

**Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting held on 16 June 2021 via Zoom.**

**Those attending:**

Steve Bagshaw (items 5-12)  
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  
Isobel Stephen (item 7 only)  
Dr Ceri Lyn-Adams (item 7 only)  
Dr Michael Ball (item 8 only)  
Dr Rowan McKibbin (item 8 and 10 only)  
Julie Venis (item 9 only)  
Dr Peter Burlinson (item 10 only)  
Charlotte Hamilton (item 11 only)  
Sarah Cresswell  
Ksymena Grzybowska (Secretary)

**ITEM 1. OPENING REMARKS**

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and government's guidance on social distancing this meeting was held virtually via Zoom.
2. The Chair welcomed new Council members, who joined Council on 1 April 2021: Anne Ferguson-Smith, Christine Orengo and Nigel Scrutton.
3. The Chair also welcomed Lorna Colquhoun, UKRI-BBSRC Executive Director, Strategic Planning, Evidence and Engagement, to her first Council meeting. Lorna joined BBSRC on 26 April covering for Sarah Perkins while on maternity leave.
4. 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 9 MARCH 2021 (UKRI BBSRC 08/2021)**

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5. The minutes were agreed as a correct record of the meeting subject to the following amendment in paragraph 20:

*'Since 2012 Scottish Government was funding peatland restoration and afforestation, and there were huge opportunities for biology and BBSRC in the context of Net Zero (e.g., growing moss on restored peatland, Miscanthus).*

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

6. It was noted that all actions were completed or in hand.

### ITEM 4. EXECUTIVE CHAIR'S REPORT (UKRI BBSRC 09/2021)

7. Melanie Welham introduced her report to Council. Council noted the 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 4 (31 March 2021). Council noted the update on the National Engineering Biology Programme and the inclusion of funding within the baseline, and therefore its rating would be revised in the next scorecard. Council emphasised the importance of continuity and was interested in the Programme's delivery timeframes. It was noted that the focus for the next few months was on sustaining current capability and transitioning to the National Programme. Work was ongoing to develop the business case for the Programme depending on the Spending Review (SR) allocations. Council was assured that there was a joined-up approach across UKRI.
8. Council noted the update on awards affected by ODA cuts, including Newton Bhabha UK-India Industrial Waste Challenge. They were under threat of having their objectives curtailed as the scope of the ODA cuts being determined. Mitigating actions were also considered where possible. There were other programmes like ZELS that were also affected by ODA cuts. BBSRC would provide more information to Council soon.

**Action UKRI-BBSRC 53/2021: More information on the impact of ODA cuts would be provided to Council at its next meeting (Amanda Collis).**

9. Council discussed the balance of UKRI communications vs Research Councils, also in the context of ODA cuts, and noted that BBSRC Executive Chair was due to discuss with UKRI Head of Communications and would follow-up with Fiona Fox from the Science Media Centre, who attended the BBSRC Annual Strategic Workshop the day before Council meeting. Council was informed that at this stage the focus was on escalating issues relating to ODA cuts, sharing intelligence and influencing UKRI stakeholder engagement. It was noted that the GCRF Hubs review was due shortly.

**Action UKRI-BBSRC 54/2021: BBSRC Executive Chair was due to discuss with UKRI Head of Communications and would follow up with Fiona Fox from the Science Media Centre, who attended the BBSRC Annual Strategic Workshop the day before Council meeting (Melanie Welham).**

7. Council noted that there had been less interest in Enterprise Fellowships and BBSRC was looking at ways to support this area.
8. Council noted the Responsive Mode Grants Rounds Data for 2019 and 2020.
9. The Chair thanked Melanie for her report.

