

# **UKRI ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL**

## **EDITED MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 14 & 15 MAY 2019 AT THE ST JAMES TAJ, LONDON.**

Council Members: Professor M E Smith (Chair)  
Professor L Gladden  
Professor M Calder  
Ms B Dean  
Professor A Etheridge  
Professor S Sharples (14<sup>th</sup> only)  
Professor I Walmsley  
Professor T Whitley  
Dr P Williams (15<sup>th</sup> only)  
Professor A Wright  
Professor S Belcher

Executive: Dr A Bourne  
Mr G Mapstone (14<sup>th</sup> only)  
Dr A Wall (14<sup>th</sup> only)  
Dr N Viner  
Ms J Nicholson  
Dr L Blackwell

Others: Mr I Kenyon  
Dr G Goodall  
Sir John Kingman (15<sup>th</sup> 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 Jennings. Professor Sharples was only able to attend for the first day and Dr Williams only attended the second day. Professor Smith said that a presentation from Professor Kev Dhaliwal, Edinburgh University had been planned for today's meeting. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, this had been rescheduled for a later meeting.
- 1.4 There were no new declarations of interest from Council members at this meeting.

- 1.5 Professor Smith informed Council that Sir John Kingman, UKRI Chair, would be attending on 15<sup>th</sup> May and that he will provide an update on UKRI.

## **2. DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 12 & 13 MARCH 2019**

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

## **3. ACTIONS AND MATTERS ARISING**

- 3.1 There were 10 actions from the last meeting. Actions 4.8, 5.2 and 5.3 were covered as part of the Executive Update (agenda item 4). Council were informed of progress to date with actions 6.4, 9.3 and 10.3. All other actions were complete.

## **4. EXECUTIVE UPDATE (EPSRC 08-19)**

- 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 work continued on the basis of a four year SR settlement but cautioned that much would depend on other developments in the wider political environment. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 4.3 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 4.4 Professor Gladden informed Council that she attended the UKRI Board meeting on 26 March and had delivered a presentation about the scope and opportunities afforded by EPSRC's current research portfolio. She said that this had been well received by the Board.
- 4.5 Professor Gladden provided a brief update on the current UKRI Transformation Programme. She provided an overview of the changes to EPSRC's senior management structure arising from the recent UKRI-led organisational design exercise and highlighted the positive outcome for EPSRC. The new structure will provide much needed headroom for senior staff and increased capacity to deliver the long term ambitions of the Strategic Delivery Plan. **Minute not**

**included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

4.6 Dr Goldberg reminded Council of the discussion at the last meeting regarding the proposal to formalise the role of the Big Ideas Group and to re-establish it with a slightly broadened remit. She said that work was now underway to establish the new Science, Engineering and Technology Board (SETB) and that the draft terms of reference for the Board had been refined taking into account Council's feedback. She also updated Council on progress on operational and membership aspects. She said that it was proposed that two Council members would attend meetings on a rotating basis. The meetings would be chaired by an EPSRC Deputy Executive Chair. Finally she reported that the Big Ideas Advisory Group would be asked to act as the SETB until formal recruitment is completed in time for April 2020 appointments, with members serving up to a four year term on the board.

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

4.9 Council **noted** the update.

## **5. CDT REVIEW UPDATE (EPSRC 09-19)**

5.1 Dr Wall introduced this paper which provided an overview of the outcome of the recent Centres for Doctoral Training call. She highlighted that a very important aspect of this call was cohort based training and that some of the key successes were the additional £100 million secured for the AI studentships and the significant collaboration with Ireland as well as the excellent geographical spread. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

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

5.3 Dr Wall concluded the discussion by reminding Council that one of the actions contained within the Strategic Delivery Plan was to look at all

of our routes for funding doctoral training and think about the next era for training which allows flexibility for both cohort and non-cohort approaches.

## **6. CLOSE OF FIRST DAY**

6.1 Professor Smith formally closed the first day.

## **7. COUNCIL RECOMMENCES**

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

## **8. CLOSED SESSION WITHOUT THE EXECUTIVE**

8.1 A closed session was held without the Executive and UKRI representative.

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## **9. REFLECTING ON EPSRC'S INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY (EPSRC 10-19)**

9.1 Ms Nicholson presented this paper which set out EPSRC's current international strategy and proposed some discussion points for Council in the light of developments within UKRI and the wider changing relationship with the global environment. She said that the current environment provided a timely opportunity to consider what revisions should be made to the existing strategy and, in particular, with whom EPSRC should be seeking to partner within the future.

