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### UKRI ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL

#### EDITED MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 01 DECEMBER 2020

Council Members: Professor M E Smith  
Professor Dame L Gladden  
Professor Dame M Calder  
Professor A Etheridge  
Professor N Jennings  
Professor S Sharples (from 12:00pm)  
Dr J de Sousa  
Professor I Walmsley  
Professor T Whitley  
Dr P Williams  
Professor A Wright  
Professor S Belcher

Executive: Dr R Bishop  
Dr L Blackwell  
Dr A Bourne  
Dr A Chmura  
Ms K Daniel  
Professor C Deane  
Ms S Francis  
Dr K Magnay  
Mr G Mapstone  
Dr L Martin  
Ms J Nicholson  
Dr K Pandya  
Dr M Parsons  
Mr A Paul  
Dr N Viner  
Dr A Wall

Others: Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser (for item 7 only)  
Mrs S Peters, UKRI (from 10:45am)  
Professor T Rodden (for item 6 only)  
Dr K Salt (for item 6 only)

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.
- 1.2 Professor Smith formally opened the meeting. He took this opportunity to congratulate Professor Calder on her award of a DBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.
- 1.3 No apologies had been received although it was noted that Professor Sharples would join the meeting later.
- 1.4 There were no new declarations of interest from Council members.

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### 2. Draft Minutes of the Meeting on 06 October 2020

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

### 3. Actions and Matters Arising

3.1 There were eleven actions from the last meeting. Council noted those that were completed and those that were in-hand. Council received specific updates as follows:

- i) Minute 3.1 (ii): Ms Nicholson shared Principal Investigator (PI) diversity data arising from the recent New Horizons call. This covered gender, disability, ethnicity and age and compared these categories against responsive mode grants in 2019. In response to a question she agreed to provide a comparison with a smaller cut of lower value responsive mode grants in order to see if this highlighted any different characteristics. In addition, she agreed to provide the same data for co-investigators. Finally, Council thanked Ms Nicholson and remarked on the positive feedback that had been received from the wider community about the way in which this particular call had been conducted.
- ii) Minute 8.9: Dr Pandya described some of the activities and engagement that had followed the discussion with CSAs at the last meeting. This had revolved around AI, Digital Twins and Data Science; Covid-19 Pandemic Recovery; and Clean Environment and Sustainable Growth. He highlighted those planned activities and said that he will ensure that Council are updated with any developments. Council welcomed the impetus the initial engagement had provided and agreed that it was important to build on this and develop these relationships further.

### 4. Executive Update (EPSRC 23-20)

- 4.1 Following a discussion at the October meeting Dr Bourne provided Council with a brief update on developments associated with plans to introduce a short-term UKRI international funding programme post-Brexit to fill the gap left by ERC grants and to establish a new Discovery Fund. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 4.2 Ms Nicholson updated Council on the process underway to compile and submit EPSRC bids to the next round of the Capital Infrastructure Fund. The deadline for bids is June 2021. The outline bids will be brought to Council for its input in March 2021.
- 4.3 Professor Gladden reflected on the recent SAN Conference and the UKRI Board and All Council event that Council members had participated in. Council members agreed that the SAN conference had been a worthwhile and informative event and particularly commended those EPSRC staff who had been involved in organising it. Council also welcomed the UKRI event and the openness of both the Board and the UKRI. **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 provided an update on developments associated with the Spending Review. The headline allocations had been announced on 25 November but, the precise details and the outcome for UKRI, and therefore the Councils, was still awaited.
- 4.5 Council received an update on EPSRC's current and future financial position. **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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4.6 Professor Gladden reported that the recent exercise to recruit two new Council members had been successfully completed. In addition, the recent SAT recruitment exercise had also made 26 new appointments. Finally, she reported that an exercise to replenish the SAN cohort was currently underway.

4.7 Council **noted** the update.

### **5. Place (EPSRC 24-20)**

5.1 Dr Bourne introduced this paper which followed on from previous Council discussions in July 2020. The paper set out some high-level strategic priorities on Place and sought Council's approval for proposed approaches which included intensifying regional engagement by expanding EPSRC's cohort of heads of regional engagement and proposals to augment and expand EPSRC flagship schemes with regional adaptations i.e. a) Regional Big ideas b) Regional Prosperity Partnerships, and c) Regional Impact Acceleration Account (RIA). Ms Daniel added that, in developing these approaches, EPSRC recognised that not all research would or should have local impact and that there were opportunities for excellence in one place to have impact in another.

5.2 Council noted the paper. It recognised that, given the ongoing discussions within Government about the need for "levelling up", any approach adopted by EPSRC would need to be both flexible and responsive to new developments. It stressed that there would need to be additional funding to allow this to happen. Furthermore, Council stressed that it would also be important to synchronise with and complement the work underway by other parts of UKRI in this space, especially RE and IUK.

5.3 Finally Council thanked those EPSRC staff who had been instrumental in developing this work.

### **6. Effectively Embedding Responsible Innovation and Trusted Research in Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPSRC 25-20)**

6.1 Professor Smith welcomed Dr Karen Salt, UKRI Deputy Director, R&D Culture and Environment and Professor Tom Rodden, DCMS CSA, who joined the meeting for this item.