### ITEM 5. UPDATES FROM GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND THE WIDER CSA NETWORK (ORAL)

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10. The Chair invited Gideon Henderson (DEFRA CSA) to share his updates with Council. They were as follows:
  - There was a clear commitment to biodiversity and climate change from the DEFRA Secretary of State. This commitment was also expressed in G7 discussions. Council noted that the Environment Bill was back in the parliament and that the response to gene editing consultation would be published in late July 2021.
  - Five key areas of DEFRA SR of mutual interest were: one health and zoonoses, food strategy, measuring and monitoring the environment, Net Zero, biodiversity and nature.
  - It was noted that planning for COP26 was going ahead; science innovation would be a flagship alongside nature. There would be a science innovation day and a pavilion. UKRI was linked in with this.
11. The Chair thanked Gideon and invited Andrew Millar (Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture, Scottish Government CSA) to share his updates and they were as follows:
  - Important to hear BBSRC scientists' voice e.g., from Roslin Institute, providing concrete examples, and helping the public engage.
  - Systems thinking was key – land use and peatlands were part of the climate change risk assessment and would contribute to the global balance to reach Net Zero.
  - Biodiversity –Scottish Government was committed to producing a strategy relating to functional biodiversity after COP26 (how species contribute to functioning of ecosystems to maintain habitats). There was an important role for BBSRC and NERC in this area.
  - The biomass needed for carbon capture. System calculations required negative emissions, there was not enough biomass and there was a role for *Miscanthus*. There were opportunities for plant varieties that grow in different ecosystems. There was urgency to engage and implement solutions quickly as there was not much time left.
  - UKRI should address the needs of all Devolved Administrations and work through science partnerships. Council noted that this was work in progress across UKRI.
12. Council commented that vertical farming was a way forward and that we need to support underpinning technology.
13. Council considered how biodiversity could be preserved in light of land use changes. This was part of BBSRC and NERC interface and functional biodiversity was captured there too. Council noted that an evolution of Alan Turing Institute could present opportunities for biodiversity big data.
14. The Chair thanked Gideon and Andrew for their useful updates.

### **ITEM 6. DEBRIEF FROM THE ANNUAL STRATEGIC WORKSHOP - REFLECTION ON THE OUTPUTS AND HOW THEY COULD FEED INTO UPCOMING ACTIVITIES – AUTUMN SR, INSTITUTE STRATEGY, STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT (ORAL)**

15. The Chair made positive remarks about the format and rich discussions at the BBSRC Annual Strategic Workshop held on 15 June 2021 and invited Melanie to comment on the event. Melanie said that the content and ideas would help shape BBSRC's thinking about the Spending Review, Delivery Plan and Forward Look refresh. Reflections from Council members, who attended the workshop, were as follows:
  - Be more confident in how we express the importance of the solutions for challenges.

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- Systems thinking (Net Zero, food, our health and health of the planet).
- Our role as stewards is key, provision of relevant and tangible examples.
- Mobility of talent underpins everything.
- Create diversity of career pathways.
- Connectivity came through strongly. Cross-disciplinarity and establishing cross-Council groups as ways of addressing challenges identified by UKRI.
- Reflect on BBSRC's portfolio of funding in light of teams and collaboration
- The view was that small pots of money released quickly could be very useful and provide connection to SMEs.
- There were good ideas ranging from plastics to food security.

16. It was noted that more time for discussions and more structure would be useful for future workshops.

17. The Chair thanked Melanie and Council members for their comments.

### **ITEM 7. SPENDING REVIEW AND THE INNOVATION STRATEGY (UKRI BBSRC 10/2021)**

18. The Chair welcomed Isobel Stephen, UKRI Executive Director of Strategy, and Ceri Lynn-Adams, BBSRC Associate Director Strategy & Planning, who was covering for Laura Notton during her assignment to UKRI. The Chair invited Isobel to update Council on the Spending Review.

19. Isobel presented the latest updates on the Spending Review 2021. Following the conclusion of the 2020 Spending Review, in which UKRI had received multi-year settlement for core budgets and a single year settlement for the remainder of our budgets, UKRI was preparing for the launch of the SR 2021. Government was very ambitious and a narrative around the UK as science superpower was emphasised.

20. As part of the planning, UKRI would need to prepare different scenarios and UKRI was discussing with BEIS their wider approach to the SR 2021. BEIS wanted to work with UKRI to demonstrate how UKRI delivers on the government priorities, particularly through existing activities. UKRI would need to also ensure that we could effectively frame our bid that resonated with HM Treasury and ministers. UKRI would also look to engage UKRI's wider communities, including Council members, as UKRI begins to construct their bid.

21. Isobel presented an expected timeframe, with SR 2021 launching in July 2021, developing submissions through to September, iterations and announcement in November.

22. Council was invited to discuss getting science in the SR bid and how Council would get involved and make the argument for research. Council members made the following comments:

- Focusing on challenges and systems thinking as ways to make arguments supported by evidence.
- The focus should be on investing in people, translation and commercialisation.
- Be more ambitious about interacting with commercial companies and getting their voices to speak for BBSRC.
- Demonstrate the link between SME performance and the investment in science.
- Capture how our research is used by business (case studies).
- Make an argument about the Government investing in the public sector and that this triggers more industrial and global investment.
- Use the vaccine story analogy as a lever.

