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**Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting held on 14 September 2021 via Zoom.**

**Those attending:**

Steve Bagshaw  
Professor Ewan Birney  
John Bloomer  
Professor Anne Ferguson-Smith  
Professor Laura Green  
Professor Gideon Henderson (items 1-7 and 11-13)  
Professor Martin Humphries (Chair of the meeting)  
Professor Andrew Millar (items 1-8 and 11-13)  
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 (items 4 -13)  
Dr Lorna Colquhoun  
Dr Karen Lewis  
Bill Poll (items 4 -13)  
Laura Notton (items 6 and 7 only)  
Daniel Shah (item 6 and 7 only)  
Isobel Stephen (item 6 and 7 only)  
Dr Clare Bhunnoo (item 9 only)  
Aidan Grimsley (item 9 only)  
Dr David McAllister (item 9 only)  
Paul Reeves (item 10 only)  
Dr Jef Grainger (item 11 only)  
Dr Sadhana Sharma (item 11 only)  
Dr Michael Ball (item 12 only)  
Dr Rowan McKibbin (item 12 only)  
Claire Salinas (item 12 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. 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 16 JUNE 2021 AND NOTES FROM THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING ON 22 JULY 2021 (UKRI BBSRC 18/2021)**

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3. The minutes of 16 June 2021 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.
4. The notes from the extraordinary Council meeting held on 22 July were agreed subject to the amendment in paragraph 13 'elevator pitch'.

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

5. The Chair went through the actions and the following updates were noted:
  - Action UKRI BBSRC 36/2020: Five Topics - this was part of UKRI Strategy development and was closed.
  - Action UKRI BBSRC 46/2021: Data intensive bioscience review - this action was closed following discussion at the meeting in June 2021.
  - Action UKRI BBSRC 50/2021: Strategic steering group comprising a subset of NERC and BBSRC Council. This action to be closed – the group was established and held its first meeting on 4 August 2021.
  - Action UKRI-BBSRC 53/2021: ODA cuts - the briefing was circulated to Council.
  - Action UKRI-BBSRC 54/2021: It was noted that Melanie Welham had met with Fiona Fox (Science Media Centre).
  - Action UKRI-BBSRC 57/2021: It was noted that BBSRC was not involved in the Trinity Challenge.

### ITEM 4. EXECUTIVE CHAIR'S REPORT (UKRI BBSRC 19/2021)

6. The Chair invited Melanie to introduce her report. 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 1.
7. Council noted the re-launch of the Big Ideas Pipeline and that BBSRC continued to convene a cross-Council forum for big ideas processes and established, in principle, a position on the UKRI website to promote these processes at a cross-Council level.
8. Council discussed BBSRC's leading role in the delivery of a Net Zero Agriculture Network Plus (likely to be launched in Quarter 2) working across UKRI partners through the UKRI 'net zero' working group, and with financial co-support from EPSRC and NERC. This represented a first coordinated action in this area, with the anticipation that it could provide a foundation for further/scaled investment in the future. The aim of the network was community engagement and supporting feasibility studies. A PO3 for a deep dive into Food had been finalised and signed off by EC and UKRI CEO and it would be shared with Council members. The deep dive process would be initiated in September via assembly of a cross-UKRI working group. Council noted that the joint NERC and BBSRC group established focused on agriculture and biodiversity loss rather than agriculture and Net Zero, however, these focused discussions were nested in the broader environmental perspective.

***Action UKRI-BBSRC 59/2021: A PO3 for a deep dive into Food had been finalised and signed off by EC and UKRI CEO and would be shared with Council members (Amanda Collis)***

9. Council emphasised the importance of PhD entrepreneurship discussed earlier in the year and Melanie, in her new role of UKRI Executive Champion for People, Culture and Talent, assured that this was under active discussion.

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10. Council discussed the upcoming COP26 event and BBSRC's approach to messaging and presenting case studies. It was noted that BBSRC was going to launch an e-booklet and that it would host discussions on different topics that fall broadly within the remit of BBSRC and reaching out to other Councils.
11. Council discussed plans to establish a veterinary vaccine facility at the Pirbright Institute – analogous to the ISCF-funded VMIC facility at the Harwell Campus. Council noted the support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and FCDO.
12. The Chair thanked Melanie for her report.

