UKRI Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
Minutes of the EPSRC Council
Date: 4-5 March 2026
Location: Plymouth

Attendees
Members of EPSRC Council

Professor Charlotte Deane (EPSRC Executive Chair)
Professor Jeremy Baumberg (Senior Independent Member)
Professor Dame Alison Etheridge
Professor Deborah Greaves
Professor Dame Jane Jiang
Ms Siân John
Dr Simon King
Professor Robert Mokaya
Mr Alan Newby
Professor Martin Schröder
Professor Ian White
Professor Andy Wright

UKRI/EPSRC attendees

Andrew Bourne (Executive Director, Innovation and Partnerships Directorate)
Nicola Goldberg (Chief Operating Officer)
Jane Nicholson (Executive Director, Research Directorate)
Kedar Pandya (Executive Director, Strategy Directorate)
Garth Wells (Deputy Executive Chair)
Kathryn Magnay (Deputy Director, Clean Energy)
Juliette Meek (UKRI Finance Director) - virtual, item 5
Hugh Harris (Chief of Investment Planning and Strategy job share) - virtual, item 8
Katie Blaney (Deputy Director, Science) - virtual, item 11
Alex Broomsgrove (Head of Advanced Material) - virtual, item 11

Guests

Professor Nigel Brandon (Imperial College London)

Secretariat/Observers

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

Apologies

Professor Jane Hillston (Council member)
Professor Martin Schröder (Council member)
Dr Dave Smith (National Technology Adviser)
David Stiles (UKRI Senior Finance Business Partner)

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

1.1. Jeremy Baumberg 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.

1.3. Council were updated on new members joining this year including Professor Nigel Brandon, Professor Catherine Hobbs, Dr Jon-Paul Sherlock and Professor Marika Taylor, and welcomed Nigel as an observer to this meeting.

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. **Reflection of day one**

3.1. Council noted their formal thanks to the University of Plymouth for providing a very engaging and thought-provoking day of activities and discussion, and Council thanked all those who had contributed to making it a successful visit.

3.1.1. Council reflected on the first day of engagement activities, including visits to university facilities: the Coastal, Ocean and Sediment Transport (COAST) Laboratory; Cyber-SHIP Lab and Cyber-Resilience of Offshore Wind Networks (CROWN); Marie Lebour Marine Biology Research Facility and the Landscape-Level Laboratory; and Marine Station facilities including teaching and research facilities, the Diving Station and the Autonomy Station.

Council commented on the wide variety of career pathways observed, on the commitment and passion for their fields demonstrated by Plymouth colleagues and noted the breadth and interdisciplinarity of their research.

3.1.2. The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and EPSRC Councils heard presentations from University of Plymouth colleagues describing wide-ranging challenges and opportunities for coastal communities including:

- the socio-economic and environmental challenges facing England's coastal communities and the opportunities that could arise from digital health, economic regeneration from offshore renewable energy, marine environmental services and water quality engineering
- societal challenges faced by young people; how urban planning can help by recognising unique challenges for coastal communities, and opportunities to engage coastal youth, for example engendering different types of citizenship and behaviour, and encouraging better understanding of coastal and marine knowledge to create behaviour change
- the range of modelling-based techniques required and the importance of data collection and availability to both researchers and local users for modelling coastal risks and energy generation across flood risk and natural disasters, heritage coastal structures, and the performance of coastal-based energy devices.

Discussion points included the benefits and challenges around co-creation with end users and communities, how multidisciplinarity might influence methodology, and the value of seeking early social science collaboration.

3.1.3. NERC and EPSRC Councils received updates on the context in which the IS-8 programmes were being set up across the Industrial Strategy growth-driving sectors.

3.1.4. NERC, EPSRC and University of Plymouth colleagues discussed Green Critical Technologies over dinner.

3.2. Council reflected on how the university understood and demonstrated its strengths and was an economic driver for its area.

3.3. Building upon the insights provided by the visits, Council discussed more generally:

- the balance between taking advantage of opportunities for spinouts and acting as a central hub utilising expertise and convening power

- how universities might work with further education colleges to provide joined-up approaches to support more quality trade and technically skilled jobs through apprenticeships in skills needed in their research sectors

4. **Pre-UKRI colleague update**

4.1. Council agreed on topics that would merit discussion with the UKRI Finance Director.

5. **UKRI colleague update**

5.1. Council welcomed Juliette Meek to the meeting who outlined her responsibilities and briefly spoke on allocations and new finance lines and delegations, recent UKRI CEO communications and future comms plans around priority programmes, and people and senior recruitment.

5.2. Council discussed work on operational changes, governance, financial business partnering and data reporting to support interdisciplinary Priority Programmes to deliver government and societal priorities, and to drive innovation across the UK.

5.3. Council briefly discussed community anxiety around the scale of cost reductions, specifically across the Science and Technology Facilities Council's (STFC) portfolio.

