

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

Date: 4 December 2024

Location: Virtual

Attendees

Members of EPSRC Council

Professor Charlotte Deane (EPSRC Executive Chair)
Professor Jeremy Baumberg (Senior Independent Member)
Professor Alison Etheridge
Professor Deborah Greeves
Professor Jane Hillston
Professor Andy Wright
Professor Dame Jane Jiang
Ms Siân John
Professor Tim Whitley
Mr Alan Newby
Dr Joe de Sousa

UKRI/EPSRC attendees

Andrew Bourne (Executive Director, Partnerships)
Jonathan Dawes (Deputy Executive Chair)
Nicola Goldberg (Chief Operating Officer)
Jane Nicholson (Executive Director, Research Base)
Kedar Pandya (Executive Director, Cross-Council Programmes)
Siobhan Peters (UKRI Chief Financial Officer)
Christine Ashton (Chief Information Officer)
Helen Morgan (UKRI Senior Finance Business Partner)
Daniel Shah (Interim Chief of Investment Planning and Strategy)

Secretariat/Observers

Gillian Bartoszewska (Senior Governance and Operations Manager)
Stephen Gilligan (Senior Portfolio Manager, Risk and Assurance)
Megan Maycock (Executive Assistant and Governance Manager)
Neil Robinson (Secretary to EPSRC Council)

Apologies

Professor Martin Schröder (Council member)
Mr Alex van Someren (CSA)

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.

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. Spending Review (SR) phase 1. Council were updated on the SR phase 1 timeline, noted the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) had received its allocation and negotiations for UKRI, and subsequently EPSRC, allocations were ongoing.
- 3.1.2. SR phase 2. Council noted the formal DSIT commission had not been received, however UKRI preparatory work reflected conversations surrounding clarity of likely asks. Council were presented with thinking around DSIT's science and technology priorities and how what EPSRC supports resonates and benefits wider society and citizens of the United Kingdom. Council talked through key messages and the areas EPSRC had been discussing with stakeholders.

Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- 3.1.3. Board Executive Council's Conference. Council reflected on the conference held on 26 November 2024 where conversations spanned financial pressures, attracting investment, mechanisms for commercialisation, multi-year financial agility and flexibility, protecting the talent pipeline and international opportunities.
- 3.1.4. Key Partners Update. Council congratulated colleagues on a very successful stakeholder engagement event, which brought together EPSRC's key stakeholders from academia, business and government departments with EPSRC leadership to discuss research and innovation strategy.
- 3.1.5. Operations update. Council were updated on the Simpler Better Funding project where the focus had been on developing the functionality and risk and assurance processes to allow the Service to award grants at scale. Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- 3.2. Council noted written updates on Finance, and an update on the STFC-EPSRC task and finish group.

4. UKRI colleague update

- 4.1. Council welcomed Siobhan Peters and Christine Ashton to the meeting. Siobhan gave an update on the UKRI Board, changes to senior UKRI staff, DSIT and UKRI's in year financial position.
- 4.2. Christine explained her approach to TFS including the changes in governance, the separation in focus between the development and service management, and her engagement with colleagues across UKRI over issues raised. She also described the future model of TFS as 'software as a service' rather than delivery of a business application.
- 4.3. Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

5. Session with UKRI Interim Chief of Investment Planning and Strategy

- 5.1. Council welcomed Dan Shah to the meeting. Dan gave an overview of the SR process, how UKRI was positioning itself for work on SR phase 2 and of ongoing multi-level conversations and contextualised discussions. Council appreciated the work UKRI had completed to support DSIT build its SR case. Council discussed areas of interest and potential to strengthen evidence-based arguments and made suggestions to support the UK talent pipeline.

6. Next Strategic Delivery Plan

- 6.1. Council were updated on the timeline for developing the next strategic delivery plan and how it would be framed around EPSRC's priorities:

- Future proof the STEM workforce for UK plc
- Build a sustainable and vibrant National Capability in research and infrastructure
- Catalyse the research and innovation the UK needs in Critical Technologies and Net Zero

6.2. Council discussed the balance between articulating ambitions and deliverables, bilateral opportunities to align approaches and to land messages with the community. Council members agreed to form a sub-group to provide timely engagement in the development process.

7. **Speed networking outputs**

7.1. Council were updated on the outputs from the Speed Networking session in the previous Council meeting and reflected on the summary of the rich discussions, which ranged from skills to emerging tech to commercialisation. Council highlighted the value of the reflection process for theme leads and welcomed the insight they had gained into their diverse portfolios.

7.2. Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

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.

8.2. Council discussed developing communication lines between Strategic Advisory Teams and Council, making explicit how advisory body input had been incorporated into items presented at Council and suggested future agenda topics.

9. **Risk**

9.1. Council were updated on the bi-annual risk management report and EPSRC's risk register and noted the highest rated risks of low response rates to peer review and the transition to TFS.

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9.3. Council discussed the low reviewer response rate and potential mitigating actions. Council suggested clearer articulation of our expectations on reviewing, including the consequences of the low response rates and that we investigate using more industry and industry laboratory experts to review grants. More stringent approaches to sanctioning grant applicants who do not review were discussed and there were differing views on whether we should take that approach.

10. **Information papers**

10.1. Council noted the information papers on EPSRC communications and impact stories and EPSRC University Doctoral Landscape Awards.

11. **Any other business**

11.1. 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.

11.2. Council noted this was Professor Tim Whitley's last meeting and thanked him for his service on EPSRC Council.

11.3. The next meeting will be held on 12 and 13 March 2025.