



Council Meeting
Thursday, 6 July 2023
12:30 – 15:30
Hybrid Meeting

Minutes

Attendees	
Council Members:	Professor Dame Jessica Corner (JC) (Chair) Dr Phil Clare (PC) Ms Sharon Ellis (SE) (virtual) (Items 1–7) Dame Janet Finch (JF) Professor Cathy Gormley-Heenan (CGH) Dr Anne-Marie Imafidon (AMI) (Items 1–7) Professor Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad (CRP) (virtual) Mr Mike Rees (SIM) (MR) Professor Graeme Reid (GR) Professor Colin Riordan (CR) (virtual)
Observers:	Ms Helen Cross (HC), SFC Mr Paul Murphy (PM) (on behalf of Heather Cousins), DfE NI (virtual)
UKRI:	Mr Tim Bianek (TB), Chief Operating Officer (for Items 1–6) Deputy Director Investment Strategy (on behalf of Dan Shah) (virtual) (for Items 1–5)
Officers:	Ms Jacqui Dovey (JD) Ms Alice Frost (AF) Dr Steven Hill (SH)
RE Staff:	Associate Director of Research Head of Strategic Coordination Funding and Assurance Manager (for Item 5) Funding Round Manager (for Item 5)
Apologies:	<u>Council Members</u> Dr Carol Bell (CB) Professor Ian Greer (IG) Ms Bronwen Maddox (BM) <u>Observers</u> Professor Naren Barfield (NB), I&E Champion Dr David Blaney (DB), HEFCW Heather Cousins (HC), DfE NI Ms Susan Lapworth (SL), OfS Professor Trevor McMillan (TM), KE Champion Mr Dan Shah (DSH), UKRI
Secretariat:	Head of Governance and Risk Secretariat Officer

Item	
1.	Welcome and Introductions
1.1	JC welcomed all to the meeting, in particular, Tim Bianek (Chief Operating Officer for UKRI); Paul Murphy (Senior HE Research Manager from DfE NI) attending on behalf of Heather Cousins; the Deputy Director Investment Strategy attending on behalf of Dan Shah; RE's Associate Director of Research; and RE's Funding and Assurance Manager and RE's Funding Round Manager, attending for the Funding Budgets item.
1.2	JC also welcomed RE's two newest Council members, Sharon Ellis and Colin Riordan. Sharon is Chief Operations Officer at Queen Mary University, London and brings a fantastic range of experience, both from government and the sector having previously worked in various government departments and as Director of International Science and Innovation at BEIS before joining Queen Mary. Colin is currently President and Vice-Chancellor at Cardiff University and has substantial and broad sector experience not only in England and Wales, but also across the UK as a whole. A third new member, Professor Colette Fagan (Vice-president for Research at the University of Manchester) has also been appointed: she will start her term on Council in April 2024. Both JF and GR's terms have been extended for one year.
1.3	Apologies were received from Naren Barfield, Carol Bell, David Blaney, Ian Greer, Susan Lapworth, Bronwen Maddox and Trevor McMillan.
1.4	Council provided positive feedback on the 'meet and greet' session held before the meeting at the RE office, stating that they found it to be enjoyable and very worthwhile.
1.5	The CSA for National Security was, unfortunately, unable to join this meeting as planned but is likely to attend a future meeting. RE will continue to work on engaging with the CSA Network.
1.6	Terms of Reference for UKRI councils' Councils have been shared with Council for information.
2.	Minutes and Actions of the meeting held on 11 May 2023
	<u>Minutes</u>
2.1	The minutes were accepted as being an accurate record of the previous meeting.
	<u>Actions</u>
2.2	There were no outstanding actions.
	<u>Matters Arising</u>
2.3	There is only one action outstanding on the RE Council Self-Assessment Action Plan – for the RE Executive Group to consider holding a Council Away Day once the new Executive Chair is in post. Council will discuss this during their next closed session after the September RE Council meeting.
	Action: RE Council to consider requirement(s) for an Away Day during their Closed Session following the 28 September 2023 RE Council meeting.