5.4. Council raised how UKRI would work with the academic community to demonstrate impact, particularly in areas where UKRI delivers programmes on behalf of government partners, and UKRI's role in supporting public understanding of science research and innovation.

5.5. Juliette was thanked for providing a concise update and for positively engaging with Council.

6. **Post UKRI Colleague update reflections**

6.1. Council recommended providing additional support for grant managers to monitor and manage remit pressures.

7. **Executive Report**

7.1. Council received updates from the EPSRC executive:

7.1.1. Allocations update– Council were updated on the mapping of budget lines to the new allocation lines and commented that the research community were positively engaging with the change. Council welcomed the change in direction and noted that engagement via regional workshops would support clarity on the direction of travel. Council noted EPSRC would welcome engagement with the community on their funding priorities to drive R&I and to signal growth opportunities. Council discussed funding stream dependencies, future risks and opportunities and said they would welcome further discussion once the changes embedded, later in the year.

7.1.2. UKRI AI Strategic Framework – Council were updated on the UKRI AI Research and Innovation Strategic Framework publication, co-announced with DSIT on 19 February 2026.Council noted the six priority areas and outcomes: Technology development and future foundations; AI transforming research; Developing AI skills and talent; Accelerating innovation and adoption for economic growth and societal benefit; Championing responsible and trustworthy AI; Building world-class AI-enabling data and infrastructure. Council noted EPSRC was strengthening its relationship with the Sovereign AI Unit and was deepening understanding of where the expertise for specific domains was best situated.

7.1.3. Future ways of working – Council were updated on Government and Societal Priority Programmes and noted that advisory structures would be revisited at a future meeting.

7.1.4. Operations - Council received updates on the UKRI People Survey, the Funding Service, Priority Programmes situated with EPSRC, Hybrid Working Policy and financial controls.

7.1.5. Science Engineering Technology Board (SETB) update – Council received updates from SETB's February meeting discussion including commercialisation priorities for EPSRC, the curiosity driven research budget allocation, the development of an EPSRC Research Infrastructure strategy and the 2026 SETB membership refresh.

7.2. Council noted written updates on senior appointments and the financial update.

8. **Refresh of the UKRI Strategy**

8.1. Council welcomed Hugh Harris to the meeting. Council were updated on the timeline for developing the next 5-year UKRI strategy for the period 2026-2031, providing a long-term direction of travel. Council heard that the new strategy would have curiosity-driven research at its heart, with clear goals around advancing government priorities and supporting innovative companies. Central to the strategy would be a new set of cross-disciplinary outcome-focussed programmes aligned with, and going beyond, the Industrial Strategy sectors, with more specific outcomes articulated in a one-year single delivery plan.

8.2. Council discussed the importance of language within the strategy to promote good behaviour patterns, reduce siloed thinking, to recognise all learnings whether positive or negative from curiosity-driven research, to articulate outcomes beyond technical audiences, and to ensure clarity around what UKRI was prioritising.

9. **Council closed session**

9.1. A closed session was held with Council.

10. **Feedback from Council closed session**

10.1. Council provided feedback on the key discussion points from its closed session, including how UKRI communications were being received by the community and how Council could support improvements in comms, particularly around priority areas. Council complimented the good example set by the EPSRC Executive on their approach to setting up the Government and Societal Priorities programmes within their remit.

11. **Review of EPSRC institutes**

11.1. Secretary's note: For this item, specific declarations of interest were made by Alan Newby, Alison Etheridge, Jeremy Baumberg, and Robert Mokaya. No action was deemed necessary given the high-level nature of the discussions which limited the members ability to influence any outcomes or decisions. This item was chaired by Charlotte Deane.

11.2. Council welcomed Katie Blaney and Alex Broomsgrove to the meeting and received a summary of the review process and recommendations regarding funding for the institutes Henry Royce and Rosalind Franklin.

11.3. Council noted advice received from SETB including assurance around review recommendations, diversification of funding models and value add goals from additional funding.

11.4. Council advised that they agreed with the recommendations.

11.5. Council discussed how the institutes resonated well with new allocation structures, and were strongly situated within the UK landscape. Council challenged EPSRC to consider international comparisons, tension against other activities, the long-term funding trajectory and to ensure governance was fit for purpose and supported the evolution of the institutes.

12. **Information papers**

12.1. Council noted the information papers on UKRI External Affairs and Communications Audience Report, EPSRC Case studies, and the Strategic Advisory Teams (SATs) update.

12.2. Council suggested that it might be beneficial for the comms updates to be aligned to programmes and funding mechanisms to provide additional context.

12.3. Council requested that SATs are invited to highlight any specific key issues that might merit further Council discussion.

13. **Any other business**

13.1. Council thanked EPSRC colleagues who contributed to the meeting, networking session, logistical and admin support, and who provided contributions to the wide range of briefing materials.

13.2. Council noted this was the last meeting of Alison Etheridge and Andy Wright. Council thanked them for their service on EPSRC Council.

13.3. The next meeting would be held on 17-18 June in Swindon.