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

13. Gideon Henderson (DEFRA CSA) shared his updates with Council. They related to the Innovation Strategy, DEFRA spending review areas of mutual interest to BBSRC and COP26 planning.
14. Andrew Millar (Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture, Scottish Government CSA) shared his updates related to the nature crisis, biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions in livestock and how much BBSRC and UKRI's science align with these areas. He also invited Council members to reflect on climate change by analogy with the Covid-19 pandemic and what actions should be taken and suggested that this could be a topic for a future Council dinner.

***Action UKRI-BBSRC 60/2021: Climate change could be a topic for a future Council dinner.***

### **ITEM 6. UPDATE FROM UKRI**

15. The Chair welcomed Laura Notton, UKRI Head of Corporate Strategy, Isobel Stephen, UKRI Executive Director for Strategy, and Dan Shah, UKRI Director Investment Strategy and Systems Insight, to the meeting. The Chair invited Laura to update Council on the development of UKRI's 5-year Strategy, which would build on UKRI's mission and vision. Early engagement focused on key principles and BEIS Secretary of State had also expressed his expectations, relating to science superpower narrative. Council noted that the strategy was based on five pillars. Collectively they covered the breath of science.
16. Council reflected that increasing visibility of areas that were threats to humanity (Net Zero, food supplies, climate crisis, fuel/energy, plastics, infection/AMR) would be impactful and would set a clear context within which UKRI was operating.

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

17. The Chair invited Isobel Stephen and Daniel Shah to present the latest updates on the Spending Review 2021 (SR). Council acknowledged the enormous effort made by the UKRI Strategy team, BBSRC Executive Leadership Team and BBSRC colleagues more broadly, for making a compelling case to BEIS and ensuring engagement with government departments.

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18. Whilst UKRI did not have confirmation of the final BEIS R&D bid submitted to HMT on 13 September 2021, the day before UKRI BBSRC Council meeting, the overall bid and implications for BBSRC were becoming clearer. The bid should increase UKRI's annual budget over the SR period.
19. Council noted the current UKRI position within the overall BEIS bid and that the spending review outcome would be announced on 27 October 2021. UKRI's position was good but continuing the conversations and engaging with stakeholders was important.
20. Council's input and engagement was welcomed and a plan of stakeholder engagements was outlined. Council members were going to be provided with messages to use when talking to the community.
21. Council noted ongoing discussions about ISCF's future and winding down commitments whilst ensuring cross government department engagement. Council discussed the importance of influencing government's perception of academia working in partnership and supporting the national agenda, rethinking PhDs to reflect entrepreneurship, skills training for undergraduates and ensuring that innovation was highly integrated across UKRI.
22. The Chair thanked Isobel, Laura and Daniel and all BBSRC staff who were involved in preparing the bid.

### **ITEM 8. BBSRC APPROACH TO PLACE INCLUDING BBSRC RESEARCH AND INNOVATION CAMPUS STRATEGY (UKRI BBSRC 21/2021)**

23. The Chair invited Karen Lewis to introduce the paper, which provided the broad policy context of UK Government, and UKRI thinking about the role of R&D in relation to place-based activities and delivering local benefit and impact (including levelling up). It described the BBSRC research and innovation campus strategy, current status and forward approach.
24. Council noted the broad policy context, including the UK Government's high-level ambitions for 'institutions and place' as a pillar of the Innovation Strategy. It noted that the R&D Places Strategy was expected to be published, shortly after the Innovation Strategy. This was paused, and Neil O'Brien (Conservative MP for Harborough) was asked to lead the development of a cross-government plan for levelling up across the UK, with the aim of publishing a White Paper in the Autumn 2021.
25. Council noted that UKRI had been working with BEIS and the levelling up unit in the Cabinet Office to develop strategic thinking to inform the Government's strategy and in the context of SR 2021. BBSRC had been working with partners and stakeholders, to develop five national research and innovation campuses. The aim of this work is to support the development of distinct research and innovation ecosystems that were centred on, and draw value from, the world leading bioscience and national capability of the institutes that receive strategic funding from BBSRC. This is to advance bioscience research, accelerate innovation, and enhance regional and national economic growth, and social prosperity.

