ms Emma Lindsell, UKRI (for item 5 only)
Mrs Siobhan Peters, UKRI (from 10-11am and 2.30pm onwards)
Mr Mark Bussey, UKRI (from 9.30am to 1pm)

Secretary: Dr N Goldberg

1. Introductory Remarks

- 1.1 Professor Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded members of the protocols for running this virtual meeting of Council and outlined the key business.
- 1.2 Professor Smith formally welcomed Ms John and Professor Schröder who were attending their first meeting.
- 1.3 No apologies had been received although it was noted that Professor Sharples would join the meeting later and that Professor Whitley would be leaving the meeting at 1pm.
- 1.4 There were no new declarations of interest from Council members.

2. Draft Minutes of the Meeting on 01 December 2020

- 2.1 Council **agreed** the record of the last meeting.

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3. Actions and Matters Arising

3.1 There were five actions from the last meeting. Council noted those that were completed and those that were in-hand. Council received the following specific update on action 7.2:

- i) Business Roundtable – Dr Bourne said that the paper which had been produced following the discussion with Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser at the December meeting was included in the Reading Room for today’s meeting. He reported that EPSRC had subsequently hosted a business roundtable on 09 March 2021 with Dame Ottoline. Dr Bourne said that he had chaired the event and it was attended by some of our Council members as well as representatives from industry and universities. He said the meeting had been useful and positive and had provided a number of potential actions for the Executive to follow up on. The Council members who had attended concurred with Dr Bourne and thanked him and the other EPSRC staff involved for convening such a positive event. They agreed that it would now be important to build on the momentum that the event had stimulated.

4. Executive Update (EPSRC 01-21)

4.1 The Executive Update paper covered a number of items including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic; the outcome of the business roundtable discussion; an update on planning for COP26 later in the year; and finally a report from an AI showcase hosted by EPSRC for an invited group of CSAs held on 01 February. However, the SR settlement was the sole topic for discussion under this item. Council were first provided with an update on the UKRI allocations process for FY21/22 and this was followed by a discussion on a number of options that the Executive could pursue as a result of the impending allocation.

4.2 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

4.9 Ms Nicholson said that it would be useful for Council to have the opportunity to further reflect on the future funding position at the July meeting based on any new developments associated with the SR.

ACTION: Dr Goldberg

4.10 Council also used this opportunity to prepare for the discussion session with Emma Lindsell, UKRI Executive Director, Strategy, Performance and Engagement.

4.11 Council **noted** the update.

5. Discussion with the UKRI Executive Director Strategy, Performance and Engagement

5.1 Professor Smith welcomed Ms Lindsell to the meeting. She began by highlighting some of the current government and UKRI strategy developments including the Place Strategy, the Innovation Strategy, and the People and Culture Strategy. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.** She then provided an update on UKRI’s own developing strategic framework and emerging implementation and prioritisation plans in the context of the government landscape.

5.2 Council discussed the importance to EPSRC of both the Innovation Strategy and the development of UKRI’s own strategy and considered how EPSRC can best influence and support their development. In particular, Council felt that, given EPSRC’s strategic relationships and interactions and, as demonstrated by the recent business roundtable event, it was well placed to ensure that there is a strong business voice represented in these deliberations. Council therefore welcomed the offer from Ms Lindsell to work offline with a small group of Council members in the near future to provide input. Council also

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agreed that this would provide a useful basis for a more in-depth Council discussion regarding the Innovation Strategy at the Council's awayday scheduled for May.

- 5.3 Council also briefly discussed the recent government announcement to create an ARPA type body in the UK (ARIA). It expressed a strong wish to contribute to the early deliberations and iterations leading up to this new body's creation. In particular, to ensure that the respective roles of UKRI, and within it EPSRC, complement that of the new organisation to ensure its success and optimum impact from the outset. Indeed, Council said that it would welcome the UKRI Board's views about how it might wish to engage with BEIS around the formation of ARIA and how EPSRC might support the Board in doing this.
- 5.4 Professor Smith thanked Ms Lindsell for attending the meeting. When she had left Council took this opportunity to briefly reprise what had been discussed.
- 6. Closed Session**
- 6.1 A closed session was held without the Executive and UKRI representatives.
- 6.2 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 7. EPSRC Doctoral Education Review (EPSRC 02-21)**
- 7.1 Dr Wall introduced a paper that provided a brief update on the ongoing review of doctoral education, with the main outcomes scheduled for Council in July. This also provided an opportunity to consider the UKRI work on a New Deal for funding postgraduate research, which is being developed for the Government's People and Culture Strategy. Council were also appraised of ongoing UKRI discussions on whether further support is needed for doctoral students impacted by the pandemic.
- 7.2 Dr Wall said that the EPSRC Doctoral Education Review was progressing well and that there had been six workshops so far. She said the next steps were:
- i) A workshop for learned societies and other organisations.
 - ii) Further data analysis including on destinations and outcomes.
 - iii) Gathering input from doctoral students.
 - iv) An external commission to gather evidence on doctoral student education in the engineering and physical sciences.
- 7.3 Council noted the update and welcomed the progress that had been made.
- 7.4 Dr Wall said that the New Deal had been included in the Government Research and Development Roadmap, published in July 2020, which committed to providing a New Deal for Funding Postgraduate Research by "increasing the investment in research training, numbers supported, models of delivery, stipend levels and helping graduates transition successfully into the next stage of their career". She said that UKRI was currently working on the elements of the New Deal to provide input to the People and Culture Strategy, which is due to be published in Spring 2021. In January/February 2021, UKRI held two round tables with training grant holders and other sector experts to gather insight and scope on emerging thinking regarding a New Deal. EPSRC had been represented at both round tables. She closed by saying that further input would now likely to be sought from university leadership and from doctoral students. The evidence gathered through these engagements would be used to set the priorities for the work programme and that a more formal consultation may follow later.
- 7.5 Council noted the progress with the New Deal. It stressed the importance of engaging universities across the whole spectrum of issues. Council agreed that whilst the aspirations

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of the New Deal were commendable the full implications would need to be considered very carefully especially regarding the affordability issue and student employment status.

