

## **Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting held on 20 September 2023 in Birmingham.**

### **Those attending:**

Steve Bagshaw  
Professor Anne Ferguson-Smith  
Professor Gideon Henderson (items 1-9)  
Professor Martin Humphries (Chair of the meeting)  
Professor Andrew Millar (items 4-11)  
Professor Christine Orengo  
Professor Guy Poppy (UKRI-BBSRC Interim Executive Chair)  
Professor Jo Price  
Professor Steven Spoel  
Professor Ijeoma Uchegbu

### **Also attending:**

Dr Amanda Collis  
Dr Karen Lewis  
Dr Sarah Perkins  
Bill Poll  
Professor Guy Poppy  
Dr Rosie Cornelius (item 5 only)  
Dr Karen Salt (item 7 only)  
Dr Pete Burlinson (item 8 only)  
Laura Notton (item 9 only)  
Anya Bek (item 10 only)  
Sarah Cresswell  
Ksymena Grzybowska (Secretary)

### **ITEM 1. OPENING REMARKS**

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. The Chair welcomed Guy Poppy to his first Council meeting in his role of interim BBSRC Executive Chair, Amanda Collis in her role of interim BBSRC Deputy Executive Chair and Jef Grainger to his first Council meeting in his role of interim BBSRC Executive Director, Research Strategy and Programmes (previously BBSRC Associate Director, Thematic Challenges).
3. Guy outlined his areas of priority during his time as interim Executive Chair, namely people, operation (peer review) and science. In relation to people, Council noted that the people survey's results demonstrated low staff morale and the Executive Leadership Team identified four areas to address via staff involvement in focus groups and all staff away day in November 2023. Council noted that there would also be an opportunity for Council members to engage with BBSRC staff at its next Council meeting held in Polaris House in Swindon. Council members offered to prepare short talks for the session with BBSRC staff.
4. In relation to peer review priority, Guy said that he had volunteered to be UKRI Champion for Peer Review. In terms of science priorities Guy's focus would be on relaunching Big Ideas Pipeline and using this platform to gather scientific ideas and excite the community.
5. Council noted the progress on appointing Council members and that interviews were planned for November 2023.
6. Guy updated Council about the appointment of his permanent successor, and it was confirmed that this was progressing.

7. Apologies were received from Ewan Birney, Nigel Scrutton and Malcolm Skingle.
8. Members were reminded to declare any changes to their registers. They should be highlighted by Council members at the meeting and the Secretariat would follow-up to update declarations via the Portal after the meeting. Members were asked to raise any conflicts arising during the course of the meeting.

## **ITEM 2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 JUNE 2023 (UKRI BBSRC 13/2023)**

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

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

10. The Chair went through the actions and most of them were either in hand or completed. Specifically, Council noted the following:
  - Action: UKRI-BBSRC 85/2023 – Council noted that interdisciplinary responsive mode applications addressed interdisciplinarity and that there were 141 applications with BBSRC component. A paper summarising the pilot would be provided for Council meeting in March 2024.
  - Action: UKRI-BBSRC 86/2023 - The update on Data Intensive Bioscience Review had been shared as part of the EC's report in June 2023. Draft vision of the BBSRC open data and research data management policy that was discussed by BBSRC Transformative Technologies Strategy Advisory Panel will be shared in due course.
  - Action UKRI BBSRC 90/2023 - outcomes of the evaluation relating to BBSRC attributable spin outs would be shared in December 2023.

## **ITEM 4. EXECUTIVE CHAIR'S REPORT (UKRI BBSRC 14/2023)**

11. 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.
12. Council noted five new Global Partnerships Awards, under the UKRI Health, Ageing and Wellbeing Strategic Theme, working with the USA, Japan, Singapore, Europe and Africa would support the joint BBSRC / MRC funded Ageing Research and Innovation Networks in creating or sustaining existing partnerships with international collaborators to pump-prime alliances and build readiness in the community to take on future joint opportunities within the international ageing research space. Council was also interested in other international priorities and noted bilateral developments with DFG (German Research Foundation) operating through responsive mode. There was also a trilateral between Canada, the USA and Germany focusing on plant science. There were other partnerships with Singapore and Japan in synthetic biology, all supported through DSIT priorities fund. Council considered future international initiatives in the next spending review and reflected on geopolitical interests influencing partnerships and the portfolio. BBSRC worked on the basis of sustained and extended appetite for international collaborations.
13. Council was interested in Global Centres in Clean Energy and Climate Change and noted that six proposals were approved for funding with the USA, Canada and Australia of which four included UK partners. Council noted that there was a strong bioscience component in one of the bids.
14. Council asked about measuring impact through Networks in Industrial Biotechnology and Bioenergy (NIBB) in the context of campuses and place agenda. Council noted that there was an evaluation of BBSRC investments in Industrial Technology (including NIBB) and that more information would be shared with Council.

