



**Research
England**

Council Meeting
Thursday, 11 May 2023
12:30 – 15:30
Hybrid Meeting

Minutes

| Attendees | |
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| Council Members: | Professor Dame Jessica Corner (JC) (Chair) Dr Carol Bell (CB) (virtual) Dr Phil Clare (PC) Dame Janet Finch (JF) (virtual) Professor Cathy Gormley-Heenan (CGH) Professor Ian Greer (IG) Dr Anne-Marie Imafidon (AMI) (virtual) Ms Bronwen Maddox (BM) (virtual) Professor Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad (CRP) (virtual) Mr Mike Rees (SIM) (MR) (virtual) Professor Graeme Reid (GR) |
| Observers: | Dr Cat Ball (CAB), SFC (attending on behalf of Helen Cross) Professor Naren Barfield (NB), I&E Champion Ms Harriet Barnes (HB), HEFCW (attending on behalf of David Blaney) Ms Heather Cousins (HC), DfE NI Ms Susan Lapworth (SL), OfS |
| UKRI: | Mr Dan Shah (DSH), Director of Investment Strategy & System Insight |
| Officers: | Ms Jacqui Dovey (JD) (virtual) Ms Alice Frost (AF) Mr Ed Hughes (EH) |
| RE Staff: | Head of Strategic Co-ordination Head of Research Assessment Policy (for Item 5) Senior Policy Adviser, KE (for Item 6) Associate Director of Knowledge Exchange (for Item 6) |
| Apologies: | Dr Steven Hill (SH) Professor Trevor McMillan (TM), KE Champion |
| Secretariat: | Head of Governance and Risk Secretariat Officer |



| Item | |
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| 1. | Welcome and Introductions |
| 1.1 | JC welcomed all to the meeting, in particular, Cat Ball, Assistant Director of Research and Innovation at the Scottish Funding Council attending on behalf of Helen Cross, and Harriet Barnes, Director of Policy & Funding at HEFCW, attending on behalf of David Blaney. She noted that RE's Associate Director of Knowledge Exchange (KE) and the Senior Policy Adviser, KE would be attending the meeting for the KE Review item and that the Head of Research Assessment Policy would be joining the meeting <withheld from publication>. |
| 1.2 | Apologies were received from Dr Steven Hill (RE's Director of Research) and Professor Trevor McMillan (KE Champion). |
| 1.3 | JC noted that this would be the last meeting for EH, who leaves RE at the end of June <withheld from publication>. She thanked EH for the significant contribution he has made to RE and wished him well in his new role. |
| 2. | Minutes and Actions of the meeting held on 2 February 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 | JC stated that it is intended for various CSAs to attend Council, with the CSA for National Security to attend the July meeting. On a related note, RE would be keen for a Council member to support the Head of Strategic Coordination in their work on Trusted Research, as TR&I Champion, a role which <withheld from publication> previously undertook. <i>Post meeting note: Due to other commitments, the CSA for National Security has sent his apologies for the July RE Council meeting but expressed an interest in attending a future meeting, diary permitting.</i> <i>Phil Clare has agreed to work alongside the Head of Strategic Coordination as TR&I champion.</i> |
| 2.4 | JC provided an update on Council recruitment. The campaign for new members closed on 21 March, followed by shortlisting and then three sets of interviews in April and May. The secretariat is in the process of arranging a final set of interviews for two remaining candidates with a view to appointing two members for an immediate start and a further two members for an April 2024 start. |
| 3. | UKRI Strategy Update |
| 3.1 | DSH provided an overview covering the wider governmental landscape, specific policy areas and the internal UKRI perspective as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the February 2023 meeting, UKRI has acquired a new parent department, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). |