7.6 Dr Wall thanked Council for their valuable contributions and said that these would be fed into the UKRI work underway.

8. Update on the UKRI Infrastructure Fund (EPSRC 03-21)

8.1 Ms Nicholson introduced a paper that set out the outcome of the first round of proposals submitted to the UKRI Infrastructure Advisory Committee (IAC) as part of the UKRI Infrastructure Fund and updated on the development pipeline of ambitious proposals for the second round. She added that, timescales permitting, a further paper was planned for the July meeting to give Council an opportunity to endorse the projects that EPSRC will submit to round two after both the quality and relative priorities of the bids been reviewed by the Capital Infrastructure Strategic Advisory Team (SAT).

8.2 Council noted the paper and welcomed the level of ambition contained within the EPSRC proposals. It was suggested that it would be helpful to factor in the timing and phasing of the different bids acknowledging that not everything would need to happen at the same time. A roadmap would therefore be helpful in this regard. Council said that it will be important to be clear about what criteria has been used to arrive at the final recommendations and the proposed timing when they are next presented to Council.

9. EPSRC Advisory Bodies (EPSRC 04-21)

9.1 Dr Goldberg reminded Council that following the approval by the Appointments and Assurance Committee (AAC) of the recent Strategic Advisory Team (SAT) appointments it was agreed that Council should view further information on EPSRC's Advisory Bodies. This paper therefore provided Council with information on the membership of full spectrum of EPSRC's advisory bodies including trends in diversity of gender, academic/non-academic membership, and geography, as well as details of applicants from the most recent round of applications. In addition, the paper provided information on how these bodies are currently used as the basis for further Council discussion.

9.2 Council welcomed the paper. It noted the diversity statistics in terms of both gender and ethnicity and cautioned that to overly press for further representation on EPSRC bodies may place further strain and overburden these particular constituencies. It stressed that the long term aim therefore should be to work with others to grow these respective constituencies within the wider community. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

9.3 Council did not recommend any significant changes to the way the advisory bodies work but agreed with the sentiment contained in the paper that EPSRC should look for opportunities to use these groups with greater flexibility and encourage greater cross-working between Strategic Advisory Teams (SATs) and with the Strategic Advisory Network (SAN).

9.4 Finally Professor Smith and Professor Calder, as members of the AAC, commented on the EPSRC recruitment processes. They said they had been impressed by the thorough and transparent manner in which recruitment exercises are conducted.

10. Council Effectiveness Review (EPSRC 05-21)

10.1 Dr Goldberg introduced this paper. She said that UKRI Councils are expected to periodically conduct a review of their own effectiveness. These take the form of a "light touch" review and are conducted annually, the first being in 2019/20. The paper therefore set out the results of the recent annual survey of EPSRC Council members views regarding the way Council is currently constituted, how it is working and how this might be improved.

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She added that that this exercise had also provided an opportunity to canvas for potential topics for a more in-depth discussion at the Council Awayday in May 2021.

- 10.2 Council welcomed the outcome which reflected individual members overall satisfaction with the current arrangements. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 10.3 Council took this opportunity to identify items which might form part of the agenda for the Council Awayday scheduled for May 2021. It agreed that, given the earlier discussion, the role that EPSRC might play in helping UKRI colleagues develop its own strategy and in shaping the emerging Innovation Strategy, together with creation of ARIA, should be a major part of Councils deliberations at the Awayday. It felt that this would be a useful opportunity to engage with some of the key players and influencers in these areas and identified some individuals that the Executive might wish to approach. The Executive undertook to take this away and discuss this further with Professor Smith in order to think about the precise format and structure of the Awayday.

11. EPSRC Risk Register (EPSRC 06-21)

- 11.1 Mr Paul introduced this paper which set out the biannual report to Council on risk management and EPSRC's risk log. He drew Councils attention to the main risks contained in the UKRI corporate risk register and the risks in EPSRC's own risk register. He explained some of the emerging developments around risk management that UKRI colleagues were advocating and Mrs Peters added further context. This included developing a risk appetite approach and asking Councils to address more operational risks than hitherto.
- 11.2 Council took this opportunity to reflect on the current risk register and agreed that that the discussions earlier in the meeting had reflected most of the key risk areas articulated in the risk register. It acknowledged that these discussions and the subsequent decisions would also no doubt influence the risk profile when the risks are next formally reviewed by the Executive. Members noted that part of the review should be to consider whether risks had by then become issues and would therefore transfer off the register. Members asked that in future versions of the paper the movement of risk scores was more clearly depicted.
- 11.3 Mr Paul thanked Council for its feedback and said that the Executive would review the risks once the SR allocation was known and would bring the register back to Council in the autumn.

12. Any Other Business

- 12.1 Council noted the Communications Update information paper (EPSRC 07-21).
- 12.2 Council **agreed** the messages that should be conveyed from today's meeting in its report to the UKRI Board.
- 12.3 Finally, Professor Smith reminded Council that this was Professor Calder's last meeting. He thanked her for her commitment and her valuable and insightful contributions to Council deliberations.

13. Next Meeting

- 13.1 Professor Smith reminded members that the next meeting is on 19/20 May and would most likely be convened virtually.