



**Council Meeting
Thursday, 21 November 2024
12:30 – 15:30
Hybrid Meeting**

Minutes

Attendees	
Council Members:	Dame Jessica Corner (JC) (Chair) Dr Carol Bell (CB) Dr Sharon Ellis (SE) Professor Colette Fagan (CF) Dame Janet Finch (JF) Professor Cathy Gormley-Heenan (CGH) Dr Anne-Marie Imafidon (AMI) Ms Bronwen Maddox (BM) Professor Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad (CRP) Mr Mike Rees (MR) (SIM) Professor Graeme Reid (GR) Professor Colin Riordan (CR) Professor Mark Smith (MS)
Observers	Dr Helen Cross (HC), SFC Mr Mark Lee (ML), DfE-NI
Officers	Ms Jacqui Dovey (JD) Ms Alice Frost (AF) Dr Kim Hackett (KH) Dr Steven Hill (SH)
UKRI	Mr Samuel Myers (SM), UKRI Strategy Directorate (on behalf of Dan Shah)
Apologies	Ms Harriet Barnes (HB), Medr, Observer Ms Susan Lapworth (SL), OfS, Observer RE Associate Director of Strategy and Planning
Guests	Associate Director of KE Data and Evidence, RE (for Item 5) Engagement Lead, Insight & Engagement Team, RE (for Item 5)
Secretariat	Council Secretariat



Item	
1.	Welcome and Introductions
1.1	JC welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Professor Mark Smith as a new Research England (RE) Council member. Mark officially started on 1 October 2024.
1.2	As Alice Frost retires at the end of the year, JC commemorated this as being her last meeting. Alice has served as RE's Director of Knowledge Exchange since its inception, previously working in a wide range of policy roles at HEFCE as well as holding a number of other roles in national policy prior to that. JC thanked Alice for her outstanding contribution to Knowledge Exchange.
	<u>Council Members for 2025</u>
1.3	JC announced the names of three new Council members from the latest round of Council recruitment: Professor Julia Buckingham CBE, Professor Dina Kiwan FAcSS and Dr Tony Raven FInstP MloD. It was further noted that Dame Janet Finch, Professor Graeme Reid and Ms Bronwen Maddox will finish their terms on Council at the end of March 2025, with new members to officially start on 1 April 2025.
1.4	Apologies were received from RE Associate Director of Strategy and Planning and observers, Harriet Barnes (Medr) and Susan Lapworth (OfS).
1.5	No conflicts of interest were declared at the meeting. Council members were asked to inform the Secretariat of any changes to those already declared.
	Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 September 2024
	<u>Minutes and Actions</u>
1.6	The minutes were accepted as being an accurate reflection of the last meeting.
	<u>Actions</u>
1.7	There were no outstanding actions on the Action Log.
	<u>Matters Arising</u>
1.8	No matters arising were raised at the meeting.
2.	Geopolitical Overview
2.1	JC welcomed BM who presented Council with a geopolitical overview, including her perspective on aspects of the geopolitical landscape, such as the recent US Elections.
2.2	Council appreciated the overview in the context of agenda items on strategic review, implications on UK funding with global implications of rising costs for UK government finances, and knock-on effects on the HE sector.
3.	RE Executive Chair's Report