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26. Council explored the potential for wider place-based approaches to better enable local impacts of BBSRC investments across the UK and noted that BBSRC was keen to diversify the cohort of Strategic Partner Universities and include more partners. Council suggested including Devolved Administrations and active engagement with local authorities. Council discussed different criteria for Strategic Partner Universities, such as spin out activities to effect changes.
27. Council emphasised the importance of facilitating mechanisms to encourage mobility between campuses, learning from successful campuses, sharing skills and best practice, using modern ways of creating teams, creating ecosystems that will enable campuses to grow, active engagement with local authorities and using LoLas as a vehicle to increase connectivity. Council discussed Prosperity Partnerships and their value too.
28. Council considered the existing portfolio of campuses and potential gaps (e.g. chemicals, biomaterials), discussed focusing on current campuses vs creating new campuses (e.g. Northern England) and the need for a coherent strategy at UKRI level. UKRI should build on the current portfolio of campuses and identify science areas and places for new activities.
29. Council suggested joining up with catapults, that bring together academia, businesses, government and investors to translate ideas and research into the marketplace and funding to encourage connectivity between campuses.
30. The Chair thanked everyone for their inputs.

### **ITEM 9. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE BIOSCIENCES (UKRI BBSRC 22/2021)**

31. The Chair welcomed David McAllister, BBSRC Associate Director, Research & Innovation Talent and Funding Delivery, Claire Bhunnoo, BBSRC Senior Portfolio Manager, Capability, and Innovation and Aidan Grimsley, BBSRC Portfolio Manager, Skills and Careers Unit. The Chair handed over to David who provided an overview of the EDI agenda, BBSRC activities to date and proposed a workplan of future activities.
32. UKRI continued to be committed to improving EDI of its research and innovation communities as part of its stated aim to support a positive research culture. EDI and culture were woven into UKRI's recently developed guiding principles to reinforcing the importance of these areas in the wider research and innovation effort. The development of UKRI's EDI Strategy, due to be published in draft form by mid December 2021, would provide a framework to which BBSRC activities could be aligned.
33. Council confirmed its support for BBSRC's vision and overarching aims and agreed with the direction of the objectives proposed. Council recognised that the objectives were framed at a high level and more granular, action-oriented objectives were desirable so that progress could be monitored.
34. Council was positive about the analyses carried out to date and was keen to see more data to make specific comments and suggestions for activities going forward. Council made the following comments:

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- It was noted that improvements have been made recently regarding gender balance, but less so for other protected characteristics.
  - Data trends should be provided for as long a time period as possible.
  - Data should be analysed for each stage of the “funding life cycle” and cover every role (e.g. Principal Investigators, students, etc) to identify where step changes occur.
  - Targets should be used to drive change. These should reflect the diversity of the research and innovation community as well as wider society.
  - An evidence-based approach should be taken for all aspects of EDI, and data gathering for the area of supporting individuals from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds should be a priority since there is little data in this area.
  - The analysis of grant application success rates by Principal Investigator gender and age was noted in particular. Council felt that it would be useful to compare that data across UKRI.
35. 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.

***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).***

36. Council discussed the benefits of publishing EDI data and the implications that this would have on driving change. Council felt that BBSRC EDI data should be published and that BBSRC should be open as this would drive positive change. However, the context of publications should be carefully considered and data could be accompanied by positive case studies, role models and action plans targeting specific issues.
37. Council discussed sharing good EDI practice within BBSRC communities, particularly Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) and promoting networking and community building.
38. Council suggested that BBSRC should consider establishing an EDI/research culture forum with external stakeholders to collate and share best practice across the sector. Institute leads, Athena Swann and NERC CENTA doctoral training were mentioned as specific examples of potential sources of good practice and EDI data.
39. BBSRC should also consider whether the demonstration of good EDI practices can be requested during the grant application process to promote their importance.
40. Council noted that a longlist of actions for each objective and interventions would be discussed by the Executive Leadership Team in October 2021 and would be brought back to Council in future.

***Action UKRI-BBSRC 62/2021: Council noted that a longlist of 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)***

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41. The Chair thanked everyone for their comments.