9.2 Council discussed the focus for the Strategic Delivery Plan (SDP), regions of the world we might focus on for collaboration, and ODA supported work. Council advised that international partnership should have one of the following drivers:

- i) Science diplomacy, including influencing international standards;
- ii) Scale – an area which needs a global effort or the skills or resources lie outside of the UK;
- iii) Creating relationships so that researchers can move quickly when funding arises.

9.3 Council concluded that it was difficult to recommend any substantive changes to EPSRC's international strategy at this juncture given the

ongoing uncertainty associated with the EU funding. However, it encouraged the Executive to investigate non-resource intensive methods of encouraging further engagement by EPS researchers with ODA funding opportunities. This could be through partnership with researchers from other Councils, who are already successful in securing ODA funding, and their networks.

## **10. UKRI INFRASTRUCTURE ROADMAP (EPSRC 11-19)**

- 10.1 Dr Bourne introduced this paper which updated Council on the final stages of the development of the UKRI Infrastructure Roadmap which was due to be published in September 2019. He described the work of an EPSRC working group (comprising SAT, SAN and Council members) which had been working with the Executive to shape EPSRC's input to the roadmap and set out some of the issues that the working group felt merited Council discussion. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 10.2 Council **noted** the work of the working group and the draft of the first edition of the UKRI Infrastructure Roadmap.
- 10.3 Council **agreed** that the World Class Laboratories (WCL) should be EPSRC's priority for capital funding given its importance in underpinning the grand challenges. It also acknowledged that the WCLs were critically important to the Place agenda and to the overall sustainability of discovery research in the EPS domain. It recognised that they were also key to solving many of the Industrial Strategy challenges. Furthermore, Council emphasised the importance WCLs played in helping to attract and retain world class researchers and in enabling early career researchers to create and develop the equipment of the future. It noted that a large proportion of EPSRC funded work relied on smaller-scale equipment and that this would be marginalised without ongoing investment in WCLs. Also, that WCLs are critical in the foundational research which is undertaken before using national and international facilities.
- 10.4 Dr Bourne concluded the discussion by encouraging Council members to act as advocates for WCLs wherever possible.

## **11. ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION WITH SIR JOHN KINGMAN**

- 11.1 Professor Smith welcomed Sir John and invited him to say a few words of introduction prior to a roundtable discussion.

11.2 Sir John began by describing the progress UKRI has made in turning the aspirations contained in the Nurse Report into reality. He said he believed UKRI's value lay in contributing to questions where an overall strategic perspective was needed and in providing a single voice into government. He described how UKRI was in a good place in terms of leadership and in attracting and retaining high calibre people including the UKRI Board. He said that he had seen demonstrable progress in the delivery of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) both in terms of the quality of proposals and in the ratio of public to private sector investment that had been achieved. He acknowledged the ongoing challenges facing UKRI including Brexit and staff engagement, but said that he was committed to making UKRI an exciting place to work. Finally he referred to the letter he and Sir Mark Walport had sent to Council at the end of last year, reaffirming that they were decision making bodies and the custodians of everything in their respective scientific domains. He said that he was keen to build on the 1<sup>st</sup> April event where all the Councils and the Board came together.

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11.10 Prof. Smith closed the discussion by thanking Sir John for attending and for a wide-ranging discussion. He said that Council were committed to Engineering and Physical Sciences in the UK and their role within UKRI.

11.11 Prof. Smith asked the Executive to draft a letter which he could send to Sir John, in his role as the SIM, which summarised Council's key points.

## **12. ITEMS TO NOTE ONLY**

12.1 There were two information papers:

- |     |                       |             |
|-----|-----------------------|-------------|
| i)  | Communications Update | EPSRC 12-19 |
| ii) | Council Dashboard     | EPSRC 13-19 |

## **13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

13.1 Council discussed the prospect of Council (or sub-sets of Council) meeting with counterparts of other Councils. Council agreed that it would be a good idea to invite them to dinner meetings prioritising Innovate UK, STFC, MRC and BBSRC, dependent on diary alignment.

13.2 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 international strategy, World Class Labs in the infrastructure roadmap, and the Spending Review.

## **14. NEXT MEETING**

14.1 Tuesday 09 and Wednesday 10 July 2019 at Thales UK, Reading