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UKRI ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL

EDITED MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 12 & 13 March 2019 AT THE ST JAMES TAJ, LONDON.

Council Members: Professor M Smith (Chair)
Professor L Gladden
Professor M Calder
Ms B Dean
Professor A Etheridge
Professor N Jennings
Baroness P Neville-Jones
Professor M Rosseinsky
Professor S Sharples
Professor I Walmsley
Professor T Whitley
Dr P Williams
Professor A Wright
Professor S Belcher (13th only)

Executive: Dr A Bourne
Mr G Mapstone (12th only)
Dr A Wall
Dr N Viner
Dr C Graves
Dr K Magnay
Dr K Pandya

Others: Mr I Kenyon
Dr M Lascelles
Mr Peter Saraga (12 March only)
Professor David Sweeney (12 March only)

Secretary: Dr N Goldberg

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

- 1.1 Professor Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 1.2 Professor Smith formally opened the meeting.
- 1.3 Apologies had been received from Professor Belcher who was unable to attend the first day.
- 1.4 There were no new declarations of interest from Council members at this meeting.

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- 1.5 Professor Smith informed Council that David Sweeney (Executive Chair Research England) and Peter Saraga (Research England's Senior Independent Member) would join the meeting at 17:00 for a round table discussion focusing on topics associated with the dual support funding environment and the relationship between EPSRC and Research England.

2. DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 5 & 6 DECEMBER 2018

- 2.1 Council **agreed** the record of the last meeting subject to one addition to minute 5.8 which should read "*It was agreed that further thought around how ED&I within grants would be trialed and evaluated would be brought back for further consideration by Council*".

3. ACTIONS AND MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 There were 7 actions from the last meeting. All the actions were complete except 7.4 which is scheduled for Q3 19/20.

4. EXECUTIVE UPDATE (EPSRC 01-19)

- 4.1 Professor Gladden invited colleagues from the Executive to provide Council with an update on some key developments since the last meeting.
- 4.2 Dr Bourne provided an update on progress with the 2019 Spending Review (SR). He said that the UKRI expectation was that the SR would be launched this summer for an autumn announcement. EPSRC are currently working on updating the original commission developed in September, ensuring that Sir Mark Walport has clear sight of any significant requests by the end of April. Council asked how well sighted the Executive are on other councils' plans including Innovate UK, noting that there was an opportunity to align EPSRC plans with other Councils. Professor Gladden commented that all UKRI component bodies hold a fortnightly SR conversation, and all UKRI Executive Chairs meet weekly, thus ensuring a joined up approach. Professor Gladden added that EPSRC are strongly engaged in eleven ISCF challenges (six as sponsor) and work closely with the Innovate UK Executive Chair on all twelve.
- 4.3 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

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- 4.4 Mr Mapstone also reported that the agreed 2019/20 commitment plans for the award of new grants supporting discovery research were comparable to the current year, but that the longer term position was dependent on the outcomes of the Spending Review. Dr Viner noted that current EPSRC funding success rates were stable. With respect to the balance between strategic intervention and community discovery research, Mr Mapstone said that funding restrictions have had a greater impact on strategic interventions, with funding activity in this area now primarily centred on ISCF and SPF routes rather than other mechanisms.
- 4.5 Professor Gladden provided a brief update on the current UKRI Transformation Programme. She said that sign off on the proposed EPSRC organisational design was currently with Sir Mark Walport. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 4.6 Professor Gladden updated Council on progress with senior EPSRC staff appointments, noting that the advert for Deputy Executive Chairs (DEC) is currently live. Council suggested that the issue of managing conflicts of interest needed careful thought, adding that requiring DEC's not to hold active grants while in post may impact EPSRC's ability to attract the best people. The Executive agreed to send the DEC advert web link to Council members.
- 4.7 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 4.8 Council **noted** the update.

5. STRATEGIC DELIVERY PLAN (EPSRC 02-19)

- 5.1 Dr Bourne introduced this paper which provided an update on the process to produce the final version of the EPSRC Strategic Delivery Plan (SDP) and the plan for communicating it to our stakeholders. It also described initial implementation plans and the link to the 2019 Spending Review (SR). He said that it was also timely to consider how the current EPSRC advisory structure might be supplemented to assist with the identification of future large scale investments. The paper therefore proposed formalising the existing Big Ideas Group into a standing advisory body with a slightly broadened remit. This new Science, Engineering & Technology Board (SETB) would sit alongside and be complementary to the existing Strategic Advisory Network (SAN) and the themes Strategic Advisory Teams (SATs).

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- 5.2 Council noted the most recent version of the SDP and commended the increased highlighting of discovery research. Professor Gladden commented that the revised version provided more specifics on near term actions, and for aspects which are across-UKRI (such as infrastructure) it focussed more clearly on EPSRC specific activity. Council requested that clarity be obtained on the sign-off process for the SDP and in particular Council's role in this.
- 5.3 Council discussed the plans for the SETB including the proposed Terms of Reference and the board's place in the broader EPSRC advisory structure. Council approved the plans in general terms but requested more clarity on decision making points, the relationship between SATs and the SETB, and the overlap between Council and the SETB.
- 5.4 Council noted the proposed role of the SETB in post-award grant management and advised the Executive to guard against possible unintended consequences as a result of overly managing research. Dr Bourne responded that the role of the SETB would be more focussed on better understanding the wider richness of knowledge and how it fits into the landscape, but noted there was a need to capture examples of good practice in post-award grant management and apply it more widely.