### **ITEM 10. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INSTITUTE STRATEGY AND THE 2022 INSTITUTE ASSESSMENT EXERCISE (UKRI BBSRC 23/2021)**

42. The Chair welcomed Paul Reeves, BBSRC Head of Evaluation, to the meeting and invited Lorna Colquhoun to present the paper, which set out the next steps for the implementation of the BBSRC's new Institute Strategy. It highlighted the role of the Institute funding model and the 2022 Institute Assessment Exercise (IAE) in enabling the effective implementation of the Institute Strategy.
43. Council emphasised the importance of the wider landscape and changing priorities and ensuring that the portfolio of Institutes reflected these changes and priorities. Council noted that Institute Strategy Council Task and Finish Group had considered this and outcomes of Sir Paul Nurse's review of the UK's research landscape would play an important role in thinking about the Institutes. Council discussed managing the current portfolio of Institutes and reaching out to communities to ensure awareness of any bottom-up initiatives and potential new activities.
44. Council discussed the proposed Institute funding model and noted that Institute Directors had been consulted. The key feature of the model was that a financial sustainability test would be carried out to ensure bids were sustainable.
45. Council emphasised that it would be important to ensure that priorities/recommendations set out within the Institute Strategy were addressed and implemented and that the process was not driven by outcomes only.
46. Council discussed Full Economic Costing (FEC) and was informed that the current approach for funding Institutes embedded in Universities at 80% FEC should be maintained as one of the key principles for determining individual Institute funding allocations. This approach was also agreed in consultation with Institute Directors. Council noted the remaining key principles set out in the paper.
47. Council commented that research culture and EDI should be at the heart of the IAE and the Institute Development Grant (IDG) was intended to be used for developing strategies and approaches to implementing the recommendations in the Institute Strategy, including research culture. It would also support Institutes in developing proposals for the next IAE, particularly to ensure that the Institute remains responsive to the relevant needs within its mission, continues to function as it should, meets its national strategic need and delivers excellent research with clear impact. Institutes were expected to provide BBSRC with a brief overview of how they would use the IDG and how they were going to implement the research culture recommendation in mid-September.
48. The aim of the revised funding model was to reduce existing barriers discouraging joint working, minimising competition and encouraging partnerships and collaborations. Council commented that a robust assessment/assurance would be needed to evaluate these aspects as part of the IAE process. On the assessment process, Council raised a question about whether panel meetings were the best way of assessing research activity and the whole ethos and environment in the Institutes. BBSRC Executive had discussed at length and concluded that the IAE process

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should use an expert panel meeting, rather than visits to individual institutes. The move to a less competitive process provided opportunities to conduct Individual Assessment Panel (IAP) meetings in parallel rather than sequentially. This would provide scope for longer IAP meetings (e.g. one day, compared with 0.5 days for the 2016 IAE), allowing for 'deeper dives' into the science and facilitating wider participation from Institute staff. Council suggested that there was an opportunity to involve a diverse range of panellists via zoom technology.

49. Council approved BBSRC's approach and direction of travel for the design and delivery of the Institute funding model and the 2022 Institute Assessment Exercise and noted the provisional timetable for the IAE process with its key milestones.
50. The Chair thanked Council members for their comments and Paul and Lorna for the paper.

### **ITEM 11. STRATEGIC DISCUSSION: BIOSCIENCE FOR AN INTEGRATED UNDERSTANDING OF HEALTH (UKRI BBSRC 24/2021)**

51. The Chair welcomed Sadhana Sharma, BBSRC Head of Strategy, Integrated Understanding of Health, and Jef Grainger, BBSRC Associate Director, Thematic Research Challenges, to the meeting.
52. Sadhana presented the slides and provided a brief overview of the current status of Bioscience for an Integrated Understanding Life (BIUH), one of the three key strategic challenge areas highlighted in the BBSRC Forward Look for UK Bioscience. BIUH represented around 20% of the whole BBSRC research portfolio. Council noted areas of research delivered uniquely by BBSRC, including one health, integrative science of food, nutrition, health and agriculture, model organism and comparative biology research etc.
53. The paper also included an early draft of the refreshed Bioscience for Health Strategic Framework covering the period 2022-2027. The emerging framework highlighted four key challenge areas (one health, food and nutrition for health, lifelong health, and transformative technologies for health across the lifecourse) which required world class bioscience to develop a deeper understanding of both what defines and determines health across the lifecourse, and the interface between animal and human health. Together, the challenges were intended to promote development of an integrated understanding of the key determinants of health.
54. Over the last six years, the strategic framework had enabled priorities to progress that were still relevant. However, a review of the framework was timely to respond to the changing landscape, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and post Brexit Britain, etc. The highlight of the last six years was the transition into the Quadram Institute, which joined the pipeline of agri-food, nutrition and health.
55. Council reflected on BBSRC's strategic positioning in the health research and innovation funding landscape and made positive comments about the vision and the refreshed framework. Council commented that the positioning of the framework should be the whole landscape, rather than only areas led by BBSRC.



