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Item 2  
Paper: ESRC 2025-08

**MINUTES OF THE 29th MEETING OF COUNCIL  
HELD ON 27<sup>th</sup> February 2025 VIRTUALLY.**

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<b>Present:</b>	Professor Todd Landman ( <i>Chair, Senior Independent Member</i> ) Professor Rachel Brooks Anita Charlesworth Professor Jane Duckett Professor Lasana Harris Professor Kimberley Scharf Professor Sarah Sharples ( <i>CSA</i> ) Professor Sir Bernard Silverman Professor Jackline Wahba
<b>Apologies:</b>	Ben Page and Marie Lloyd ( <i>interim Deputy Director for Governance and Policy</i> )
<b>Office:</b>	Stian Westlake ( <i>ESRC Executive Chair</i> ) Alison Park ( <i>ESRC Deputy Executive Chair</i> ) Jen Gold ( <i>ESRC Director of Research</i> ) Claire Graves ( <i>ESRC Chief Operating Officer</i> )
<b>Item 8</b>	Emily Clarke ( <i>ESRC Deputy Director of Strategy and Partnerships</i> )
<b>Secretariat</b>	Sam Richardson ( <i>ESRC Senior Manager, Executive Chair Office</i> )
<b>Secretariat</b>	Flo Bradley Sutton ( <i>ESRC Governance Manager</i> )
<b>Guests:</b>	Anna Valero (Item 6)

These minutes do not necessarily reflect the precise order in which items were discussed.

<b>1.</b>	<b>Welcome and apologies</b>
1.1	Professor Todd Landman welcomed members to the 29th meeting of Council.
1.2	Members were reminded to check their details currently being held on the conflicts register and update their details in time for them to be published in March.
1.3	Council members were asked to declare any potential conflicts of interest relating to the items on the agenda. Anita Charlesworth raised her role as trustee for HDR UK in relation to the strategy item. Sarah Sharples raised her role at DfT in relation to the Spending Review item.
<b>2.</b>	<b>Minutes of the previous meeting</b>

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2.1	The minutes of the previous meeting were <b>agreed</b> as an accurate record. The target year for UKRI's net-zero goal was corrected, as per Council member request
<b>3.</b>	<b>Council Forward Schedule</b>
3.1	Council members noted the forward schedule. Council members requested topics to be brought to future meeting in the areas of curiosity-led research, AI in research and data infrastructure and ESRC's approach to environmental sustainability.
<b>4.</b>	<b>Matters arising</b>
4.1	Members were updated on the status of matters arising from the previous meeting.
<b>5.</b>	<b>Executive Chair's Report</b>
5.1	Stian Westlake (SW) presented his Executive Chair report, including current plans to celebrate ESRC's 60 <sup>th</sup> anniversary and the appointment of the new UKRI CEO who will start in the summer.
5.2	ESRC's Chief Operating Officer updated Council on UKRI's commitment to net zero by 2040. Council members discussed a more holistic view to net zero, encouraging UKRI to be courageous in their ambitions.
<b>6.</b>	<b>Research and Development Support for Economic Growth</b>
6.1	Council welcomed Anna Valero (AV) to the meeting. AV provided an update on R&D Support for Economic Growth.
6.2	Council members thanked AV for attending the meeting.
<b>7</b>	<b>Research and Development support for the Government's Missions</b>
7.1	The Executive Chair and Jennifer Gold (JG) introduced the item and noted the emerging consensus across government that R&D budgets – including research council budgets – have a vital contribution to make in supporting the Government's five missions. SW and JG set out ESRC's proposed approach, including ESRC's leadership in the delivery of the R&D Missions Programme and options for using some of -ESRC's core budget to support the missions.
7.2	Council members were keen to ensure that social science researchers were made aware of any new mission-related funding opportunities given the relevance of the social sciences to addressing the challenges the missions face.
7.3	Council noted and appreciated the Local Policy and Innovation Partnership work taking place in West Yorkshire, including the 'living lab' opportunities relevant to the missions.

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7.4	Council discussed the role of the Programme Director and Challenge Directors that are being hired as part of the R&D Missions Programme. These appointments would be key to driving the missions' work forwards.
7.5	Council members thanked the Executive Chair and JG for an informed and important conversation.
<b>8.</b>	<b>Strategic Delivery Plan 2022-2025 development</b>
8.1	Emily Clarke (EC) led a discussion on the Strategic Delivery Plan (SDP). EC updated Council on the current timeline for publishing the SDP. Publication will be in the autumn of 2025, once it has been approved by UKRI Board.
8.2	EC explained that the SDP will be presented in two sections. One will provide a 'Strategic Narrative' where ESRC priorities will be mapped against the 'outcomes wheel' (UKRI's high-level goals, including supporting curiosity-driven research, delivering for citizens through better public services and the Government's missions, and economic growth). The other will set out ESRC's Strategic Objectives and detail how ESRC will deliver the six objectives in UKRI's five-year strategy.
8.3	Council members highlighted the importance of supporting high-quality curiosity-driven research. Council members discussed options for specific priorities surrounding targeted research funding. Council members encouraged ESRC to continue considering how to design technologies effectively as well as looking at public attitudes and responses.
8.4	Council discussed the importance of referencing existing investments in the new SDP to demonstrate how new targeted priorities build upon a wider and more holistic live portfolio.
8.5	Members discussed the process of peer review, noting the difficulties created by rising numbers of applications and constraints on reviewers. JG noted work within the Metascience Programme to test and evaluate innovations in peer review. Council agreed that the topic is important, and members should be kept updated on trends in peer review and changes to processes.
8.6	The Executive Chair thanked Council members for their insightful conversation and stated that he was very much looking forward to discussing this further in May.
<b>9.</b>	<b>Papers for discussion by exception and any other business</b>
9.1	Council thanked Professor Sir Bernard Silverman, Professor Rachel Brooks, Professor Jackline Wahba and Sir Chris Wormald for their contributions and time with ESRC Council, as this was their last Council meeting before departing.
9.2	Todd Landman thanked Anita Charlesworth for agreeing to Chair the next Council meeting on Thursday 22nd May.
<b>10.</b>	<b>Meeting closed.</b>