

Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting held on 7 December 2021 via Zoom.

Those attending:

Steve Bagshaw
Professor Ewan Birney
John Bloomer
Professor Anne Ferguson-Smith
Professor Laura Green
Professor Gideon Henderson
Professor Martin Humphries (Chair of the meeting)
Professor Andrew Millar
Professor Christine Orengo
Professor Nigel Scrutton
Professor Malcolm Skingle
Professor David Stephens
Professor Melanie Welham (UKRI-BBSRC Executive Chair)
Professor Ijeoma Uchegbu

Also attending:

Dr Amanda Collis
Dr Lorna Colquhoun
Dr Karen Lewis
Bill Poll
Dr Ceri Lyn-Adams (item 7, 8 and 9 only)
Dr Theresa Meacham (item 8 only)
Dr Paul Reeves (item 9 only)
Zahir Sachak (item 9 only)
Sarah Cresswell
Ksymena Grzybowska (Secretary)

ITEM 1. OPENING REMARKS

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this meeting was held virtually via Zoom.
2. The Chair congratulated Melanie Welham, who was awarded Honorary Membership of The Physiological Society and attended the award ceremony and gala dinner on 19 November 2021.
3. Members were reminded to check their details currently being held on the conflicts register, circulated by email before the meeting, update as necessary and send any changes to Council Secretariat. Members were asked to raise any conflicts arising during the course of the meeting.

ITEM 2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 SEPTEMBER 2021 (UKRI BBSRC 08/2021)

4. The minutes were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

ITEM 3. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AND MATTERS ARISING (ORAL)

5. The Chair went through the actions and the following updates were noted:

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- Action UKRI-BBSRC 62/2021: EDI action sheet. Council noted that BBSRC Executive Leadership Team had discussed actions and interventions for each objective and after the publication of the UKRI EDI Strategy BBSRC Executive would review the actions to ensure alignment with the UKRI EDI strategy and would bring it to Council for discussion.
- Action UKRI-BBSRC 61/2021: EDI data would be provided to Council annually, probably via Executive Chair's report when the data is available. Council discussed looking at data across institutions to understand if there are any systemic problems and any patterns emerging in relation to success rates. Age was suggested as another determinant.

ITEM 4. EXECUTIVE CHAIR'S REPORT (UKRI BBSRC 28/2021)

6. Melanie Welham introduced her report to Council. Council noted a performance summary highlighting key achievements, future plans and a scorecard summarising progress against the Near-Term Actions (NTAs) set out in BBSRC's Delivery Plan as at the end of Quarter 2. One of the NTAs related to recruitment and Council noted that staff retention was becoming more difficult in some areas as BBSRC staff take up other opportunities, often across UKRI.
7. Council was pleased to see BBSRC's work in leading the delivery of a Net Zero Agriculture Network Plus, in particular the call for research focussing on sustainable agri-food for net zero launched in collaboration with EPSRC, NERC and ESRC. Council discussed the importance of understanding the agri-tech portfolio from a UKRI perspective and in the context of the Government's anticipated response to Henry Dimbleby's report. It was acknowledged this was a complex landscape and there were ongoing discussions with Defra about Net Zero Agriculture and leadership. Council will discuss Net Zero Agriculture at its next meeting in March 2022.

Action UKRI-BBSRC 64/2021: Net Zero Agriculture to be discussed at Council meeting in March 2022. (Amanda Collis, Ksymena Grzybowska, March 2022, dinner discussion)

8. Council noted the update on 2020/21 Strategic Longer and Larger Grants (sLoLa) round and the very successful outcomes. It was noted that proposals were assessed as outstanding, however, only four were funded due to limited budget.
9. Council noted that the number of applications for the Discovery Fellowships was similar to previous years.
10. Council asked about Impact Acceleration Account call launched in July 2021 and noted that some changes to the process had been introduced to ensure a continuum of funding and harmonisation. Karen Lewis would share key learning after the process was completed.

Action UKRI-BBSRC 65/2021: Karen Lewis would share key learning once the Impact Acceleration Account process was completed (Karen Lewis, when available).

11. Council was interested to hear more about the Innovation to Commercialisation of University Research (ICURe) pilot, in partnership with Innovate-UK and the delivery partner. The pilot would consist of four cohorts, across two variants of the programme, with the first aiming to launch Q3-4 2021. ICURe offers a very focused enterprise experience and has an excellent reputation across researchers, universities and investors. This pilot was successful in Innovate UK and was now accessible to Institutes. The pilot would be run for early career researchers and be more inclusive. Council would be updated on the outcomes of the pilot.

Action UKRI-BBSRC 66/2021: Council would be updated on the outcomes of the Innovation to Commercialisation pilot. (Karen Lewis, when available).