| Item | |
|------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have also been changes in government personnel (new Secretary of State, Ministers and senior officials that UKRI works with). Alex Jones (who has a long working relationship with UKRI) is the new DSIT Director General for Science, Innovation and Growth, and Ben Johnson has joined DSIT as Senior Policy Adviser to the Secretary of State. Professor Dame Angela McLean is the new Government Chief Scientific Adviser. • The UK Science and Technology Framework has been published, which sets out the Government's approach to making the UK a science and technology superpower by 2030, with a focus on 10 key areas. UKRI is involved in some of the delivery strands associated with the framework. There have also been a number of other announcements relating to the Government's technology priorities. • The Integrated Review Refresh 2023 has been published, which updates the Government's security, defence, development and foreign policy priorities to reflect changes in the global context since the Integrated Review of 2021. • In the Foreign Secretary's 2023 Mansion House speech, he outlined the UK Government's position on China, adopting a more nuanced approach to the relationship. • Regarding Horizon Europe, the £1bn mark for bids for guaranteed funds has been passed: association remains the preferred option for the Government. • Significant progress has been made on the Place agenda due to the work of colleagues across the organisation: JC's role as UKRI SRO on Place is important in championing this agenda. • There is work underway across the organisation on the future Operating Model. • The UKRI Board will meet next week to discuss the future strategic agenda: considerations will include sustainability, resilience and the need to become a more evidenced-based organisation. • The optimum portfolio for the next spending review is also being considered internally, including the need for relevant evidence. |
| 3.2 | <p>Members queried whether there are plans for another round of guarantee funding for Horizon Europe as the current one is due to expire soon and whether headcount reductions within UKRI would hamper its ability to run Pioneer should it happen. DSH responded that preparations are being made for another round; however, in order to deliver any increase in activity, additional resource would also be required – a case would need to be made for this.</p> |
| 3.3 | <p>Members asked whether UKRI could provide greater clarity regarding the position on collaboration with China. DSH stated that there are some topics that HEPs should be reserved about discussing; however, there are other issues (such as global warming) on which collaboration would be beneficial. UUK is also considering what guidance is needed regarding China, and there is other work underway on how best to support academia in this area.</p> |
| 3.4 | <p>Members queried whether RE should respond to changes in the political context <withheld from publication>. It was agreed that, although RE needs to consider government priorities and grand challenges, <withheld from publication>. The upcoming strategic review of research funding should provide a useful perspective.</p> |



| Item | |
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| 3.5 | Council discussed issues affecting the financial sustainability of HEPs, including inflationary pressures and loss of international student income. DSH stated that there is a sustained programme of work ongoing regarding the financial sustainability of research funding with modelling underway as to how the system would be affected under different scenarios. In the short term, universities have been absorbing inflationary effects locally, helped by interventions such as a change in the indexation policy for research council grants and increases to PhD stipends. |
| 4. | Executive Chair's Report |
| 4.1 | Since the previous meeting, JC has continued a programme of engagement, including a visit to Cambridge with Andrew Mackenzie, and visits to Oxford and York. |
| 4.2 | JC echoed that financial sustainability is a common concern across the sector, noting that inflation poses a particular risk with early signs that universities are starting to think about scaling back on their research activities. There have also been many questions about the Landscape Review, which signals a review of QR, and the sector would like an early indication of the form that future research assessment will take. |
| 4.3 | Regarding the UKRI Operating Model work, JC has requested that RE have special consideration as, due to our size, it would be impossible for us to scale back on numbers as existing staff are already stretched to capacity. |
| 4.4 | In terms of Place, UKRI suggested options to address BEIS's ambitious target to shift spend outside of the Greater South-East (GSE), leading to an agreed policy that Place would be a criterion for funding stream decisions, noting that QR funding has already increased by 16.5% outside of the GSE. |
| 4.5 | Council endorsed the proposed changes to the Terms and Conditions of RE Funding outlined in the Executive Chair's Report. |
| 4.6 | The Chancellor's independent review of university spinouts has been launched. JC has been invited to sit on the advisory group for this and will contribute RE insights and evidence supported by the KE team. |
| 4.7 | JC stated that she was pleased to be able to attend the funeral of Peter Saraga on behalf of RE. Council formally acknowledged the enormous contribution Peter made, his role at HEFCE, contribution to establishing RE, and work as RE Council's first SIM. |
| 4.8 | Council queried how they could engage at an early stage with the review of Strategic Institutional Research Funding (SIRF). JC stated that the process is still at an early stage; however, there will be an opportunity for Council to be involved in how the review is shaped. A SIRF mini session will be arranged to allow for more focused discussion. |
| 4.9 | Council queried whether there were any figures available reflecting the potential impact of inflation on the financial sustainability of the sector. JC explained that there is a time delay in the figures received from universities with data only just showing the impact of the pandemic on the sector. |



