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UKRI ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 30 NOVEMBER 2021

- Council Members: Professor Mark E Smith (Chair)
Professor Dame Lynn Gladden
Professor Nick Jennings
Ms Siân John
Professor Martin Schröder
Dr Joe de Sousa
Professor Ian Walmsley (until 12:45)
Dr Peter Williams
Professor Tim Whitley
Professor Andy Wright
- Observers: Professor Sarah Sharples (CSA) (until 13:00)
- Executive: Dr Rachel Bishop (Item 6 only)
Dr Liam Blackwell (Item 6 only)
Dr Andrew Bourne
Dr Amanda Chmura (Item 6 only)
Dr Joanna Cox
Professor Charlotte Deane
Dr Samantha Francis (Item 6 only)
Dr N Goldberg (Items 1-5 only)
Dr Kathryn Magnay (Item 6 only)
Mrs Helen Morgan
Ms Jane Nicholson
Dr Kedar Pandya
Professor Mark Parsons
Dr Neil Viner
Dr Alison Wall (Items 6 & 7 only)
- Others: Mr Tim Bianek, UKRI (Item 2 only)
Dr Nicholas Cooper (Item 10 only)
Dr Emily Flowers (Item 6 only)
Mr Peter Hurrell (Item 6 only)
Ms Jennifer Moloney (Item 6 only)
Mr Kingsley Poulton, UKRI
Mr David Rogers, UKRI (Item 8 only)
Ms Rebecca Veitch (Item 11 only)
Mr Ben Ryan (item 11 only)
- Secretariat: Mrs Bethany Amer
Mrs Catherine Fenwick
Ms Tracy Keys
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.

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1.2 Professor Smith formally opened the meeting. Apologies had been received from Professor Stephen Belcher, Professor Alison Etheridge, and Ms Siobhan Peters. Mr Kingsley Poulton would be attending on behalf of Ms Siobhan Peters as the UKRI observer.

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

2. Update from UKRI Chief Operating Officer

2.1 Mr Bianek, the UKRI Chief Operating Officer, gave an overview on UKRI's organisational process review. Through this review, UKRI would aim to reduce bureaucracy, simplify processes, and improve upon the current delegation of authority.

2.2 Council reflected on the overview and agreed that organisational excellence would be crucial to enabling scientific excellence and delivering the best outcomes for the UK. The focus on getting the organisational design correct was greatly welcomed. Council looked forward to continued updates on how this process would be considered and implemented across the whole organisation.

3. Draft Minutes of the Meeting on 6th October 2021

3.1 Council agreed the record of the last meeting, with the amendment to add Professor Whitley to the attendees list. October's minutes were amended accordingly.

4. Actions and Matters Arising

4.1 There were four 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.**

5. Executive Update (EPSRC 22-21)

5.1 The Executive Update covered a wide range of topics. Mrs Morgan began this session by providing Council with an EPSRC financial update.

5.2 Council received an update on the National AI Strategy from Dr Pandya. EPSRC colleagues were pleased to have contributed significantly to the development of the UKRI Artificial Intelligence Programme. Discussions centred around how this strategy had been converted into a comprehensive UKRI programme. Council noted the political context where several Government reviews such as the Integrated Review, Innovation Strategy and Spending Review have influenced activity in this area. Council thanked EPSRC colleagues for their hard work. Council also noted that this programme would be subject to Spending Review settlement outcomes, and to achieve the ambitious outcomes proposed, Government would need to provide a significant financial uplift to UKRI.

5.3 Dr Kedar Pandya also provided an update on COP26. Council recognised that EPSRC and UKRI colleagues had worked extremely hard in supporting COP26. EPSRC had worked together with the UKRI team, Government, business, and academic partners to showcase where the UK's engineering, computer science, mathematical and physical sciences contributions play a critical role in achieving international objectives for environmental sustainability. Council was impressed by UKRI's COP26 involvement and commended the effort of a wide range of EPSRC colleagues who had so impressively contributed. An Engineering Net Zero showcase is planned for June 2022 and Council will be invited to provide input with the option of an informal sub-group of Council being set up to help steer the event.

Action: Dr Pandya

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- 5.4 Ms Jane Nicholson provided an update on Digital Infrastructure, noting the UKRI activity in the area which has a three-phased approach between now and FY 27/28. A fuller paper would be brought to Council at a future meeting.

Action: Ms Nicholson

- 5.5 Professor Walmsley provided an update to Council on the November UKRI Board and Council Conference, which several Council members had attended. Topics were wide ranging, and Council thanked UKRI for arranging the discussions.
- 5.6 Professor Gladden updated on Council member recruitment. It was noted that candidates had now been recommended for appointment starting April 2022. The final step was for the UKRI Remuneration Committee to ratify the recommendations. Council members extended thanks to the recruitment panel for all their hard work.

