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UKRI ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 06 OCTOBER 2021

Council Members: Professor M E Smith (Chair)
Professor Dame L Gladden
Professor A Etheridge
Professor N Jennings
Ms S John
Professor M Schröder
Dr J de Sousa
Professor I Walmsley
Dr P Williams
Professor T Whitley
Professor A Wright

Observers: Professor S Belcher (CSA)
Professor S Sharples (CSA)

Executive: Dr A Bourne
Professor C Deane
Dr J Cox (Item 9 only)
Ms S Francis (Item 8 only)
Dr N Goldberg (Item 10 only)
Mr G Mapstone (until 1pm)
Dr K Pandya
Professor M Parsons
Dr N Viner

Others: Dr Mark Bussey, UKRI
Mr David Rogers, UKRI (for Item 4 only)

Secretary: Ms Kerry-Anne Young

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 Apologies had been sent from Ms Jane Nicholson and Ms Siobhan Peters. Dr Mark Bussey would be attending on behalf of Ms Siobhan Peters as our UKRI observer.
- 1.3 Professor Smith informed Council that Mr David Rogers from the UKRI Strategy Team would be attending for part of the Spending Review 2021 (SR21) agenda item under the Executive Report. Professor Smith took the opportunity to welcome Ms Kerry-Anne Young who had commenced her role as Head of Governance and Planning at EPSRC in September, replacing Dr Goldberg who had started in her role as Deputy Director for Planning, Operations and Governance.
- 1.4 There were no other new declarations of interest from Council members.

2. Draft Minutes of the Meeting on 20th July 2021

- 2.1 Council agreed the record of the last meeting.

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3. Actions and Matters Arising

- 3.1 There were three actions from the last meeting. Council noted those that were either completed or were in hand. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

4. Executive Update (EPSRC 17-21)

- 4.1 The Executive Update paper covered a number of items, several of which were discussed following either formal presentations or verbal updates given by the Executive.
- 4.2 Mr Mapstone updated Council on the current financial position, highlighting in-year allocation changes, key variances within forecast and any significant risks. Council sought further clarification on open access charges, university spend profiles, budget variance and the implications of any underspend.
- 4.3 Dr Wall updated Council on the UKRI EDI Strategy and how the strategy will build on established work across UKRI to improve EDI, which is providing the foundations for the strategy development. UKRI are aiming to publish this strategy by the end of 2021. The strategy is likely to set out UKRI's vision, context and purpose for EDI work, actions and outcomes to date, principles along with stretching, targeted strategic objectives. It will form a framework for action plans for Councils and other groups within UKRI, therefore the implication is that EPSRC will need to develop an EDI action plan in the next financial year. Council commended the EPSRC team for their collegiate work ethos with colleagues in the centre and hoped the work Council and the EPS community had done on this were being fed into the strategy. It was noted that the UKRI EDI strategy was designed for UKRI as both an employer as well as a research and innovation funder therefore must speak to both staff and external audiences.
- 4.4 Mr Rogers joined the Council meeting and appraised Council of progress against the Spending Review 2021 (SR21), initially highlighting five priorities set out by the Chancellor at the launch of the Review, and noting that UKRI's thinking has also been underpinned by the BEIS SR21 priorities. Mr Rogers explained the current UKRI position within the overall BEIS bid, although this is subject to change during the allocations process. Mr Rogers thanked EPSRC staff for their speed in responding to BEIS and UKRI requests for information in the context of this bidding process and reflected how this has helped BEIS and UKRI create a credible bid, whose high quality had been acknowledged by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. EPSRC data and narratives have helped UKRI emphasise its ability to draw in investment from business. Finally, he gave an overview of the strategic stakeholder engagement approach. Mr Rogers asked that the information shared in this session be treated as sensitive.
- 4.5 Within the context of SR21, Dr Pandya then updated Council on how EPSRC have been working in partnership and engaging across the organisation. He highlighted EPSRC leadership in cross-cutting bids for significant new funding across UKRI, discussed areas where EPSRC have had direct influence and input, and touched on UKRI innovation programmes and the additional funding for Mathematical Sciences. Dr Pandya reflected how widely EPSRC had engaged across UKRI partners and various Government departments in order to align EPSRC's bid with the wider Net Zero programme and acknowledged Dr Martin's contribution to this strategic engagement.
- 4.6 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 4.7 Dr Chmura gave an update on the Government's Innovation Strategy, which was published by BEIS on July 22nd setting out Government's long-term plan to deliver growth through

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innovation. Dr Chmura focussed on the four pillars of the strategy followed by opportunities and actions across UKRI.

- 4.8 Dr Bourne gave an update on Trusted Research, highlighting key points of discussion from September's Council sub-group meeting on this topic. Dr Bourne summarised feedback from the sub-group, including feedback on community knowledge, training, and awareness raising. Dr Bourne acknowledged that we are still in the discovery phase of what this means for us as an organisation. Council noted that it is important to go beyond classic examples e.g. Quantum Technologies-based examples and EPSRC could explore drawing out more diverse examples from our portfolio to help elucidate Trusted Research as a concept.