Item	
3.1	JC gave a summary of her report, highlighting activities and strategic matters of interest to Council. She then drew attention to the review SE had independently conducted on the NCUB forward plan and grant funding for the next multi-year funding period (2025-2029) and making recommendations on the terms and conditions under which it should apply. JC welcomed SE to present her report to Council.
	<u>Review of NCUB next Forward Plan and Grant Funding</u>
3.2	SE stated that NCUB had put arrangements in place to review itself in preparing its next forward plan and presented a summary of the scrutiny report outcomes as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SE confirmed the main functions that NCUB sets out in its forward plan are still relevant and fit for purpose, and that supports the policy considerations for KE. It was highlighted NCUB's platform to support university and business collaboration, Konfer, is an area that RE needs to consider further. An updated plan for Konfer has been provided which summarises work on evolving the tool to enable focus on creating greater impact on business development and growth. SE noted considerations need to be taken on governance and management support provided to NCUB based on the size of the grant and to enable value for money.
3.3	JC thanked SE for her report and stated that the KE team will consider how best to take her recommendations forward.
	<u>School of Advanced Study Chair</u>
3.4	JC invited Council to consider the recommendation for Professor Colette Fagan to act as new chair for the School of Advanced Study for the Research Advisory Group (REAG).
3.5	Council endorsed the recommendation for Colette to serve as the new SAS REAG chair, and JC thanked both JF and CF as respective outgoing and incoming incumbents.
3.6	Questions on the report were received from Council as follows:
	<u>Introductory meeting with DSIT's CSA</u>
3.7	Council requested reflections on JC's introductory meeting with Professor Chris Johnson, DSIT's newly appointed Chief Scientific Adviser. JC stated that the meeting had been positive, and that Chris had been enthusiastic about engaging with RE. She confirmed that he would be invited to attend the February 2025 RE Council meeting.
	<u><withheld from publication></u>
3.8	<withheld from publication>.
3.9	Council queried REF's accountability chain from UKRI to government departments, beyond the RE management structure. SH confirmed that RE (as part of UKRI) administers the REF on behalf of the four devolved administrations, and that RE (and UKRI) engage appropriately with government as and when required.
4.	UKRI Strategy Update

Item	
4.1	<p>SM provided an update on SR process development in the context of UKRI being at the mid-point of Phase 1 and heading to Phase 2. SM made the following points below:</p> <p><u>Phase 1:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of the 30 October budget, the Chancellor announced a government investment of £20.4 billion in research and development. This commitment to back UK R&D was considered a strong endorsement from government and demonstrated the positive contribution the wider HE sector has made to R&D, particularly in light of the Government's growth agenda. • DSIT's own R&D budget has increased to £13.9 billion, and core research funding has also been increased to a record £6.1 billion. • Scenario planning is now underway, although UKRI has not yet received its settlement from DSIT. • Lead times for decisions are tight due to the proximity to the financial year and to enable strategic choices, fulfilment of commitments and the making of investments. • A full allocations process will take place in the New Year, which will provide RE, and the wider UKRI, with a clearer position. <p><u>Phase 2:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government has confirmed that the SR budget for the Phase 2 will conclude in late Spring. • There is anticipation that the Treasury will use 2025-26 as a baseline for future years and, therefore, there is a need to model for more modest rises and to account for inflation.
4.2	<p>SM noted that, dependent on decision timings in Phase 2, UKRI now has the opportunity to consider the constraints, look at scenarios, and focus on priorities and themes. SM asked Council to consider and share their perspective.</p>
4.3	<p>Following a wider discussion, the following points from Council were made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The contribution of RE funding to dual support should be clearly communicated. • UKRI should build on its current alignment and responsiveness to (new) government priorities with a broad platform and portfolio of investment. • Key themes and priorities for Phase 2 include place, the 5 missions, financial sustainability, national security, data, AI and talent. • Inter-connectiveness should also be considered, particularly in view of rising costs, and the contribution of other forms of investment in R&I.
5.	SR & Future Delivery
5.1	SH provided a strategic overview of SR and SDP direction. <withheld from publication>.
	<withheld from publication>
5.2	<withheld from publication>.
	<u>Knowledge Exchange</u>

