

**UKRI ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL****EDITED MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL COUNCIL MEETING HELD 19 & 20 MAY 2021**

Council Members: Professor M E Smith (Chair)  
Professor Dame L Gladden  
Professor A Etheridge  
Professor N Jennings  
Ms S John  
Professor M Schröder  
Professor S Sharples  
Dr J de Sousa  
Professor I Walmsley  
Professor T Whitley  
Dr P Williams  
Professor A Wright  
Professor S Belcher (20<sup>th</sup> May only)

Executive: Dr A Bourne  
Ms K Daniel  
Professor C Deane  
Ms S Francis  
Mr G Mapstone (item 4 only)  
Ms J Nicholson  
Dr K Pandya  
Dr N Viner  
Dr A Wall  
Dr J Cox  
Dr R Bishop  
Dr R Kelman  
Dr L Blackwell  
Dr K Magnay  
Dr A Chmura  
Mr A Paul (item 12 onwards)

Others: Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser (item 9 only)  
Mrs Siobhan Peters, UKRI  
Ms Alexandra Jones (item 6 only)  
Dr Mike Biddle (item 6 only)  
Mr Indro Mukerjee (item 6 only)  
Lord Willetts (item 6 only)  
Professor Lorna Dougan (19<sup>th</sup> May evening session)  
Ms Monash Shah (19<sup>th</sup> May only)

Secretary: Dr N Goldberg

**1. Introductory Remarks**

- 1.1 Professor Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting. He reminded members that the meeting was primarily intended as a “virtual away day” and therefore designed to allow Council to focus on some broader thinking about EPSRC’s future strategic direction.
- 1.2 No apologies had been received although it was noted that Professor Belcher would join the meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> May only. Professor Smith also took this opportunity to extend a

special welcome to Monisha Shah who had recently been appointed as the SIM for AHRC Council and who would be attending attend this meeting in an observer capacity. He said that there were also a number of other attendees expected during the two-day meeting:

- Alexandra Jones, Director of Science Research and Innovation BEIS.
- Mike Biddle, Programme Director, Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, Innovate UK
- Indro Mukerjee, the newly appointed CEO of Innovate UK.
- Lord Willetts, President of the Resolution Foundation and UKRI Board Member.
- Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser, UKRI CEO.
- Professor Lorna Dougan, Leeds University.

1.4 Professor Smith took this opportunity to congratulate Professor Sharples on her appointment as CSA for DfT and Professor Jennings on his appointment as VC for Loughborough and wished them well in their new positions.

1.5 There were no new declarations of interest from Council members.

## 2. Draft Minutes of the Meeting on 10 March 2021

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

## 3. Actions and Matters Arising

3.1 There were four actions from the last meeting. Council noted those that were completed and those that were in-hand. Council received the following specific update on actions 4.7 and 5.2:

- i) Minute 4.7: Council agreed to cover this as part of the Executive Update.
- ii) Minute 5.2: Council briefly received feedback from those Council members who had participated in the meeting with Ms Emma Lindsell regarding the Government's emerging Innovation Strategy.

## 4. Executive Update (EPSRC 08-21)

4.1 The Executive Update paper covered a number of items, however, the SR settlement and allocations for the current year were the main topics for discussion under this item.

4.2 Mrs Peters, UKRI Chief Finance Officer, began by summarising the outcome of the SR settlement for F/Y 21/22. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

4.3 Mr Mapstone then provided an overview of the current and future financial position for EPSRC arising from the SR settlement. It was agreed that it would be helpful to circulate Mr Mapstone's slides after the meeting.

### **ACTION: Dr Goldberg**

4.4 Professor Smith thanked Mrs Peters and Mr Mapstone for their comprehensive updates which provided clarity on a complex financial environment. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

4.5 Dr Bourne then provided Council with an update on ODA funding given the Government's recent policy changes. He outlined the UKRI approach for dealing with the immediate impact noting that UKRI were not permitted to make good the shortfall. Finally, he provided a brief update on progress in establishing the process for associating to the Horizon Europe

Programme. Council agreed that it would be important for UK academics to engage quickly with the new Programme and that they should be encouraged to participate in the capacity as assessors. It was agreed that this was something that EPSRC should promote as part of their regular HEI briefings.