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- UKRI worked hard to ensure the ecosystem was widely recognised, including PSREs and institutes.
  - People under 25 years old were passionate about topics relating to climate change, plastics etc. and therefore the next generation argument was an important one.
  - HESA was going to share their case studies and we should use this opportunity to integrate the impact (e.g., though the Russell Group).
  - Get the community to speak about the impact of BBSRC.
23. Council was invited to reflect on the SR principles and priorities agreed earlier this year. Council commented that they largely remained the same and emphasised enabling cross-Council collaborations.
  24. It was noted that UKRI was looking at the Operational Expenditure budget, funding mechanisms and how UKRI organised themselves.
  25. Council noted that the strategic themes emerging in the Spending Review and Innovation Strategy paper were overarching; they may be presented in a different way to ensure delivery of the government priorities and demonstrating coherence across the UKRI.
  26. Council noted the Government plans to deliver the Innovation Strategy (planned to be published in July 2021), the output from the Council Subgroup, update on status and emerging themes and considered the opportunity presented by the Innovation Strategy to BBSRC and bioscience and in the context of Spending Review 2021. Council supported the idea discussed by the Innovation Strategy Council Subgroup about entrepreneurial doctorates as a new way of improving employment and creating new companies. Another point that was endorsed related to the use R&D budget for international global challenges.
  27. Council agreed that reinvigorating the concept of bioeconomy was important, particularly in light of Net Zero and given that focus it was a good narrative to use.
  28. Isobel found this discussion very useful, thanked Council for their input and looked forward to future engagement and contributions.
  29. Council's comments would be incorporated into the thinking and planning for SR 2021.

### **ITEM 8. BBSRC INFRASTRUCTURES - STRATEGY AND PORTFOLIO (UKRI BBSRC 11/2021)**

30. The Chair welcomed Michael Ball, BBSRC Head of Research Infrastructure, and Rowan McKibbin, BBSRC Associate Director Frontiers & Foundations, to the meeting and invited Michael to introduce the paper.
31. Michael provided background and context for three aspects of significance to the BBSRC infrastructure portfolio, including the UKRI Infrastructure Advisory Committee (IAC), three ESFRI projects that BBSRC leads on behalf of the UK (EMPHASIS, ELIXIR, EuroBioImaging) and Infrastructure Strategy Development. The UKRI exercise to map research Infrastructure across the UK had completed in 2019 and as a result the Infrastructure Fund had been initiated, with proposals prioritised via the Infrastructure Advisory Committee. Council noted the background and the proposed submissions to the IAC for 2021.
32. Council noted that Andrew Millar and Malcolm Skingle were members of the IAC (BBSRC Council member and independent member respectively) and that as per the UKRI-BBSRC Council's Terms of Reference the Strategy in this area was Council's responsibility.
33. In discussion, the following points were made:
  - It was easier to fund a large infrastructure than mid-range infrastructures.

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- It was noted that sustainability was one of the criteria that the IAC had been discussing in light of the tension between maintenance of existing and development of new/upgraded infrastructures.
  - UKRI could provide more support to ensure coordination and consistency across UKRI and operational mechanisms to deliver.
  - There were a number of projects that formed organically within communities and UKRI/BBSRC should identify them and map existing activities/opportunities.
  - There was a question about how much attention was given to prolonging infrastructures' life and whether there were mechanisms of evaluation and best practice. It was noted that the strategy would seek to put this consideration onto a more consistent footing.
  - Council discussed treating infrastructure as an application process and considered criteria such as value for money, connectivity, building networks and transformational aspects.
  - Council commented about opening infrastructures up to other disciplines and Research Councils and allowing more inclusion and co-development of bids with the community.
  - It would be useful to include cost in Table 1 titled 'Summary of Projects proposed for the Infrastructure Advisory Committee in 2020, their status, and those planned for 2021'. (Annex 1 of the paper).
34. Council welcomed the proposed Infrastructure Strategy and agreed to establishing a Council subgroup to advise on developing the strategy, reviewing infrastructure bids, and provide advice to Council. BBSRC will review processes, bringing in best practice from UKRI and report back.