6. DISCUSSION WITH RESEARCH ENGLAND (RE) COLLEAGUES

- 6.1 Professor Smith welcomed Professor David Sweeney, Executive Chair Research England, and Mr Peter Saraga Research England Senior Independent Member (SIM), to the meeting. He said that this provided a useful opportunity to explore some areas of mutual interest to EPSRC and Research England. He invited David Sweeney to present prior to a wider roundtable discussion.
- 6.2 Professor Sweeney began by providing some background information on Research England including its mission and place in the landscape, the dual support funding environment, RE's key funding activities and initiatives, the Research Excellence Framework and the Knowledge Exchange Framework. Professor Sweeney also highlighted some of the challenges of the HE sector.
- 6.3 The ensuing discussion was wide-ranging and covered:
- i) Issues of a changing financial environment and the impact on university income including sustainability of research capital funding;

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- ii) The challenges of balancing teaching and research in universities;
- iii) The place agenda including the role of UKRI in steering universities to stimulate local growth and engaging with the LEPs;
- iv) Encouraging mobility of people, particularly industry into academia;
- v) Levers for improving equality diversity and inclusion including greater transparency in funding awards;
- vi) Diversity of funding mechanisms and approaches.

6.4 Professor Smith closed the discussion by thanking both Professor Sweeney and Mr Saraga for attending this meeting and for their stimulating contributions to the discussion. He added that this had provided a constructive basis for an ongoing dialogue with RE colleagues.

7. CLOSE OF FIRST DAY

7.1 Professor Smith formally closed the first day.

8. COUNCIL RECOMMENCES

8.1 Professor Smith welcomed everyone to the second day of the Council meeting.

9. EPSRC CONTRIBUTION TO THE 2.4% GDP TARGET (EPSRC 03-19)

9.1 Dr Pandya introduced this paper which provided Council with an update on work led by the UKRI centre towards the Government's target to reach 2.4% of GDP investment in R&D by 2027. He said that the main task facing Council was to assist in identifying a range of alternative approaches for growing industrial leverage within two of EPSRC's key Strategic Delivery Plan (SDP) areas i.e. Realising Excellence in People and Enhancing Business Engagement.

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

9.3 The Executive agreed to use the outputs of the session as a basis for determining next steps for EPSRC's contribution to the 2.4% GDP target.

10. CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE (EPSRC 04-19)

- 10.1 Dr Bourne presented this paper which provided an introduction to the Executive's initial thinking about how best to encourage Centres of Excellence through the EPSRC portfolio landscape as described in the Spending Review (SR) submission and the EPSRC Strategic Delivery Plan 2019. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 10.2 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 10.3 The Executive agreed to use the outputs of the session as a basis for determining next steps for work on Centres of Excellence.

11. BALANCING CAPABILITY REPORT (EPSRC 05-19)

- 11.1 Dr Graves introduced this paper which provided Council with an update on progress with delivering EPSRC's embedded approach to Balancing Capability since its release in early 2018. The paper set out the Executive's activities around Balancing Capability over the last six months, including stakeholder engagement.
- 11.2 Council **noted** the activities which have taken place around Balancing Capability and **endorsed** some changes to a limited number of research area strategies.

ITEMS TO NOTE ONLY

There were two information papers:

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|-----|-----------------------|-------------|
| i) | UKRI Led Funds Update | EPSRC 06-19 |
| ii) | Communications Update | EPSRC 07-19 |

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 12.1 Professor Smith reminded Council of the requirement to produce a short summary of Council business for UKRI colleagues. Council **agreed** that this should particularly highlight the discussion on the interface with Research England, the 2.4% of GDP Target discussion, and the Centres of Excellence discussion.

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- 12.2 Professor Smith said that the final version of the UKRI Infrastructure Roadmap would be presented at the next meeting. He reminded Council of the discussion at the December meeting and the decision to create a Council/SAN Working Group to support EPSRC with its positioning in the infrastructure landscape. He said that the Infrastructure Working Group (IWG) had met twice and had specifically asked the Office to engage with the Capital Infrastructure SAT in order to provide some validation of the stages of development of the ideas coming out of this process. He said that given the timescales for finalising the report it may be necessary to provide Council with an update paper on how the final report was developed in advance of the May Council.
- 12.3 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 12.4 Finally Professor Smith said this was the last Council meeting for both Pauline Neville-Jones and Matt Rosseinsky. On behalf of Council and the Executive he thanked them for their valued contributions over the years. He wished them well for the future and said that he hoped that both would continue to be involved with and advocate for Engineering and Physical Sciences.

13. NEXT MEETING

- 13.1 Tuesday 14 and Wednesday 15 May 2019 at the St James Court Taj Hotel