ACTION: Dr Bourne

- 4.9 Dr Pandya updated Council on Engineering Net Zero, highlighting that our 'Sustainable Agri-Food for Net Zero Network Plus Call' is now live with BBSRC, ESRC and NERC. This activity is a direct consequence of Council's recommendations from the joint council meeting with BBSRC and MRC in March 2020 in that we should work across the EPSRC/BBSRC interface to tackle the challenge of decarbonisation of the agriculture sector.
- 4.10 Dr Pandya asked Council to come back to the Executive on any areas of interest within the COP26 paper which had been circulated and highlighted in particular the communications activities around COP26. Dr Pandya asked Council for their assistance in thinking about longer term opportunities and legacy from COP26.
- 4.11 Ms Young and Professor Gladden then updated Council on EPSRC Council Recruitment 2021. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 4.12 Ms Young also updated Council on the new Non-Executive Directors recently appointed to the UKRI Board.
- 4.13 Finally, Professor Smith gave a verbal update on discussions with Sir Andrew Mackenzie as EPSRC's SIM. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

5. UKRI Strategy Communications and Engagement

- 5.1 Professor Deane introduced this session on UKRI Strategy Communications and Engagement. Professor Deane highlighted our unique role with our Strategy, highlighting the main components of the UKRI Strategy 2022-2027 and discussing how the Strategy will support the development of a new suite of Council Strategic Delivery Plans and a new Corporate Plan. The Cross-Cutting Delivery Plan will sit within the Corporate Plan. The UKRI Strategy will be used in the allocations process following SR21.
- 5.2 Professor Deane then asked the following questions of Council:
- How do the five strategic pillars resonate with the priorities for your community and UKRI's unique role in supporting the UK's world-class research and innovation system?
 - Are there any areas that you would want to strengthen within the Strategy?
 - What are the most important messages you would expect to see coming through in UKRI's strategy - does this framework convey those?
 - What is missing in terms of your expectations of what UKRI should be committing to through its Strategy?
 - UKRI's vision is for an outstanding R&I system – what changes would you consider to be the most important to transform the R&I system over the next five years?

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- How would you describe the look and feel of the UKRI of the future?

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

5.4 Council welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback on this Strategy.

6. Council Closed Session

6.1 A closed session was held without the Executive and UKRI representatives.

7. Feedback from Council Closed Session

7.1 When the Executive returned to the meeting Professor Smith reprised what the closed session had covered.

7.2 Council gave the following feedback:

- Council had discussed SR21 and, while acknowledging that the BEIS allocations would only be the start of the process, commended the cross-council work and engagement that had been done by EPSRC colleagues. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

8. UKRI Infrastructure Fund (EPSRC 18-21)

8.1 Professor Smith welcomed Ms Francis who started by outlining plans for Digital Research Infrastructure, with acknowledgement that this is not included in the UKRI Infrastructure Fund and sits separately. Ms Francis highlighted UKRI's vision for the area, the thematic areas within it and the new governance arrangements.

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

9. Delivery Plan (EPSRC 19-21)

9.1 Dr Joanna Cox then gave an update on the Delivery Plan, showing how the Council Delivery Plans fit with other key documents such as the Corporate Plan and Annual Report and Accounts, as well as outlining the expected timeline for the project. EPSRC's vision would be framed around the seven priorities articulated in our Spending Review bidding material. We will need to include both long-term ambitions and near-term actions for how we will deliver against these priorities. We have mapped our existing and planned programmes against these priorities. Our Delivery Plan will also articulate how we will deliver against the five pillars in the UKRI Strategy. The planned community engagement was also described. Council were invited to provide feedback on the development approach, suggest Council members for a working group to support plan development, and agree the key EPSRC groups that should be consulted on the Delivery Plan development.

9.2 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.10. EPSRC/UKRI Risk Log (EPSRC 20-21)**

10.1 Dr Goldberg gave a verbal update against paper (EPSRC 20-21), which is the biannual report to Council on risk management and EPSRC's risk log. It was noted that an additional risk on Trusted Research had been added to the log since the circulation of this paper.

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- 10.2 Council were asked to advise on EPSRC risks, identifying mitigations and commenting on risk levels, as well as identifying any additional risks that require management and in what way. The discussion was wide-ranging and can be summarised as follows:

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- 10.3 Dr Goldberg thanked Council members and agreed to take forward the recommended changes to the risk log as outlined above.

ACTION: Dr Goldberg

11. Any Other Business

- 11.1 Council noted the Communications Update information paper (EPSRC 21-21). Council briefly discussed the effectiveness and impact of our communications on our community. EPSRC agreed to reflect on this and to bring a paper to a future meeting once our new communication strategy was in place.

ACTION: Dr Goldberg

- 11.2 It was noted that since the previous Council meeting, the Royce Institute and Rosalind Franklin Institute have both opened and there has been a ground-breaking ceremony for the National Quantum Computing Centre. There has also been an announcement of the doubling of Turing world-leading research fellows in AI. Council members and EPSRC colleagues were thanked for their hard work in delivering these activities.

- 11.3 Council asked what form our future meetings would take, would they be in person or hybrid. EPSRC were due to bring a paper on this topic to November's Council meeting.

- 11.4 Council asked to what extent EPSRC is engaged in forming future reviews, for example BEIS are currently compiling the evidence base for the Research, Development, and Innovation organisational landscape independent review, and whether EPSRC are involved in evidence gathering for this. Council suggested that it would be helpful to see the terms of reference for this review. The Bureaucracy review mainly focusses on grant delivery. The BEIS Review scope will be wider than UKRI. Terms of reference for this upcoming review were circulated to Council members after the meeting.

- 11.5 Interviews have been held for ARIA CEO and Chair positions.

- 11.6 Council agreed the messages that should be conveyed from today's meeting in its report to the UKRI Board.

12. Next Meeting

- 12.1 Professor Smith reminded members that the next meeting is on 30 November and was currently planned as a physical meeting in London.

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