***UKRI BBSRC 91/2023: BBSRC to share the evaluation of BBSRC's investments in Industrial Biotechnology (Paul Reeves, probably March 2024).***

15. Council welcomed the news about association with Horizon Europe and asked about guarantees scheme and the budget. Council was informed that discussions about underspend of the commitments that would exist until the end of this financial year were taking place. Council noted that the level of uncertainty was reduced and reflected on the importance of the UK community re-connecting and engaging with Horizon Europe. Council asked about oversight and accountability of Horizon Europe Association and it was Department for Science, Innovation & Technology's (DSIT) responsibility.
16. Council was interested in highlights linked to Wheat Evaluation commissioned by BBSRC, ahead of its formal publication in October 2023. Council commented on the importance of wheat case study to showcase links with different schemes, government funding and different stakeholders, including industry.

#### **ITEM 5. UPDATES FROM UKRI (ORAL)**

17. The Chair welcomed Rosie Cornelius to the meeting, who provided updates as follows:
  - UKRI had welcomed the announcement of the association with Horizon Europe and discussed some challenges.
  - Council was also informed that work undertaken to prepare for non-association would not be lost and there were aspects we can follow-up in future.
  - Council noted the progress on the collective funding approach to talent across UKRI with an aim to harmonise and support porosity.
  - Monitoring framework for open access policy would be published soon.
  - There was an ongoing review of peer review.
  - In relation to place agenda, there was a new target for spend outside Greater South East (GSE) as proportion of UKRI's budget.
  - UKRI had received over 1000 applications as part of cross-research responsive mode pilot call.
  - Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) had announced first cohort of programme directors.
18. Council discussed the relationship between UKRI and ARIA and opportunities to connect. Council noted that Ottoline Leyser, UKRI CEO met with ARIA CEO and ARIA CEO met with UKRI Board. Council discussed the importance of engaging with ARIA and exploring relationships e.g. how we complement each other in developing strategies.
19. The Chair thanked Rosie for providing her update to Council.

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

20. Gideon Henderson (DEFRA CSA) shared his updates with Council. The government updates related to Horizon Europe Association, Climate Week Conference in New York held in September 2023, the next Spending Review (probably covering one year only) and UK Biological Security Strategy published in June 2023. On the latter, Gideon asked about biothreats and whether this was managed as a risk. Council noted that this was picked up at UKRI level and through Trusted Research and Innovation stream of work. Council considered having a discussion item on biosecurity on future Council agenda.

***Action UKRI BBSRC 92/2023: Council considered having a discussion item on biosecurity on future Council agenda. (Ksymena to note on the Council forward Look).***

21. It was noted that there was some Official Development Assistance funding available for R&D commitment in climate related activities and that could be an opportunity for BBSRC and UKRI.
22. Defra updates related to Land Use for Net Zero Hub and Gideon commented positively about collaboration with BBSRC and other funders, including Devolved Administrations.

23. Gideon also informed about Defra's fellowship programmes for post docs and hiring senior civil servants.

## **ITEM 7. TRUSTED RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (ORAL)**

24. The Chair welcomed Karen Salt, UKRI Deputy Director, R&I System Diversity and Security, to the meeting and invited her to introduce her item. The aim of the presentation was to stimulate advice to BBSRC and UKRI. Council was informed of the purpose of the programme and current UKRI activities.
25. UKRI had launched its Trusted Research and Innovation (TR&I) work programme to protect UK researchers and businesses in thriving and collaborative research and innovation sector. This programme was an enabling mechanism that was designed to ensure that collaborations and partnerships could flourish. It was not about restricting activities or limiting innovation, but it aimed to provide a risk management and mitigation ecosystem.
26. The work program included updates to grants management processes, including Council and Innovate UK terms and conditions, developing and implementing effective risk assessment protocols, collaborating with key international partners by sharing of knowledge and best practice, establishing a training and communication program and putting in place a strong and supportive governance structure.
27. Council noted that BBSRC was working on the ten steps plan and risk assessment and had helpful discussions with strategic partners and institutes strategically funded by BBSRC.