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12. It was noted that there were a large number of applications submitted for the engineering biology breakthrough ideas call. However, some of them were out of scope and this was reflected on to ensure definitions were clear and community engagement remained high.
13. The Chair thanked Melanie for her report.

ITEM 7. UPDATE FROM UKRI (ORAL)

14. The Chair welcomed Ottoline Leyser, UKRI Chief Executive, to the meeting. Ottoline updated Council on the Spending Review (SR) allocations and next steps, the development of UKRI's 5-year Strategy and the ongoing reviews (namely Nurse's review of the landscape, David Grant's review of UKRI and Adam Tickell's 'bureaucracy' review).
15. Ottoline thanked Council and BBSRC Executive for pulling together advocacy for the SR, that had resulted in the overall uplift. UKRI was in a complex allocations process and there were ongoing conversations across the Government. Following completion of the allocation process, the challenge would be to deliver simultaneously and the UKRI strategy, due to be published in the new year, would guide UKRI to achieve that. Another challenge would be budgets and the anticipation that the next financial year would be tight and having sight of the three-year budget would allow looking ahead and crystallising long-term strategic vision.
16. Ottoline was keen to have a broad and open allocation discussions across UKRI to ensure we can deliver more for the community. Each Council can best serve its community and work together with all parts of UKRI focusing on benefiting the country. Incentives to encourage working together were discussed. In response to Council questions relating to the Spending Review and allocations Ottoline stressed that cross-UKRI funds to serve the country and tackle grand challenges alongside core budgets for each Council was a way forward and Council endorsed that principle.
17. Council was interested in the landscape review instigated by the need for international comparison and Ottoline emphasised the importance of clarity of Institutions' diversity of functions and adequate support mechanisms. Ottoline mentioned that the focus would be on the current portfolio of Institutes rather than establishing new ones.
18. Council reflected on the UKRI Board and Councils' conference held in November 2021 and feedback from Council members was positive. There was an appetite across all Councils to work together as part of UKRI.
19. Council asked Ottoline about innovation and, in her view, people and their careers were at the centre of innovation. UKRI's role was to think about the system and supporting a stable community, who bridge the gap and where mobility was encouraged. There was not a sufficient focus on people and different career pathways, joint appointments between academia and policy, academia and industry were key. Innovation in an international context was also raised and Ottoline stressed different levels of risk aversion in the UK in comparison to the USA and different cultural barriers that we should try to overcome to get better at creating spin outs and scaling up.
20. Council discussed UKRI Strategy and the possibility of having ambassadors on Councils and creating 'human' links between organisations. Challenges that were identified related to maintaining one identity as UKRI with multiple Council identities.

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21. The Chair and Council thanked Ottoline for attending Council meeting and providing valuable updates in key strategic areas for UKRI.

ITEM 6. UPDATES FROM GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND THE WIDER CSA NETWORK (ORAL)

22. Gideon Henderson (DEFRA CSA) shared his updates with Council. They related to DEFRA's spending review allocation, areas of mutual interest to BBSRC and COP26 feedback.
23. Andrew Millar (Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture, Scottish Government CSA) shared his updates related to climate change, yield increase and strategies to achieve this.
24. Council noted that this was Andrew's last Council meeting in his role of Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture, Scottish Government CSA. The Chair and Council members thanked Andrew for his very useful updates.

ITEM 7. UPDATE ON SPENDING REVIEW 2021 ALLOCATIONS (UKRI BBSRC 29/2021)

25. The Chair invited Ceri Lyn-Adams to introduce the paper, which provided an update on the Spending Review 2021 (SR21) since the last Council meeting in September 2021, including a summary of key announcements from the Chancellor on 27 October 2021. A multi-year settlement was announced increasing public investment in R&D to £20 billion per annum by 2024-25. The paper outlined the approach for developing the allocation of UKRI's budget for 2022/23 and 24/25 working with UKRI Strategy Committee. It also provided details of BBSRC SR21 priorities and its contributions to cross-UKRI areas.
26. Council considered the appropriateness of the SR principles agreed at previous Council meetings and expressed its continued support for them, highlighting that protecting responsive mode was key.
27. Council emphasised the importance of training and developing skills, both at doctoral and postdoctoral level, and UKRI's unique role in this. Viewing research opportunities as training opportunities was identified as a desired approach and forestry science was an example.
28. In the deployment of BBSRC's 2021/22 allocation, Council had supported applying inflationary increases to responsive mode, studentships and fellowships, enabling strategic investment in priority areas by reinstating a budget line to support managed mode initiatives and increasing investment in research-led international partnerships. Council discussed managed mode initiatives as a way of maintaining balance across the portfolio.
29. Council noted that with an increase of the headroom, BBSRC would increase investment (build back) in innovation by building on the club models, collaboration with business and consider whether the prosperity partnership model is suitable for bioscience community.
30. Council welcomed increasing (building back) investment in transformative technologies and incorporating the £8m allocated in 2020-21 for Synthetic Biology pressures as a separate budget line, which was now part of BBSRC's baseline.
31. Council supported the principle of including a cross-cutting line in UKRI's budget to support the strategic themes, acknowledging likely tensions between different lines of the budget. It was commented that the cross-cutting fund may help with responsive mode funding pressures.
32. It was noted that UKRI Board would be discussing allocations in January 2022 and Council might need to be consulted in-between Council meetings.