3.	UKRI COO Remarks
3.1	TB set the context for current organisational change programmes. The Government has set targets for UKRI to significantly reduce its headcount and operational expenditure. Although there has been an increase in collaboration across the organisation with a focus on multidisciplinary research and science, the organisation is still somewhat fragmented in the way that it operates. The UKRI Chief Executive is keen to move away from the concept of nine member councils with a corporate hub to a model of councils running alongside pan UKRI functions, some of which will be delivered centrally and some of which will be delivered by individual councils such that there is proper integration and increased collaboration. This aligns with a 'double hatting' approach whereby staff fulfil individual roles and responsibilities while also making a contribution to UKRI as a whole.
3.2	UKRI does not yet have a single enterprise resource planning or unified finance system. SHARP (a single finance, HR and procurement system for the organisation) is due to be delivered in April 2024; the Funding Service (grant system) will harmonise and simplify grant processing; and a new ERM system is being developed with a view to consolidating information on internal and external stakeholder engagement. The Operating Model programme is considering how work is carried out and how to increase efficiency, simplify processes and reduce bureaucracy. It is also seeking to identify where expertise sits within the organisation and how it can be optimised across the organisation as a whole. Underpinning this is how UKRI arranges, sorts and uses the data that it holds. In addition to improving the organisation's efficiency, the aim is to influence government policy and show impact while also addressing the recommendations of the Grant Review.
3.3	TB stated that it is unlikely that creation of DSIT will change the nature of the work that UKRI is doing but that it is likely to have implications on approach to work, such as the need to be agile in use of data and the need to be responsive to political change.
3.4	Council requested specific examples of harmonisation or simplification to make the conceptual picture more real. TB referenced simplification of differences in grants processing to streamline grant funding and the simplification of delegations processes to improve governance.
3.5	Council enquired about changes that university offices might expect to see. TB responded that the Simpler and Better Funding programme is working through an incremental delivery programme, which is already providing a service that is easier to use and which will continue to improve over the next 6 – 18 months.
3.6	JD informed Council that RE has been carrying out its own discrete piece of work on Organisation Design sitting within the People workstream, which is being led by the UKRI Chief People Officer. That programme of work is aiming to ensure that the right resource (people, systems and processes) are in place for enhanced organisational efficiency and resilience. Council stressed the importance of investment in leadership and people. TB stated that there will be sharing of best practice as the organisation seeks to harmonise its functions and that a distributive leadership approach will be taken whereby leaders from across the organisation will be gathered to develop ideas about the best approaches to work, drawing from their own experience and relationships across the organisation.
4.	UKRI Strategy Update
4.1	The Deputy Director Investment Strategy explained that they lead the Investment Strategy team in UKRI and that they play a key role in planning the investment portfolio

	<p>across all nine UKRI councils as well as considering how to make an ongoing investment across the whole R&I system. Their update included the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UKRI is midway through the current SR period, which runs to March 2025. • This is the first time that UKRI has had a multi-year settlement. • The timing of the next SR is not known. • UKRI did not have an agreed strategy before the last SR; however, one is now in place. • The new department (DSIT) has a specific role for coordinating R&D development. • The S&T Framework sets out high-level government priorities for investments. • UKRI's current focus is on big issues to be addressed for the next SR.
5.	RE Funding Budgets
5.1	<p>JD introduced the paper, noting that it pertains to the annual allocation of sector-level budgets, that proposed three-year budgets were endorsed by RE Council in June 2022, that this presentation builds on previous conversations with Council about the budget, and that Council has also had sight of the budget during a mini session held with them on 28 June 2023. RE's Funding Round Manager then provided an overview of the budget.</p>
5.2	<p>Council queried what the circumstances would be for not accepting short-term funding. JC responded that, last year, RE had been asked to help with distribution of funds associated with Horizon at short notice via RE's funding mechanism. RE's Associate Director of Funding explained that, in the past, some funding has been refused if the timeframe for delivery has been too short or if a novel or complicated funding mechanism has been required. RE needs to know as early as possible about funding to enable it to be best used. A balance must be struck between use of the funding and the ease with which the funding can be distributed. For example, it is difficult to allocate funding that has to be spent within a few months.</p>
5.3	<p>Council commented that it would be alarming if RE was not able to process short-term funding due to resource pressures and that the organisation should be correctly resourced to carry out all of the functions that it needs to. HC stated that, in responding to government requests, the resources to administer that request do need to be taken into account as well. Council agreed that there should be an associated cost of administering funding with the allocation of any funding.</p>
5.4	<p>Council commented that, over the past few years, universities have adapted to the likelihood of short-term funding so have now factored this into their planning and are becoming more adept at coping with and responding to this type of funding. Council also stated that RE should not be the only mechanism within UKRI for administering this type of funding. The Deputy Director Investment Strategy responded by stating that UKRI has just carried out an exercise where they have considered in-year short-term funding and the management of, and avenues for absorbing. JC stressed the importance of maintaining the balance of dual support throughout any type of funding.</p>
5.5	<p>JD stated that RE has always been able to administer funding thus far and that the new analytic platform will also help with the smooth delivery of funding. Council again raised the issue of appropriate resourcing, and TB stated that an internal discussion is required to ensure that there is sufficient resource resilience within RE in the light of the operating expenditure challenges and in the context of what RE is being asked to do in terms of administering short-term funding.</p>

