

**UKRI Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
Minutes of the EPSRC Council**

Date: 4 December 2025

Location: Virtual

Attendees

Members of EPSRC Council

Professor Charlotte Deane (EPSRC Executive Chair)
Professor Jeremy Baumberg (Senior Independent Member)
Dr Joe de Sousa
Professor Alison Etheridge
Professor Deborah Greaves
Professor Jane Hillston
Professor Dame Jane Jiang
Ms Siân John
Dr Simon King
Mr Alan Newby
Professor Martin Schröder
Dr Dave Smith (National Technology Adviser)
Professor Ian White
Professor Andy Wright

UKRI/EPSRC attendees

Andrew Bourne (Executive Director, Partnerships)
Nicola Goldberg (Chief Operating Officer)
Jane Nicholson (Executive Director, Research Base)
Kedar Pandya (Executive Director, Cross-Council Programmes)
Garth Wells (Deputy Executive Chair)
David Stiles (Finance Director, Cross Council Cluster, EPSRC and MRC)

Guests/observers

Professor Robert Mokaya (Incoming Council Member)
Hugh Harris (Chief of Investment Planning & Strategy - Jobshare)
Sam Francis (Deputy Director, Planning, Operations and Governance)
Kerry-Anne Young (Head of Governance & Planning)
Katie Daniel (Deputy Director, University Partnerships)
Natalie Jones (Head of Regional Engagement North West England)
Katie Blaney (Deputy Director, Physical and Mathematical Sciences)
Stephen Gilligan (Senior Manager, Governance)
Richard Leafe (Head of Strategic Allocations and Thematic Investment Strategy, UKRI)
Stian Westlake (ESRC Executive Chair, Senior Responsible Officer Research and Development Missions Accelerator Programme (R&D MAP))
Harry Turnbull-Jones (Programme Director R&D MAP)
Jenny Hill (Clean Energy Superpower Mission Challenge Director R&D MAP)
Vivienne Blackstone (Clean Energy Superpower Mission EPSRC Challenge Delivery Lead R&D MAP)

Secretariat

Cerianne Whitehead (Head of Private Office, Secretary to Council)
Megan Maycock (Executive Assistant and Governance Manager)

Apologies

Gillian Bartoszewska (Senior Governance and Operations Manager)

1. **Welcome, introductions and declaration of interests**

- 1.1. Jeremy welcomed attendees, confirmed quoracy and noted apologies.
- 1.2. Members were reminded to update their declaration of interests during the year. Members were asked to raise any conflicts arising during the course of the meeting. No new declarations were raised.

2. **Minutes and actions**

- 2.1. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.
- 2.2. Members were updated on the status of matters arising from the previous meeting.

3. **Executive Report**

- 3.1. Council received updates from the EPSRC executive:
 - 3.1.1. Allocation update – members received an update on UKRI’s four-year spending allocation from the government, describing the structure of the funding including a new suite of priority programmes each led by a UKRI executive chair as the programme’s responsible owner. Council noted how a greater proportion of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology’s budget would be allocated to UKRI to deliver their priorities. Council discussed the breakdown of investment across the Industrial Strategy priority sectors, the governance arrangements, departmental budgets, delivery mechanisms, and the impact on research themes. Council encouraged UKRI to include talent and skills development in key performance indicators (KPIs) to support colleagues delivering outcomes.
 - 3.1.2. Innovation for Growth Summit update - Council were updated on the Innovation for Growth Summit held on 24 November 2025, which saw the announcement of a new strategic direction for UKRI to drive growth, with over 300 representatives from government, academia, industry and the third sector. Council members who attended reported that the event delivered clear strategic messages, supported by strong political sponsorship and a renewed sense of urgency from senior leadership. Council felt UKRI’s direction and intent were communicated with far greater clarity than in previous years, and that senior figures appeared aligned behind the proposed changes. They also noted a sense of inertia within the wider system, that the broader research community may not yet appreciate the implications of funding being more tightly linked to strategic priorities and the operational challenges of delivering change at pace. Council agreed that the themes emerging from the summit were consistent with ongoing discussions on allocations and strategy.
 - 3.1.3. EPSRC Partnerships Summit update - Council were updated on the Partnerships Summit held on 17-18 November 2025, which brought together over 80 attendees for two days of discussion and engagement, including a reflective keynote on technology translation and scaling challenges, an Executive Board panel session, and three facilitated discussions on realising the UK’s AI opportunities, infrastructure for research innovation, and unlocking the commercial potential of research in the Industrial Strategy sectors. Members who attended the event reported that the meeting felt positive and constructive, providing valuable space for open discussion with colleagues in different settings and noted the benefit of bringing diverse viewpoints together, particularly in tensioning between the needs of industry, government and academia. Council noted that feedback from attendees had been very positive, further input would be sought during university engagements, and Council members and EPSRC colleagues were thanked for their contributions.