6.2 Dr Bourne introduced this paper which followed on from previous Council discussions in 2020 and built on recommendations from the Responsible Innovation (RI) SAN Workstream. At the March 2020 meeting, Council had concluded that while RI was an important area it was also potentially sensitive and that there was a balance to be struck between appropriate intervention and increased bureaucracy. At the May 2020 meeting the related issue of "dual use" technologies had also been briefly discussed and it was noted that this linked with the UKRI Trusted Research Initiative for which Professor Gladden is the SRO. The Trusted Research Initiative, working with Government, seeks to establish a framework for considering responsible, legal and beneficial research investment with foreign actors and when collaborating with overseas agents.

6.3 Although these two areas are inextricably linked, they were dealt with separately for the purpose of discussion.

6.4 Dr Chmura led the discussion around embedding RI and set out the response to Council's earlier deliberations and the recent RI developments. She also described the planned activities and future priorities intended to effectively embed a culture of RI across EPSRC staff and the whole EPS research community. Council noted and endorsed the approach described by Dr Chmura. It acknowledged that there would inevitably be some resisters and nervousness within the community, in part due to the different disciplinary cultures, but recognised that the tools approach should help in that regard. It agreed that further ongoing

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work would be required to obtain a deeper understanding of these issues. Council also asked that the Executive consider the link between RI and UKRI's sustainability approaches.

- 6.5 Dr Blackwell then led the discussion about trusted research. EPSRC had commissioned a task and finish group to develop and enacted a series of actions to identify and mitigate risks posed by collaboration with foreign agents in the portfolio. He described a suite of activities which had been developed as a consequence, or are under development, to create a framework which allows EPSRC to continue funding excellent, novel, risky, collaborative research, while identifying and, where appropriate, mitigating risk.
- 6.6 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 6.7 Following a wide-ranging discussion Council acknowledged that this was a complex and potentially sensitive area, but that it was nevertheless extremely important to Government, HEIs and the Funding Councils. It recognised that this was of particular importance to EPSRC given the nature of its research portfolio and agreed to create a Council subgroup to take this forward with the Executive. Council emphasised the importance of directly linking this EPSRC activity with the emerging UKRI initiative as it was essential that UKRI was seen to promote a single approach and create a unified message to the various outside constituencies.

## 7. Meeting with UKRI CEO

- 7.1 Professor Ottoline Leyser, UKRI CEO, attended Council for an hour-long discussion session. This was part of an annual schedule of meetings with UKRI Councils. After a brief introduction from Ottoline there followed a roundtable discussion covering a number of broad topic areas including:
- i) Diversity and Research Culture.
  - ii) The Funding System and Incentives.
  - iii) How UKRI can grow, be more effective and add value.
  - iv) The Innovation Ecosystem.
  - v) Business interface and EPSRC, IUK and RE interaction/partnerships.
  - vi) Skills and training.
- 7.2 As a consequence Professor Leyser agreed that it would be helpful if EPSRC submitted a discussion paper setting out some of its initial thinking about how best to optimise the interface with business and the innovation ecosystem and the complementary roles that EPSRC, IUK, the Catapults and RE can play in making this happen.
- 7.3 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.
- 7.4 When Professor Leyser left the meeting Council briefly reflected on the discussion and agreed an approach to compiling the discussion paper.

## 8. EPSRC Doctoral Support: Impact of the Pandemic and Wider Funding Implications (EPSRC 26-20)

- 8.1 Dr Wall introduced a paper that built on earlier Council discussions and which provided an update on both the short and medium-term impacts of the pandemic on EPSRC doctoral students, as well as on the wider implications for funding levels for EPSRC's future doctoral

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investments. She said that the paper had been prepared with advice from the Strategic Advisory Network (SAN) working group on the review of doctoral education. The paper covered UKRI-wide action to support doctoral students, a high level outlook on the future trajectory of funding, particularly focussed on the availability of co-funding from university, business and other partners, together with proposals to continue to support students where support is decreased or no longer available from these partners.

- 8.2 Council welcomed the paper and noted the interventions that had been introduced to support students in the short term. It agreed that the worst-case impact of Covid-19 had not materialised and that the measures that had been put in place had helped considerably. However, it agreed that further effort would be required to monitor the medium-term impact on the PhD cohort, particularly given the existing pressures on numbers and budgets. The full outcome of the SAN working group will be presented to Council at its March meeting.

### 9. SETB Update and Institutes Review (EPSRC 27-20)

- 9.1 Council considered a paper which provided an update on the recent activities of the EPSRC Science, Engineering and Technology Board (SETB) since it was formed in 2019.
- 9.2 Professor Deane reported on a recent SETB meeting which had reviewed progress with three of EPSRC's major institutes. The Institutes considered at this meeting were the Rosalind Franklin Institute (RFI), the Royce Institute (Royce), and the UK Collaboratorium for Research on Infrastructure and Cities (UKCRIC). Council welcomed this opportunity to review these major investments especially as this was a relatively new departure for EPSRC and recognised that this had provided a useful learning opportunity for all parties. It agreed that it had been particularly helpful to see the institutes side-by-side in order to understand synergies and compare strengths and weaknesses. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.** Finally, Council agreed that it would be helpful to engage with other Councils to ascertain how they managed their own Institutes.

### 10. Any Other Business

- 10.1 Council noted the Communications Update information paper (EPSRC 28-20).
- 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 Council **agreed** the messages that should be conveyed from today's meeting in its report to the UKRI Board.

### 11. Next Meeting

- 11.1 Professor Smith said that the next meeting in March would most likely be convened virtually.