**ACTION: Dr Bourne**

4.6 Council **noted** the update.

## **5. Biannual Review of Delivery Plan Priorities**

5.1 Dr Bourne introduced this paper which set out highlights across the 12 Delivery Plan priority areas. He reminded Council that they had last reviewed 6 priority areas in detail at the October meeting and that Council would therefore focus on the remaining 6 areas: Healthy Nation, Resilient Nation, Excellence in Research, ED&I, Accelerating Impact and Public Engagement. He said that the aim of this session was to (1) ensure Council have a clear view of progress against our Delivery Plan, (2) increase Council's awareness of our best case studies across 6 of our 12 Delivery Plan Priority Areas, and (3) elicit Council's help in thinking about future direction. Council then broke out into smaller groups to review the 6 areas in detail.

5.2 When Council reconvened it briefly reflected on the session. Council welcomed the progress that had been made in taking forward the Delivery Plan priorities. In particular it noted the richness of the case studies presented and thanked those staff who had been involved in compiling them. They unanimously agreed that these case studies provided the basis for a compelling story about how EPSRC-sponsored research can deliver. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

**ACTION: Dr Bourne**

## **6. Innovation Strategy**

6.1 Professor Smith welcomed Alexandra Jones (BEIS), Indro Mukerjee (IUK) and Mike Biddle (IUK) who were attending for this item. He said that Lord Willetts would join the meeting at 4pm. Indro Mukerjee, the newly appointed IUK CEO, took this opportunity to say a few words of introduction before the session began in earnest. He particularly emphasised the importance of the need for a dynamic and effective partnership between IUK and EPSRC.

6.2 Dr Chmura introduced the session and said that the main focus would be on the Government's emerging Innovation Strategy and to explore how EPSRC might best engage with the Strategy and be part of an integrated response across UKRI.

6.2 Alexandra Jones began by providing an introduction to the Innovation Strategy and its relationship to SR21. She then briefly set out how BEIS see the Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPS) research base contributing to the Innovation Strategy. Mike Biddle then provided an overview of how IUK intended to work with the emerging strategy. Finally, Lord Willetts provided his views as a Board member on how UKRI, in particular EPSRC and IUK might interface with the Strategy.

6.3 The discussion that followed was wide ranging. Some of the main areas discussed were:

- i) The important role that HEIs will have in taking the Innovation Strategy forward and how they might be incentivised to do so.
- ii) The role of big business and enhancing the interactions between them and the academic base.

- iii) The development of translational research as a discipline in the UK and in particular providing academics with an environment for establishing meaningful and enduring relationships with big business.
- iv) The need to identify research areas of mutual interest to Government and industry in order to create co-funding.
- v) The importance of identifying and understanding the differing mind sets, drivers, challenges and barriers between all of the players to ensure the commercial viability of the outputs so that the UK economy ultimately benefits.
- vi) The interaction between the “missions” and the “technology families” (in the Government’s draft Innovation Strategy) and how they will interact and link up.
- vii) Creating a regulatory environment that allows innovation and related investment to take place.
- viii) The notion of “technology sovereignty” - the tension/balance between international competition, security, collaboration and prosperity.
- ix) Establishing the appropriate topology between “vertical missions” and “general purpose enabling technologies”.

6.4 Professor Smith closed the session by thanking all of the participants for an engaging and thought-provoking discussion and said that he hoped that this represented the beginning of a longer conversation. With that in mind he particularly welcomed the proposed regular meetings between IUK and EPSRC Executive going forward.

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

## **7. Guest Speaker: Professor Lorna Dougan, University of Leeds**

7.1 Later in the evening Council reconvened and were joined by Professor Lorna Dougan who provided a presentation on her research activities, principally as an Engineering Engagement Champion.