**Action UKRI-BBSRC 55/2021: Council welcomed the proposed Infrastructure Strategy and agreed to establishing a Council subgroup to advise on developing the strategy, reviewing infrastructure bids, and provide advice to Council. BBSRC will review processes, bringing in best practice from UKRI and report back (Michael Ball).**

### ITEM 9. BBSRC STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT (UKRI BBSRC 12 /2021)

35. The Chair welcomed Julie Venis, BBSRC Senior Manager, Stakeholder Engagement, to the meeting. The Chair handed over to Lorna, who introduced this paper, which presented an opportunity for Council to consider BBSRC's future strategic approach to stakeholder engagement. Input from Council would help shape the corporate stakeholder engagement strategy and inform development of an implementation plan.
36. The critical importance of stakeholder engagement and communications came through strongly earlier in the meeting when Council discussed the SR. Council commented on the proposed plans as below:
- The list of stakeholders was long and a key question was how BBSRC could engage with them all and how they map across different categories? There may be overlaps with other Research Councils and we might want to engage together.
  - Another key point was about capturing SMEs, which were large in number. It was suggested that the Bioindustry Association and Industrial Biotechnology Leadership Forum could be vehicles to reach out to SMEs. Including royal societies, manufacturing centres, DSTL, EU (INRA and TGF), and EMBL-EBI would be a good starting point.
  - The diversity of voices was emphasised and it was commented that the stakeholder map presented in the paper was biology focused.

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- There was a need for a balance between BBSRC specific messaging vs UKRI wide messaging, clarity and consistency and a joined-up approach across UKRI. Council noted value in joint messaging, e.g., MRC and BBSRC together.
- Council noted that developing a suite of materials to achieve consistency would be key. However, it recognised there must be a level of prioritisation due to resources. Council asked to have access to the messages so the same ones were used. Council also offered to help with prioritisation.

**Action UKRI BBSRC 56/2021: Council asked to have access to the messages so the same ones were used (Julie Venis).**

- Council considered measures of success such as raising the profile of BBSRC in news about discoveries that BBSRC had funded.
- Public engagement is key, but should be separate from stakeholder engagement.

37. The Chair thanked Lorna and Julie for the paper and Council members for their comments and their willingness to help shape the strategy and subsequent implementation and how this is uniquely related to the role of Council members.

### ITEM 10. STRATEGIC DISCUSSION – UNDERSTANDING THE RULES OF LIFE (UKRI BBSRC 13/2021)

38. The Chair welcomed Peter Burlinson, BBSRC Head of Strategy, Rules of Life, and Rowan McKibbin, BBSRC Associate Director Frontiers & Foundations, to the meeting and handed over to Amanda Collis, who made opening remarks. This paper provided an overview of the current status of Understanding the Rules of Life (URoL) theme as one of BBSRC's eight research and innovation priorities and considered potential ways to enhance BBSRC's activities in this area. Peter Burlinson introduced this paper noting that there were key questions for biology in the area of Understanding the Rules of Life (URoL).

39. In discussion, Council made the following points:

- The balance of challenge led funding vs funding underpinning research within this area
- Council welcomed the framing and positioning of the URoL and aligning the Strategic Lola re-launch with the URoL had landed well with the community.
- We should demonstrate that outcomes of the research within this area feeds into answering key biological questions.
- As one of four strategic messages within BBSRC's Communications Plan, URoL will be built into the key messages for stakeholder engagement.
- There was no boundary for URoL and this should be UKRI wide. It could be a joint theme with MRC.
- The link between URoL and the bioeconomy should be clear and key advances and questions defined.
- It was noted that BBSRC would be re-launching the Big Ideas Pipeline and to encourage applications within the URoL targeted calls could be considered bearing in mind that ideas in the URoL space could take longer to deliver.
- There should be a balance between short-term vs long-term funding, it is important to respond to political landscape but we must not forget about long-term research delivery.
- Council discussed ways of encouraging different types of research, e.g., by the provision of a devolved portfolio within the University Strategic Partners, targeting Big Ideas, randomised control trial approach to research as a way of ensuring diversity and having a separate call for high-risk ideas.