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56. Council commented that more partnerships with funders to ensure links in different areas (such as health/aging and climate change) were needed. Council noted that BBSRC had strong links with Defra and FCDO and that strengthening connections with NIHR was a priority to address the health agenda.
57. Council emphasised the importance of linking agriculture from soil to human health, immune system and mental health and given that climate change crossed all BIUH areas it was suggested that this was reflected in the framework. The role of preventative medicine in animal welfare was also highlighted by Council.
58. Given the Covid-19 pandemic, infectious disease, monitoring microbial resistance, animal and human one health were key in the BIUH area and working with partners within UKRI and Defra focusing on their strengths was the way forward.
59. Council noted the opportunities identified in the paper and added that there was going to be a breakthrough coming from gut research and that this could have an impact on soil microbiome.
60. In summary, Council welcomed the emerging framework and provided a high-level steer and more detailed comments. The Chair thanked Sadhana and Jef for presenting the paper and Council members for their comments.

### **ITEM12. BBSRC INFRASTRUCTURE - COUNCIL SUBGROUP (UKRI BBSRC 25/2021)**

61. The Chair welcomed Michael Ball, BBSRC Head of Research Infrastructure, Rowan McKibbin, BBSRC Associate Director Frontiers & Foundations and Claire Salinas, BBSRC Senior Portfolio Manager, Research Infrastructure.
62. Michael provided an update on the Infrastructure Strategy and Council subgroup that had been discussed by Council at its meeting in June 2021.
63. Council members were invited to volunteer to join the group and the preferred scenario would be for both the BBSRC Council representative on the Infrastructure Advisory Committee (Andrew Millar), and Malcolm Skingle (member of BBSRC Council but an independent member of the IAC) to join the panel, in addition to any other volunteers. To maintain the strategic connection, it was proposed that the Transformative Technologies Strategy Advisory Panel Chair (currently Kathryn Lilley) was invited to join the group, either as a member or observer.
64. Council endorsed the proposal set out in the paper.

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

65. Council noted the plans to hold the next Council meeting on 7 December 2021 face-to-face.
66. Net Zero Agriculture could be a topic for dinner discussion in December 2021.

***Action UKRI-BBSRC 63/2021: Net Zero Agriculture could be a topic for dinner discussion in December 2021 (Ksymena Grzybowska).***

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Council Secretariat

October 2021

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Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
	Actions from 16 June 2021 meeting			
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>	Julie Venis	October 2021	Completed. On CouncilINET
11.	<i>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).</i>	Charlotte Hamilton	September/October 2021	In hand
	Actions from 14 September 2021 meeting			
4	<i>Action UKRI-BBSRC 59/2021: A PO3 for a deep dive into Food had been finalised and signed off by EC and UKRI CEO and would be shared with Council members.</i>	Amanda Collis	December 2021	Completed. On CouncilINET
5	<i>Action UKRI-BBSRC 60/2021: Climate change could be a topic for a future Council dinner.</i>	Ksymena Grzybowska	December 2021	Noted

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9	<b>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).</b>	<b>David McAllister</b>	<b>When data available</b>	<b>In hand</b>
9	<b>Action UKRI-BBSRC 62/2021: Council noted that a longlist of 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)</b>	<b>David McAllister</b>	<b>Future Council meeting</b>	<b>In hand</b>
13	<b>Action UKRI-BBSRC 63/2021: Net Zero Agriculture could be a topic for dinner discussion in December 2021 (Amanda Collis, Ksymena Grzybowska).</b>	<b>Amanda Collis Ksymena Grzybowska</b>	<b>Postponed to March 2022</b>	<b>Noted</b>