| Item | |
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| 4.10 | Council expressed concern that some of the points of greatest vulnerability are regions with less support. <withheld from publication>. EH stated that the OfS collects and analyses this sort of data and that RE could possibly try to access this. DSH agreed the time lag to receiving HESA data is a challenge. UKRI has commissioned independent data on the cost of research; however, data is difficult to obtain as there are different drivers of research, and data varies by discipline. Council stated that they were not requesting a rigorous analysis of the financial sustainability of institutions but were, rather, seeking to understand <withheld from publication> where a greater level of scrutiny might be required. |
| 4.11 | In response to queries regarding cybersecurity, the Head of Strategic Coordination stated that there is increased activity within UKRI and that UKRI is engaging with Jisc regarding the support that they are providing via the Janet network. The Head of Strategic Coordination stated that they would provide Council with an overview once they have a clearer picture of the situation. |
| | Action: Head of Strategic Coordination to provide Council with an overview of security issues. |
| 5. | <withheld from publication> |
| 6. | Knowledge Exchange (KE) Review – HEIF Eligibility |
| 6.1 | AF and members of the KE team provided an overview of decisions on eligibility for KE funding, including Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF) as part of the review of KE funding and policy approaches in KE. |
| 6.2 | In February 2022, Council endorsed the objectives, timetable and workplan for a review of KE funding and related policies. A sub-group, chaired by CB, was set up to consider HEIF eligibility with a view to providing advice to the RE Executive Chair. |
| 6.3 | The recommendations on HEIF eligibility proposed by the sub-group, are underlined by the principle of having evidence of KE activity and are aimed at providing consistency. They provide a mechanism by which new entrants can access funding and by which access ceases for those no longer eligible. The tool designed to help with determining eligibility can be shared as a decision tree with providers. It is expected that expansion of eligibility would not impact on overall HEIF allocations significantly. DSH observed that this provides an opportunity to gather interesting data regarding the incentive effect of eligibility and marginal impact of funding. |
| 6.4 | Referring to recommendation 2d, members queried whether the requirements around the minimum level of reported activity that providers need to evidence (as listed in Annex A) are too onerous. CB clarified that providers do not have to meet all of the listed requirements, and the Senior Policy Adviser added that as all HEPs are required to submit this data to HESA or OfS, it is already gathered by providers and, therefore, low burden. |