40. Council asked whether BBSRC supported the Trinity Challenge and Melanie would check this.

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**Action UKRI-BBSRC 57/2021: Council asked whether BBSRC supported the Trinity Challenge and Melanie would check this (Melanie Welham).**

41. Council welcomed this type of strategic discussion and its format and looked forward to the next one.

**ITEM11. BIENNIAL RISK UPDATE, REVIEW AND DISCUSSION (UKRI BBSRC 14/2021)**

42. The Chair welcomed Charlotte Hamilton, UKRI Risk and Assurance Business Partner, to the meeting. Charlotte introduced this paper, which provided Council with one of its regular updates of UKRI Risk Management activities operated by BBSRC. Council recognised their importance as management tools to provide assurance and to inform BBSRC's prioritisation, resource planning and mitigation strategies.

43. *This section deemed business sensitive and was therefore recorded separately.*

**ITEM 12. COUNCIL FORWARD LOOK AND AOB (UKRI BBSRC 15/2021)**

44. The Chair thanked Council members for their comments they had provided on future Council meetings and there was a consensus for alternating face-to-face with Zoom meetings (September 2021 meeting would be held via Zoom and possibly December 2021 one would be held in-person).

45. Council commented that Zoom meetings could be used for more transactional subjects, such as biennial risk reviews, while suggestions for uses of in-person meetings were:

- bringing in new people and relationship building
- creative and iterative discussions
- contentious subjects where misunderstanding can cause issues
- collaboration building (e.g. meetings between different Councils to forge new partnerships)

46. Council also noted that time critical aspects would also be considered when scheduling agendas.

47. One AOB was raised that related to reduced funding for science despite the scientific community's response and contributions during the Covid-19 pandemic and saving the UK from health and economic consequences of the pandemic. Council agreed the need for continuous efforts to make a case for science, using different arguments and the support of the public.

Council Secretariat

July 2021



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Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
	<i>Actions from 9 December 2020</i>			
4.	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 36/2020: Identify five topics within UKRI that require synergies and provide some common ground for communities. This could be an action on all Executives and the topics could be individual agenda items for future strategic discussions at Council (Melanie Welham, Martin Humphries)</i>	<i>Melanie Welham Martin Humphries</i>	<i>TBC</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
	<i>Actions from 9 March 2021 meeting</i>			
4	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 46/2021: Council considered the rating for Data Intensive Bioscience review, which was rated as green and suggested it should be amber (Amanda Collis).</i>	<i>Amanda Collis</i>	<i>June 2021</i>	<i>In hand</i>
8	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 50/2021: Council agreed to establishing a strategic steering group comprising a subset of NERC and BBSRC Council members to manage the strategic direction of the programme, including necessary expertise.</i>	<i>Amanda Collis</i>	<i>September 2021</i>	<i>In hand</i>
9	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 51/2021: There would be an opportunity to start the conversation about UK Institutes portfolio, possibly at the BBSRC Annual Strategic Workshop in June 2021. (Sarah Perkins).</i>	<i>Lorna Colquhoun</i>	<i>September 2021</i>	<i>In hand</i>

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	<b>Actions from 16 June 2021 meeting</b>			
4.	<i>Action UKRI-BBSRC 53/2021: More information on the impact of ODA cuts would be provided to Council at its next meeting.</i>	<i>Amanda Collis</i>	<i>September 2021</i>	<i>In hand</i>
4.	<i>Action UKRI-BBSRC 54/2021: BBSRC Executive Chair was due to discuss with UKRI Head of Communications and would follow up with Fiona Fox from the Science Media Centre, who attended the BBSRC Annual Strategic Workshop.</i>	<i>Melanie Welham</i>	<i>September 2021</i>	<i>Completed</i>
8.	<i>Action UKRI-BBSRC 55/2021: Council welcomed the proposed Infrastructure Strategy and agreed to establishing a Council subgroup to advise on developing the strategy, reviewing infrastructure bids, and provide advice to Council. BBSRC will review processes, bringing in best practice from UKRI and report back.</i>	<i>Michael Ball</i>	<i>September 2021</i>	<i>On agenda for September 2021</i>
9.	<i>Action UKRI-BBSRC 56/2021: Council asked to have access to the stakeholder messages so the same ones were used by Council.</i>	<i>Julie Venis</i>	<i>October 2021</i>	<i>In hand</i>
10.	<i>Action UKRI-BBSRC 57/2021: Council asked whether BBSRC supported the Trinity Challenge and Melanie would check this. Update: BBSRC is not involved.</i>	<i>Melanie Welham</i>	<i>September 2021</i>	<i>Completed</i>
11.	<i>This section deemed business sensitive and was therefore recorded separately.</i>			<i>In hand</i>