ITEM 8. BBSRC STRATEGIC DELIVERY PLAN REFRESH (UKRI BBSRC 30/2021)

33. The Chair invited Theresa Meacham to introduce this paper, which provided Council with an outline plan for BBSRC's refreshed Strategic Delivery Plan (SDP). The SDP had been developed following extensive consultation with BBSRC strategic leads and drew on input from the 2021 BBSRC Annual Strategic workshop and community webinar. The refreshed BBSRC SDP will describe how the organisation will deliver the wider UKRI vision and mission, in the context of bioscience research and innovation. Council noted that the SDP would follow the five-objective structure of the UKRI Strategy.
34. Council noted that the timeline was tight and that the SDP blueprint would be discussed and agreed by BBSRC Executive Leadership Team in January 2022. Council was presented with an outline of engagement activities to date and noted that Strategy Advisory Panels would be engaged in the development of the SDP.
35. Council commented that there was the right balance between strategy and deliverables in the EDI section and was reassured about UKRI's and BBSRC commitment in this area. As part of the UKRI EDI Strategy, due to be published for consultation very soon, there was commitment to publishing EDI data annually.
36. Council thought that the vision and mission could be strengthened and be more profound. The SDP should emphasise BBSRC's leading role in tackling challenges such as climate change and interdisciplinary and cross-Council working. Council suggested making relationships with Innovate UK and catapults more prominent, providing key examples of activities to develop innovation and ensuring that the document was written from an external perspective.
37. Council agreed the proposed name change of 'Bioscience for advanced manufacturing and clean growth' from 'Bioscience for renewable resources and clean growth'.
38. BBSRC Office will engage Council members in the next steps of developing the SDP.

ITEM 9. 2022/23 INSTITUTE FUNDING (UKRI BBSRC 31/2021)

39. The Chair welcomed Paul Reeves and Zahir Sachak to the meeting and invited Lorna Colquhoun to introduce the paper, which provided outputs from a newly developed Institute Assessment Exercise (IAE) Financial Model that demonstrated possible funding envelopes across the strategically supported Institute portfolio.
40. *This section deemed business sensitive and was therefore recorded separately.*

ITEM 10. AOB AND COUNCIL FORWARD LOOK (UKRI BBSRC 32/2021)

41. Council noted the Council Forward Look paper.
42. The Chair, on behalf of Council, thanked Lorna Colquhoun as it was her last Council meeting whilst covering for Sarah Perkins' maternity leave.

Council Secretariat

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Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
	Actions from 16 June 2021 meeting			
11.	Action UKRI-BBSRC 58/2021: It would be useful to see heat maps capturing risks at corporate level and domain level (Charlotte Hamilton, when the next review is due).	Charlotte Hamilton	March 2022	In hand
	Actions from 14 September 2021 meeting			
9	Action UKRI-BBSRC 61/2021: Council indicated that regular EDI data updates covering application and success rates across different awards and activities would be useful and could be provided via future Executive Chair's reports when data was available (David McAllister).	David McAllister	When data available	In hand
9	Action UKRI-BBSRC 62/2021: Council noted that a longlist of EDI actions for each objective and interventions would be discussed by the Executive Leadership Team in October 2021 and would be brought back to Council (David McAllister, Ksymena Grzybowska)	David McAllister	Future Council meeting	In hand
	Actions from 7 December 2021 meeting			

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4.	Action UKRI-BBSRC 64/2021: Net Zero Agriculture to be discussed at Council meeting in March 2022. (Amanda Collis, Ksymena Grzybowska, March 2022, dinner discussion)	Amanda Collis Ksymena Grzybowska	March 2022	Dinner discussion
4.	Action UKRI-BBSRC 65/2021: Karen Lewis would share key learning once the Impact Acceleration Account process was completed (Karen Lewis, when available).	Karen Lewis	When available	Ongoing
4.	Action UKRI-BBSRC 66/2021: Council would be updated on the outcomes of the Innovation to Commercialisation pilot. (Karen Lewis, when available).	Karen Lewis	When available	Ongoing