7.2 Council welcomed the thought-provoking presentation which prompted considerable discussion.

7.3 Finally Professor Smith thanked Professor Dougan on behalf of Council for finding the time to attend the meeting and for her excellent, insightful presentation.

## **DAY 2: 20 MAY 2021**

### **8. Reflection on the Previous Day**

8.1 Professor Smith welcomed Council members to the second day of this meeting. He briefly took this opportunity to invite members to reprise and reflect on the outcome from Day 1 discussions, principally the Innovation Strategy Session.

8.2 Council agreed that the overall tenor of the discussions from the first day had been positive, thought provoking and indeed uplifting. In particular it welcomed the richness of the case studies presented as part of the Delivery Plan review. It agreed that these provided the basis for a compelling story about how research can deliver, but recognised that further work was required to tailor the messages for the various audiences. Council felt that the

discussion about the Innovation Strategy had been greatly facilitated by the participation of the guests, as well as the positive inputs from Council's business representatives. Council recognised that EPSRC still needed to understand how it should position itself with IUK and also Research England (RE) both of whom have a slightly different focus. It agreed that it is extremely important to take the opportunity to forge and develop new relationships with both.

## 9. EPSRC Focus for the Future

- 9.1 Dr Pandya introduced this session which drew on the previous day, especially the Innovation Strategy session, the other government and UKRI strategies being developed, and the EPSRC vision. He explained that the aim of this session was to obtain Council input to EPSRC's plans for the next 5 years to inform SR21 and the next delivery plan. The task therefore was to ask Council which elements of the existing SR content would be most compelling in the forthcoming SR and those elements which have a longer-term focus?
- 9.2 Council then broke out into smaller groups to consider each of these specific questions. This was followed by a short plenary session.
- 9.3 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 9.4 Dr Pandya closed the session by setting out some of the next steps and said that this would involve writing up and summarising the outputs from the breakout sessions. He added that the Executive intended to set up a small sub-group of Council members to help scrutinise and steer the inputs to SR21.

**ACTION: Dr Pandya**

## 10. Meeting with UKRI CEO

- 10.1 Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser, UKRI CEO, attended Council for an hour-long discussion session. This was part of an annual schedule of meetings with the UKRI Councils. After a brief introduction Professor Leyser began by reflecting on the outcome of the recent SR settlement and the preparation underway for the next SR. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 10.2 There followed a roundtable discussion covering a number of broad topic areas including:
- i) The UK research ecosystem in the context of the levelling up agenda and the respective roles of HEIs, LEPs, local business and others, and the importance of UKRI facilitating better connectivity between the main players.
  - ii) ED&I, the concept of "team science" and the recently announced review of the role of PIs in critical mass projects and plans for other possible UKRI interventions. This was particularly welcomed by Council.
  - iii) Developments associated with the creation of ARIA and in particular how the challenge focus might impact on the future of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) programme.
  - iv) **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
  - v) The aims of the recently announced review of research bureaucracy and UKRI's participation in this. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

- 10.3 Professor Smith thanked Professor Leyser for taking time out of her busy schedule to join Council and for her willingness to engage which was very much appreciated. He said that Council looked forward to further opportunities to speak with her.
- 10.4 When Professor Leyser left the meeting Council briefly reflected on the session. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

**ACTION: EPSRC Executive**

## **11. Next Steps**

- 11.1 Professor Smith led this session which provided an opportunity for Council members to reflect on the outcome from the deliberations over the past two days and to agree any next steps.
- 11.2 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

## **12. Any Other Business**

- 12.1 Council noted the Council Dashboard and Communications Update information papers.
- 12.2 Council agreed the messages that should be conveyed from today's meeting in its report to the UKRI Board.
- 12.3 Council agreed that it would be useful to find some time at the next meeting to discuss the notion of trusted research in the context of the National Security Bill which was under development.

**ACTION: Dr Goldberg**

## **13. Next Meeting**

- 13.1 Professor Smith reminded members that the next meeting is on 20<sup>th</sup> July and would be convened virtually.

## **14. Actions**

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