5.6	<p>Regarding the specific actions for RE Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Council noted the content of the DSIT funding and priorities letter, including the grant settlement for FY 2023-24 and indicative settlement for FY 2024-25. b) Council noted that the first call on the budget for FY 2023-24 is £450m of existing funding commitments for AY 2022-23. c) Council endorsed the proposal that 25.6% of the FY 2024-25 indicative resource funding budget (£618m) should be allocated to the AY 2023-24 budget, enabling RE to honour the provisional budgets published in July 2022. d) Council endorsed the proposed conversion of indicative FY 2024-25 budgets to expected AY 2024-25 budgets (Figure 4 in Paper C23/17), including an assumed contribution of £48m from DfE and provisional contribution of £683m from FY 2025-26, acknowledging that the actual contribution is, as yet, an unknown figure, but indicating their willingness to accept the associated risk. e) Council endorsed the disaggregation of the research and knowledge exchange resource funding AY budgets and capital funding FY budgets to proposed totals for individual funding streams, as set out in Paper C23/17. f) Council noted that subsequent allocations to individual HEPs will need approval by the RE Executive Chair in line with the scheme of delegation, before being announced to the sector.
6.	Executive Chair's Report
6.1	<p>JC touched on highlights from the report to include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the May meeting, initial REF decisions have been announced, and the initial reaction has been positive; however, ongoing dialogue is planned. • There has been a lot of engagement on the independent review of spinouts, which includes consideration of the ongoing role of universities in spinouts. JC sits on the advisory group for this review. • Interviews for the Director of Insight & Engagement role will take place later this month. • PC is taking over from Richard Armour as TR&I champion.
6.2	<p>Council provided positive feedback on JC's role in leading the Open Access agenda. Council also commented on the mention of research infrastructure in the annex of the report. The Associate Director of Research stated that there is a commitment in the SDP to achieving a better understanding of the estate. RE is also co-funding a project with AHRC aimed at getting a better understanding of arts and humanities infrastructure.</p>
7.	Strategic Institutional Research Funding (SIRF) Review
7.1	<p>SH provided an overview of the programme to undertake a fundamental review of strategic institutional research funding. He noted that there is an opportunity for early Council involvement in shaping this piece of work and that Council comments and thoughts are welcome on proposed approach and timeline. The paper outlines some of the anticipated risks and complementary workstreams.</p>
7.2	<p>The Associate Director of Research used slides to provide an overview of core principles, approaches and mechanisms. She explained that the review will be considering formula rather than competitive funding, that it will be steered by Council member input within and outside of formal meetings, and that it will align with other work currently underway (such as development of REF policy). The Research Funding Policy team is working with the Insight & Engagement team on stakeholder engagement and is taking into account other</p>

	ongoing work, such as development of REF 2028 activity. The team is currently working on Package 1. It is anticipated that the level of engagement will increase as the programme develops. Council stated that this is clearly a pivotal project that will draw a lot of attention.
7.3	<p>During the discussion, the following points were raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team will draw on the RE EDI advisory group to ensure that EDI is appropriately considered throughout this piece of work. • This is the most important project that RE has undertaken since its inception and is likely to undertake. • It will be important to ensure that the principle of the dual support is kept separate and out of scope from this piece of work. • The work is well designed and timely. • It may be worth the team trying to anticipate difficult or challenging questions, in advance, and determining how they might respond to these, particularly where these may undermine the important principles that underpin QR funding.
7.4	HC explained that the UKRI project looking at dual support is considering whether the current view of dual support is the way in which dual support should continue to be viewed given that there are other funders of research. Also, the extent to which the balance of dual support is supporting the financial sustainability of the sector is being considered.
7.5	The Associate Director of Research stated that the team is meeting regularly with colleagues from the devolved administrations so that there are no unexpected surprises for them. HC stated that Scotland has its own programme of work that would align with the proposed transparency work and that it would be helpful to liaise with AL on how this work is framed.
8.	FRAP Update
8.1	SH provided an update on the future research assessment programme, stating that the response to publication of the initial decisions document three weeks ago has been largely positive overall and that feedback has provided useful information for development of more detailed proposals, although there is still a lot of work to be done. He stated that there has been some negative commentary around the proposed increase in focus on people and culture: DSIT colleagues are handling this.
9.	Risk Assurance and Governance Report
9.1	MR chaired this section of the meeting. Council noted the updated strategic risks, link between risks and strategic delivery plan (SDP) objectives and risk appetite associated with each of the risks. They also noted the overview of the top UKRI risks and update on RE's assurance programme. Council endorsed the new strategic risk register.
10.	AOB
10.1	Council acknowledged the contribution of the Secretariat Officer, who leaves RE later in July for a new job.

Date and Time of next Meeting: Thursday, 28 September 2023, 12:30 – 15:30
Venue of next Meeting: Caxton House, Tothill Street, London, SW1H 9NA