- 3.1.4. Science, Engineering and Technology Board (SETB) update - Council were updated on the recent SETB meeting, which focused on three areas: advice on the details within the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) action plan, early input into the New Horizons and Big Ideas work, and early conversations on how research outcomes should be articulated and monitored. SETB emphasised the need for realistic benchmarks, clearer pathways for high-risk research to progress, and a pragmatic approach to outcomes reporting, noting that many parts of the community were already familiar with similar requirements from other funders. Council discussed how external advisory boards might support outcome monitoring and were informed that SETB membership would be refreshed in the coming year.
- 3.1.5. UKRI AI Strategic Framework - Council discussed the draft UKRI AI framework, which aims to align with government priorities while driving long-term transformative change across research and innovation. Six focus areas were outlined: strengthening core foundational technologies and mathematical sciences; AI transforming research; developing talent and skills; accelerating innovation and adoption for economic growth; championing ethical and responsible research and innovation; and underpinning data and computing infrastructure. The framework publication and delivery planning would continue into 2026. Council discussions included highlighting the complexity of the landscape, collaboration with funding partners including the AI Security Institute, appropriate risk appetite and success indicators, maintaining global competitiveness, and the need for agility during the rapid pace of technological change.
- 3.1.6. Context setting for the Research and Development Missions Accelerator Programme (R&D MAP) item - Council received a brief overview on R&D MAP, established to deliver on five government missions outlined in the Plan for Change. Council noted the budget and target leverage ratios, and that whilst EPSRC did not have Challenge Directors embedded within the council, it would play a significant role in delivering against the missions. Council noted conversations were ongoing on how EPSRC could support partners to navigate through the complexity of translating policy into delivery and realising impacts within short timescales.
- 3.1.7. Council Recruitment - Council was updated on recent recruitment activity, with three new members appointed this year. Two would begin their terms in April alongside a previously recruited member, and one would start in January 2027. The update emphasised the ongoing effort to refresh and broaden Council expertise to ensure diverse perspectives and representation across research areas, regions, and backgrounds.
- 3.2. Council noted written updates on Strategic Advisory Teams (SAT's), Finance and UKRI staffing and senior appointments.
4. **EPSRC Risk update**
- 4.1. Council were updated on the bi-annual risk management report, the UKRI corporate risk register and the EPSRC corporate risk and issue register.
- 4.2. Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000
- 4.3. Council discussed how risk management would evolve to better manage new structures for priority missions and cross council governance arrangements. Council reflected on how council risk registers were a tool for managing upwards for consideration at a UKRI level, driving cross council action on mitigations to reduce risks. Council noted the development of a new risk was anticipated around workforce capability and adapting to new ways of working.

5. UKRI colleague update

- 5.1. Council welcomed Hugh Harris and Richard Leaf to the meeting.
- 5.2. Council were updated on the development of a new five-year UKRI strategy, the timeline for publication and the new structure reflecting outcomes aligned to the UKRI Framework Document 2025 and on UKRI as a world class organisation.
- 5.3. The strategy would aim for a high-level, transformative tone, reflecting UKRI's ambition to fulfil its founding vision. Implementation details and KPIs would largely sit within the corporate plan, though the strategy would include clear objectives where relevant.
- 5.4. Council were updated on allocations and the publication of the UKRI Allocations Explainer. Key messages included a commitment to prioritisation, doing fewer things better, while maintaining strong support for basic research and talent development. Delivery would involve a matrix of programme-based approaches aligned to industrial strategy sectors, with councils continuing as homes for domain expertise and curiosity-driven allocations assigned directly to them.
- 5.5. Council discussed potential risks and challenges, including managing community expectations amid cost pressures, ensuring clarity on programme changes, and leveraging investment in relevant sectors. Members emphasised the importance of transparent communication and maintaining balance between industrial strategy priorities and broader research areas. Council stated they would welcome early engagement with Mission Programme Directors, particularly those situated in other councils with relevance to EPSRC.

6. Reflections following UKRI colleague update

- 6.1. Council reflected on the UKRI colleague update and noted that the strategy provided a positive opportunity for EPSRC's community.
- 6.2. Council reflected on the resource needed to deliver the strategy, noting legacy commitments and the challenge to manage expectations and overcome inertia within the system. Council highlighted the need to support talent and skills and that strategic funding models could potentially lead to greater workforce instability.

7. UKRI People Survey

- 7.1. Council received an update on initial findings from the 2025 UKRI People Survey. The survey focused on engagement, workload, and learning and development, following the previous action plan aimed at supporting EPSRC's wellbeing and talent.
- 7.2. Council noted positive outcomes on call management, engagement and improvements in learning and development opportunities, whilst workload pressures, managing change, and perceptions around pay remained as challenges.
- 7.3. Council considered the timing of the survey which coincided with organisational change which may have influenced responses, and supported the increased engagement with teams to discuss action plans. Council noted further analysis would be conducted and a focused action plan developed, supported by the employee engagement group and senior leadership team.