*The final section of this paragraph was deemed business sensitive and was therefore recorded separately.*

28. The Chair thanked Karen Salt for presenting to Council.

## **ITEM 8. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN BIOSCIENCE AND BIOTECHNOLOGY: PROGRESS TO DATE AND FORWARD LOOK (UKRI BBSRC 15/2023)**

29. The Chair welcomed Pete Burlinson, BBSRC Head of Strategy, Rules of Life, to the meeting and invited him to introduce the paper.
30. Artificial intelligence (AI) was a transformative technology that was already demonstrating widespread impact and disruptive potential, including in the biosciences. Alongside Engineering Biology, AI was the other key technology where bioscience has significant interest.
31. BBSRC was actively engaging in AI activities across UKRI. UKRI reviewed AI approximately two years ago, publishing a report that set out areas of opportunity as well as cross cutting issues. There was an emerging UKRI AI framework. Council noted that UKRI will shortly undertake a cross-Council portfolio 'deep dive' and AI strategy refresh.
32. It was timely for BBSRC Council to advise on how BBSRC should respond to the potential opportunities and challenges as BBSRC approached the spending review and a refresh of the UKRI AI strategy.
33. Council discussed polarisation within the community where AI usage differed across the community some people and agreed that BBSRC/UKRI should be pioneering new approaches. Council also considered whether data was suitable for AI use and noted that data management was a challenge that could be partially addressed by BioFAIR. Linking with international partnerships, such as ELIXIR would enable capturing data using international standards.
34. Other comments that Council made were as follows:
  - Council agreed that it was key to demonstrate positive examples of AI usage and encourage upskilling to ensure researchers/workforce were AI enabled.

- Council asked about the UK's position and its competitive advantage in AI technology development and emphasised its translation/application role and potential UK's focus on this aspect and leading in health and bioscience.
- AI allowed to get data into models, and this could be a strength, especially in areas such as synthetic biology, microbial and plants systems. Potential strengths could be in areas where there was structural data, composition and communities, e.g. phenotyping. Council also said that identifying such areas would be key for the next spending review bid.
- Doctoral training centres targeting training in AI would not only help with developing skills but would also be helpful in the context of place agenda.
- Council also noted that UKRI review of AI was important in the context of considering AI for scientific purposes and enabling different approaches. It would be great if BBSRC could lead in this area and promote positive case studies.
- It will be important to explore infrastructure, skills and different data owners.
- Networks and communities will be driving data standards and BioFAIR can identify these communities. Funders have a role to play to ensure data standards.

35. The Chair thanked Pete for attending the meeting and presenting the paper.

## **ITEM 9. UPDATE ON UKRI'S APPROACH TO 'PLACE' AND LEVELLING UP (UKRI BBSRC 16/2023)**

36. The Chair welcomed Laura Notton, BBSRC Associate Director, Strategy and Planning, and invited Sarah Perkins to introduce this item.
37. This paper updated Council on developments within UKRI and wider government in relation to place and levelling up since Council's previous discussion on this topic in September 2021, and anticipated implications for BBSRC. It highlighted the UKRI Policy on Place Funding, which recognised that R&D-active sectors were at the heart of high value job creation and economic growth. This Policy articulated an aim to grow capacity to perform research and innovation, as well as enhance the contribution R&D makes to growth across the UK.
38. Council noted the revised DSIT target aiming to increase spend outside of the GSE by £1.3bn by the end of the SR period. Different methodologies had been used to establish the target. Council also noted UKRI and BBSRC investment profiles and whilst the trend was heading in the right direction, UKRI were pursuing several interventions to increase the pace of change such as increasing in the proportion of Research England's QR funding to universities outside the GSE, increasing in the proportion of UKRI budget delivered through Innovate UK, including Innovation Accelerators, delivery of the Strength in Places Fund, actions already delivered within the place section of Council Strategic Delivery Plans, and Cross-UKRI activities such as the introduction the Place Toolkit, which supports teams across UKRI to build place and Levelling Up in the design and delivery of programmes.
39. UKRI was considering different interventions within UKRI investments and tilting opportunities, connectivity and engagement and UKRI funding policy.
40. Council noted that BBSRC Executive Leadership Team had commissioned an internal Task and Finish group to develop a proactive framework to strategically develop the BBSRC approach in response to and in line with the target. BBSRC was also developing long-term position on place and undertaking activities described in the paper.
41. Sarah sought Council's views on BBSRC positioning and engagement, particularly in relation to growing capacity to perform research and innovation across the UK.
42. Council made the following points in the discussion:

- Council acknowledged that UKRI was considering investment interventions to further understand the impact and issues in relation to infrastructure and clusters and noted that a lot of government investment and research calls in infrastructure were typically outside Greater South East. City Region Deals and Aberystwyth's Green Futures Innovation Park were mentioned as examples. Council recognised strong infrastructure across UK including Institutes strategically funded by BBSRC.
  - Council considered using catapult centres, similarly to Northern Ireland, to build the ecosystem.
  - Council discussed incentivising interdependencies and encouraging partnerships that are strategic and not creating regional competition. EPSRC's Doctoral Training Partnerships was cited as an example of maximising interdependencies, collaboration across the country and changing culture.
  - It was noted that BBSRC Institute Strategy was about connectivity and that Institutes strategically funded by BBSRC were on the journey to enhance collaboration and there could be more scrutiny on this.
  - It was important to provide access to national facilities for all, including those from different regions.
  - Council considered targeting money to regions – e.g. via follow on funding and Doctoral Training Partnerships.
  - Council said that quality funding through Research England and collective talent would have positive impact on place agenda.
  - Council said that grand challenges calls in national collaboration would have an impact in place agenda too.
  - Another example was Engineering Biology Mission Hubs model to work across the country, spreading funding and access.
  - It would be important to look where the market was rather than focusing on geographical coverage based on power of research (REF) only and ensuring Institutes were a key component.
  - The question was how we achieve the target diversifying the research in the country and Council agreed that it would be necessary to continue maintaining quality of science, optimising regionalisation, and improving strength.
  - Acceptance of the UK golden triangle and global investment there.
43. In relation to communications, Council suggested involving the community before formal comms and providing case studies with good examples.

44. The Chair thanked Council members for their contributions.

#### **ITEM 10. BIENNIAL RISK UPDATE, REVIEW, AND DISCUSSION (UKRI BBSRC 17/2023)**

*This discussion was deemed business sensitive and therefore recorded separately in an annex.*

#### **ITEM 11. AOB AND FORWARD LOOK (UKRI BBSRC 12/2023)**

45. Council noted the dates for future meetings and future agenda items.

Council Secretariat

November 2023

Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
	<i>Actions from March 2023 Council meeting</i>			
4.	<i>Action: UKRI-BBSRC 85/2023: A paper summarising cross-Council responsive mode pilot scheme would be provided to Council, probably at its meeting in March 2024.</i>	<i>Amanda Collis</i>	<i>March 2024</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
4.	<i>Action UKRI-BBSRC 86/2023: BBSRC to share draft vision of the BBSRC open data and research data management policy that was discussed by BBSRC Transformative Technologies Strategy Advisory Panel.</i>	<i>Amanda Collis</i>	<i>TBC</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
	<i>Actions from June 2023 Council meeting</i>			
4	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 90/2023: Karen will share the outcomes of the evaluation relating to BBSRC attributable spin outs.</i>	<i>Karen Lewis</i>	<i>December 2023</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>

Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
	<i>Actions from September 2023 Council meeting</i>			
4	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 91/2023: BBSRC to share the evaluation of BBSRC's investments in Industrial Biotechnology (Paul Reeves, probably March 2024).</i>	<i>Paul Reeves</i>	<i>March 2024</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
6	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 92/2023: Council considered having a discussion item on biosecurity on future Council agenda. (Ksymena to note on the Council forward Look).</i>	<i>Ksymena Grzybowska</i>	<i>October 2023</i>	<i>Noted</i>