6. Delivery Plan Progress Q2 2021-22

- 6.1 Dr Bourne provided an overview of the progress made against the EPSRC Delivery Plan during quarters one and two of the financial year 2021/2022. Council was reminded that there were twelve priority areas in total, and that six were discussed in May 2021. During this session Council discussed the remaining areas: Productive Nation, Connected Nation, Excellence in People, Enhancing Business Engagement, Research Infrastructure and Managing our Portfolio and Priorities.
- 6.2 When Council reconvened, they briefly reflected on the session. Council welcomed the update on the progress of the areas and thanked EPSRC colleagues for their work in compiling an extensive and interesting range of narratives for the case studies. Council suggested that it would be worth thinking about broader uses for the information compiled. They suggested using this to engage a wide range of audiences, including key stakeholders, and showcase the benefits of EPSRC-funded research to delivering Government priorities along with UK social and economic prosperity.

7. Race Equality – Community Engagement and Next Steps

- 7.1 Dr Wall provided an update on the UKRI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy, which would be published for consultation in December 2021 (now scheduled for early January 2022). Once published, the EPSRC EDI Strategic Advisory Group would be convened to discuss the draft strategy.
- 7.2 Council were then updated on the outcome of community engagement on the under-representation of ethnic minority researchers in our portfolio, peer review, and advisory processes. Through a series of engagements, EPSRC had captured both quantitative and qualitative data about how disadvantaged communities view their opportunities within the R&I system. From this work, EPSRC proposed a series of actions for the next few years, the purpose of which would be to ensure that the research system underpinned by EPSRC is as diverse and inclusive as possible. Council agreed the actions and encouraged EPSRC to ensure these actions would be open to discussion and scrutiny from communities of ethnic minority researchers.
- 7.3 Council thanked EPSRC colleagues for the work that went into this. They also emphasised the importance of ensuring that the topics were fully understood by all colleagues within the organisation to ensure that staff could interact with the community in a way that assured our community of EPSRC's cross-organisational acceptance and understanding. Council would welcome an opportunity to comment on the updated EPSRC EDI action plan at a future meeting.

ACTION: Dr Wall

8. Council Spending Review Allocations

- 8.1 Mr Rogers, UKRI Deputy Director for Investment Strategy, gave an update on the Council Spending Review allocations, reflecting a three-year settlement would be welcomed to enable longer term planning.
- 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. Developing the Balance of the Portfolio Post-Spending Review

- 9.1 Dr Nicholson, Dr Pandya, and Dr Bourne updated Council on post-Spending Review plans for the EPSRC portfolio, with a particular focus on the next Financial Year. The portfolio was framed using the emerging EPSRC strategy, which had been previously endorsed by Council. As well as providing the vision and ambition for the strategy, Council were provided with examples of cross-council working, opportunities to build partnerships with Government, industry and others, and highlighted specific engineering and physical science contributions.
- 9.2 Council were asked to suggest what they might need in order to facilitate further discussion on this topic. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

ACTION: Dr Nicholson

10. EPSRC Delivery Plan Development

- 10.1 Dr Cox updated Council on EPSRC's ongoing preparation of a Delivery Plan, which had been discussed at the previous day's Strategic Advisory Network conference. During this session, Council was asked to provide input into the Delivery Plan "blueprint". This document will show how EPSRC's strategy and planned activities would deliver the UKRI strategy. UKRI would initially use these blueprints to inform the Spending Review allocations process. The blueprints would also form the basis of EPSRC's final Delivery Plan.
- 10.2 Council were asked to discuss the current draft Delivery Plan blueprint, focusing on whether it made a clear, confident case for investment in EPSRC, and whether priorities and activities were mapped effectively against UKRI strategy, noting the link to the Spending Review allocations process. Council endorsed the document and suggested updates to strengthen the key points within it.

ACTION: Dr Cox

11. UK Committee on Research Integrity Update

- 11.1 UKRI Head of Research Integrity, Ms Rebecca Veitch, updated Council members on progress establishing the UK Committee on Research Integrity (UK CORI). UK CORI is being set up by UKRI following a House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee recommendation made in 2018, to establish a committee with formal responsibility for promoting research integrity in the UK.
- 11.2 Council suggested priority areas and gave advice on how to raise awareness for UK CORI. They noted the strong response to calls for recruitment to UK CORI thus far. Council

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acknowledged the importance of the area and looked forward to updates on the group's work at appropriate points in the future.

12. 2022 Council Meeting Preference

- 12.1 In October 2021, Council expressed an initial desire to hold a mixture of virtual and in-person meetings in the future. The Executive had explored risks and benefits associated with in-person and hybrid Council meetings in 2022, and recommended that Council do not hold hybrid meetings. Council endorsed this and agreed to a programme of three in-person meetings and two virtual meetings in 2022, noting that the in-person meetings may need to revert to a virtual format if external circumstances dictated.

13. Any Other Business

- 13.1 Council thanked Professor Deane for her contributions as EPSRC's Deputy Executive Chair, for her contributions to Council and for her work in directing EPSRC's COVID-19 response. Professor Deane will be leaving EPSRC in December 2021. Council also thanked EPSRC's Mrs Catherine Fenwick for her contributions to EPSRC Council as EPSRC Council Secretariat Manager, noting her caring and considerate support for Council members over the past 8 years.

14. Next Meeting

- 14.1 The next EPSRC Council meeting will be 9-10 March 2022 and will be an in-person meeting.

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