8. Council effectiveness review

- 8.1. Council discussed the outcomes of the Council effectiveness review survey which captured Council members' views regarding the way Council is currently constituted, how it is working, and how it might be improved. Members were reminded that feedback is welcome throughout the year, not just via the survey.

- 8.2. Council provided positive feedback on the quality and clarity of meeting materials, increased clarity on the role of Council and the EPSRC executive, and valued the openness of discussions and engagement with senior leadership.
- 8.3. Council suggested greater visibility of the activities of other advisory bodies within EPSRC and across UKRI, timely and relevant updates between meetings, enhanced induction and mentoring opportunities, and additional briefings on financial and strategic planning.
- 8.4. Council discussed how it could best support the EPSRC executive, including providing constructive critique, sharing community perspectives, and helping to communicate key messages externally during this period of change. Council requested further monitoring and discussion on the evolving funding landscape.

9. **EPSRC's Place Framework: Review and future priorities**

- 9.1. Council received an update on EPSRC's Place Framework, introduced in 2020 to support regional engagement and maximise local economic and social impact from research investments across the UK that were important to regional stakeholders. The framework operates across all UK nations and regions and aims to work with civic bodies, regional authorities, universities and other stakeholders.
- 9.2. The update highlighted progress as a key contributor to UKRI's Place agenda, including the establishment of eight Heads of Regional Engagement, two rounds of Place-Based Impact Acceleration Accounts creating 17 partnerships, and examples of regional collaboration such as Supergen Energy Network working with the Northern Ireland Executive, the UK Financial Services Plus (UKFin+) network, and the Lincoln-Cambridge (LINCAM) agri-food robotics partnership.
- 9.3. Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000
- 9.4. Council discussed the importance of maintaining strong engagement whilst prioritising activities aligned with Industrial Strategy sectors and economic geographies, supporting regions to focus on areas of genuine strength, and improving connectivity between research and innovation ecosystems. Members also suggested leveraging academics as ambassadors on regional boards and emphasised the need for a more strategic approach to future investments.

10. **Research and Development Mission Accelerator Programme update**

- 10.1. Council welcomed Harry Turnbull-Jones, Jenny Hill, Vivienne Blackstone and Stian Westlake to the meeting.
- 10.2. Council were updated on the Research and Development Missions Accelerator Programme (R&D MAP), which aims to deliver outcome-oriented solutions aligned with the five government missions. Council noted the programme operated on short timelines and differed from traditional UKRI approaches by focusing on specific problem statements aligned with government priorities, securing commitment for pull-through adoption of solutions with ambitious and challenging leverage targets.
- 10.3. Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000
- 10.4. Council welcomed the programme's ambition, expressed strong support for its objectives and encouraged further engagement on how EPSRC could work with R&D MAP to support successful delivery of the programme. Members committed to helping connect research

communities and industry to these opportunities and encouraged continued dialogue on funding models, engagement strategies, and delivery mechanisms.

11. New Horizons

- 11.1. Council were updated on the proposed relaunch of the New Horizons scheme, which aims to support high-risk, early-stage research ideas, requiring modest funding and fast turnaround. The update outlined the scheme's objectives, priorities, and practical considerations, including its role in addressing a perceived gap in the funding landscape and signalling EPSRC's intent to encourage transformative research and broaden the portfolio.
- 11.2. Council noted feedback from SETB, who expressed strong support and emphasised New Horizons' value in fostering high-risk, high-reward research, and recommended creating pathways for successful projects to transition to other funding routes.
- 11.3. Council considered the need for clear objectives including target career stage, diversity or novelty, and recommended collecting robust data to evaluate impact and reach. Whilst members leaned toward weighting awards in favour of early-career researchers, they felt the scheme should remain open to all career stages, particularly for those seeking to pivot into new areas.
- 11.4. Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000
- 11.5. Council advised the scheme should be high priority relative to other curiosity-driven modes and encouraged EPSRC to proceed with careful design of review processes, clear objectives, and mechanisms to monitor outcomes.

12. Information papers

- 12.1. Council noted the information papers on:
 - Big Ideas
 - EPSRC Communications and Impact Stories
 - EPSRC Economic Impact Report

13. Any other business

- 13.1. Council gave their thanks to colleagues, guests, and observers for their time and contributions to the meeting, and also to EPSRC colleagues who contributed logistical and admin support, as well as those who provided contributions to the wide range of briefing materials.
- 13.2. Council noted this was Joe de Sousa's last meeting and thanked him for his service on EPSRC Council.
- 13.3. The next meeting will be held on 4-5 March 2026.