| Item | |
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| 6.5 | Members asked whether this has been tested against known HEPs, and the Senior Policy Adviser responded that data exists for all providers who are potentially eligible. It was noted that the sub-group had considered whether providers should be required to meet two or three of the listed elements; however, they decided that only one should be required so as not to disadvantage providers who are focused on smaller areas of activity. AF stated that, in the long run, the new national KE data centre will help with providing useful KE data. |
| 6.6 | Members queried whether, due to inflation, the top and bottom thresholds of HEIF should be adjusted. DSH responded that this could be kept in reserve as an option for future decision makers. |
| 6.7 | Members also suggested that mentoring or support might be offered to organisations coming into this sort of activity at an early stage, whether this be through NCUB, another agency or like-minded institutes in other parts of the country. The Associate Director of KE advised that the Innovate UK KTN has previously been engaged through a supportive programme to provide HEPs with an opportunity to build and develop new relationships. <withheld from publication>. |
| 6.8 | Members were supportive of the proposals, noting that they address future as well as current issues and explain the mechanisms of KE and HEIF well. |
| 6.9 | Council endorsed the recommendations as contained within the paper. |
| 7. | Risk Assurance and Governance Report and Strategic Risk Review |
| 7.1 | MR chaired this section of the meeting, providing an overview of the Risk, Assurance and Governance report, noting that while the report contains information that pertains to RE's current strategic risks, a review has identified a proposed new suite of strategic risks and that reporting will be against the new risks from July 2023 onwards. |
| 7.2 | <withheld from publication>. |
| 7.3 | The Head of Governance and Risk provided an overview of the strategic risk review, explaining that when providing updates for the previous register, risk owners found there to be overlap and duplication. RE's Executive Group, therefore, undertook a brainstorming exercise, wherein a large number of risks were discussed with risks then grouped thematically to form a register of ten new strategic risks. The proposed new risk register shows how each new risk links to risks within the previous risk register. |
| 7.4 | Members indicated they were comfortable with the new structure but, <withheld from publication> queried whether the aggregated risk needs to be shown at finer level of detail. The Head of Governance and Risk explained that there will be an operational level <withheld from publication> risk register, which will capture risks at a more granular level, and which can be escalated to the strategic risk register as required. |
| 7.5 | Members indicated that they would prefer the risk report to retain its current format. The Head of Governance and Risk assured Council that once the new register is established |



| Item | |
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| | and confirmed, updates will be reported to Council in the same manner as they are currently. The register presented in the paper is a starting point to enable Council to approve the risks as listed. |
| 7.6 | The Head of Governance and Risk clarified that UKRI sets appetite levels for each of its areas (for example resourcing, strategy, operational issues) and that councils then have to map their risks to these. Council can discuss whether it feels these set appetites are at an appropriate level and, if not, the Head of Governance and Risk can address this with the UKRI Risk team. |
| 7.7 | <withheld from publication>. |
| 7.8 | <withheld from publication>. |
| 7.9 | <withheld from publication>. |
| 7.10 | Noting that there is further work to be done to fully develop the risks, members agreed that they were happy with the direction of travel as set out in the paper and endorsed the proposed new strategic risk register. |
| 7.11 | Referring to the assurance update provided, MR asked for some clarity around the process in place for HEPs. EH clarified that, under RE's T&Cs of funding there is a requirement for HEPs to carry out internal audits of their data processes. As part of the work our external auditors do when carrying out data audits, HEPs are asked to provide detail of their own internal audit mechanisms. |
| 7.12 | MR recalled that during the last meeting Council discussed UKRI's policy on freedom to speak up, and he suggested that consideration should be given as to whether this works and is sufficient for the purpose. AMI added that it would be useful to know whether anything has been raised relating to this given that the policy changed in October 2022. The Head of Governance and Risk responded that, as a trained investigator, they are copied into requests for support for UKRI's whistleblowing process: they were not aware of any cases related to RE. Council discussed the fact that no cases could be as concerning as multiple cases. |
| 8. | AOB |
| 8.1 | JC reminded Council that the next meeting will be taking place in Bristol with an opportunity for members to 'meet and greet' staff at the RE office: she looked forward to welcoming all who would be able to attend. |
| 8.2 | CB advised that she has started representing RE Council on a UKRI 'Green Future' advisory board and will report back to Council as work progresses. The Head of Governance and Risk has circulated opportunities for Council members to provide some extra support if they are able, including the role of a TR&I champion, and will continue to circulate these as they arise. |



**Research
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| Item | |
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| 8.3 | JC informed members that on 16 May 2023, she and MR will be attending a meeting of Council Executive Chairs and SIMs with UKRI Executives. The Head of Governance and Risk added that there is an 'All-Council' event taking place on 29 November and requested that any members not yet in receipt of an invitation to let the Secretariat know. |

Date and Time of next Meeting:

Thursday, 6 July 2023, 10:30–15:30

Venue of next Meeting:

Research England, Westward House, Lime Kiln Close, Stoke Gifford, Bristol BS34 8SR
St Michael's Centre, Stoke Gifford, Bristol BS34 8PD