Item	
5.3	The Associate Director of KE Data and Analysis presented the section on KE <withheld from publication>. The Associate Director requested endorsement from Council for the proposal to support the proposed HEIF funding <withheld from publication>.
5.4	<withheld from publication>.
5.5	Council agreed the proposal in support of Phase 1 HEIF funding.
	<u>Update on 2022-2025 SDP</u>
5.6	SH provided an update on the status of current commitments of the 2022-25 SDP and noted that half of the of 77 funding commitments have already been completed.
	<u>Strategic Delivery Plan Refresh 2025-2027</u>
5.7	SH highlighted the 2025-26 SDP refresh as a UKRI wide approach to a suite of refreshed SDPs to ensure consistency in format and tone across the research councils, RE and Innovate UK, and to ensure alignment of cross-organisation narratives around strategic direction. This will tie into a new UKRI strategy that will be designed to deliver the new UKRI Chief Executive's vision (Dame Ottoline Leyser will step down from UKRI as Chief Executive in June 2025).
	<u>Emerging Themes on SDP Refresh 2025-2027</u>
5.8	SH referred Council to Emerging Themes I & II, gave an overview of emerging themes and approaches to funding, and requested deliberation from Council on themes for the strategic narrative. SH questioned how these might influence RE's approach to funding considering the balance between maintaining our policy agenda versus exploring new approaches and new funding streams.
	<u>RE Council Views on Emerging Themes I & II</u>
5.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RE should seek to drive and influence opportunity with funding to encourage efficient decision-making. • RE should lead the thought process and assist on early thinking, thereby helping to increase capacity in strategic thinking in HEPs. • Consider changing incentives to get institutions to work more in partnership, enabling the sector to be more efficient. • Improve the stability and sustainability of funding. • Aim to reduce complexity and bring coherence to the Research system, including by illustrating how the funding systems interlink. • Make improvements to the data and evidence landscape with HEIF reform. • Request better-quality data on research for RE/institutions and enhanced capabilities for reviewing data. • Draw on data knowledge and experience of other systems around the world in terms of sector-wide approach to strategic thinking. • Look at the example of Place to encourage institutions to work better together.
5.10	SH thanked the RE Council for their input and insights for the strategic narrative.

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6.	Insight & Engagement Update
	<u>Institutional Engagement Strategy</u>
6.1	KH presented the high-level Sector Engagement strategy and its Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). She updated Council on emerging findings on financial sustainability, welcomed reflection from Council on the strategy, and requested endorsement for its publication early next year.
6.2	Council supported the direction of travel with the Engagement Strategy. They suggested that Strand 1 of the Engagement Vision should be more outcome (rather than operationally) focused.
	<u>Priorities and Approaches for the EDI Action Plan</u>
6.3	KH presented an overview of the progress on developing the EDI Action Plan and objectives. She stated they will engage with relevant stakeholders on the objectives and priorities of the action plan, seeking to align these with the priorities of the RE SDP.
6.4	KH noted that the EDI Action Plan will be set for a one-year period and is contextualised within a longer-term plan. The next steps were discussed, and it was proposed that priorities, primary approaches and actions will be prioritised by the RE Executive Group with a view to finalising them in the New Year.
6.5	Council was requested to forward their comments on the EDI objectives, with any considerations on the approach of the Action Plan, to KH following the meeting.
	Action: Council to forward feedback on the RE EDI Action Plan and objectives to KH.
7.	Risk, Assurance and Governance Report
7.1	MR chaired this section of the meeting. He noted the major areas of concern <withheld from publication>. It was agreed that there would be reporting at the February 2025 meeting on pathways to reduce the score of these risks.
	<u><withheld from publication></u>
7.2	<withheld from publication>.
	<withheld from publication>.
7.3	There was a general observation by Council that some of the risks were not changing in their level of scoring. While it was acknowledged that some risks are outside of RE's control, it was agreed that it would be useful to include a prediction of anticipated risk levels for the upcoming quarter to enable a discussion at Council of potential future risk.
	Action: Associate Director of Governance and Risk to include anticipated risk under the Risk Report.



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8.	AOB
8.1	No further items were raised under AOB.
	Next Meeting: Thursday, 6 February 2025