



## **Minutes of the UKRI Board Meeting**

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**Date:** Wednesday 14 May 2025  
**Location:** Caxton House, London  
**Time:** 10:00 – 17:00

<b>Board Members and Observers</b>	
Sir Andrew Mackenzie (UKRI Chair)	Jane Norman
Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser (UKRI, CEO)	Russell Schofield-Bezer
Siobhan Peters CMG (UKRI, CFO)	Ruwan Weerasekera
The Baroness Bull CBE	Nigel Toon
Annie Callanan	Priya Guha MBE
Rita Dhut	Professor Sir Ian Chapman (Observer, incoming UKRI CEO)
Professor Nola Hewitt-Dundas	

<b>Attendees</b>	
Professor Charlotte Deane (EPSRC Executive Chair)	Stian Westlake (ESRC Executive Chair)
Hugh Harris (UKRI Chief of Investment Planning and Strategy)	Poli Stuart-Lacey (UKRI, Chief of External Affairs and Communications)
Tamsin Mather (Ministry of Defence Chief Scientific Advisor) – for item 10	UKRI Head of Risk and Management Assurance – for items 6 and 7
UKRI Director of Risk, Assurance and Counter Fraud – for items 6 and 7	UKRI Head of Performance and Planning (for item 7)
UKRI Financial Controller (for items 7 and 8)	UKRI Head of Investment Planning (for item 8)
Deputy Director for Investment Strategy (for item 8)	

<b>Secretariat</b>	
UKRI Integrative Secretariat Function – Strategic Lead	UKRI Secretariat Function – Strategic Manager
Senior Private Secretary to Sir Andrew Mackenzie	

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

- 1.1. Andrew Mackenzie welcomed members to the Board meeting and noted apologies.
- 1.2. Andrew extended the Board's warm thanks to Ottoline Leyser for her service to UKRI as CEO over the last five years.
- 1.3. He also welcomed Clare Marchment to the meeting, who is joining the Secretariat team supporting the UKRI Board.



1.4. Andrew highlighted that there were no actions to formally note from the Board dinner the previous evening, attended by Gareth Davies, Permanent Secretary at the Department for Business and Trade. Andrew reflected on the positive dinner discussion and emphasised the importance of UKRI contributing to and driving a coordinated agenda on UK economic growth. His engagements since the last Board meeting have focused on this conversation and have included meeting with:

- Peter Kyle, Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology
- Iain Anderson, Board member of the Department for Business and Trade
- Olaf Hendicson-Bell, Director of the No10 Policy Unit

1.5. He also updated the Board on the annual meeting between Council Senior Independent Members (SIMs) and UKRI Executive Chairs on 6 May 2025. Ottoline echoed his view that the group were working collaboratively to amplify their local expertise.

**2. a) Minutes of March 2025 UKRI Board meeting; b) Addition to minutes of January 2025 Board meeting; c) Action Log; and d) Forward Schedule**

2.1. The Board approved the minutes of the 19 March 2025.

**DECISION:** The Board approved the minutes of 19 March 2025 meeting.

2.2. The board approved the addition to the minutes of the 15 January 2025 meeting, detailing Lord Patrick Vallance's update to the Board.

**DECISION:** The Board approved the addition to the minutes of the 15 January 2025 meeting.

2.3. The Board noted the action log and forward schedule. They were satisfied with progress on open actions.

2.4. Andrew noted that the External Affairs and Communications (EAC) Audience Report for April 2025 is included in the Reading Room. This will be shared with the Board as standard at every future meeting.

2.5. Andrew reminded the Board to let the Secretariat know if there were any items they would like included on the forward schedule and therefore or future Board agendas.

**3. Board Committee Updates**

3.1. The Board noted the Annual reports for the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), Business Investment Committee (BIC), Nominations and Remuneration Committee (NomCo) and Organisational Change Committee (OCC).

**a) Nominations and Remuneration Committee (NomCo)**

3.1. Andrew Mackenzie, Chair of the UKRI Nominations and Remuneration Committee (NomCo), noted that the Interim Chief People Officer (CPO) had given an update at today's NomCo meeting. Andrew highlighted that he had conducted the final performance discussion with Ottoline on behalf of the Board, noting that this will come back to NomCo for discussion in September.



3.2. The Board noted that all Executive Committee positions are now filled on a permanent basis, with the exception of a permanent Chief People Officer. The Board noted that an announcement on the CPO role is due shortly.

3.3. Andrew provided an update on non-executive succession planning, both for the end of his own five-year term in July 2026 and for a deputy Chair of ARAC, who could take on the ARAC Chair in due course when Ruwan Weerasekera's tenure comes to an end.

**b) Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC)**

3.4. Ruwan Weerasekera, Chair of ARAC, provided an update to the Board, following the meeting on 7 April 2025. This meeting was attended by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) ARAC "buddy". Ruwan noted that the main focus of the committee is the UKRI Annual Report and Accounts, which are due to be signed off in early July.

3.5. Ruwan noted there is ongoing work to consider how the committee pays attention to actions that come from internal and external audits.

**c) Board Investment Committee (BIC)**

3.6. Priya Guha, Chair of BIC, provided an update on the Committee following the meeting on 30 April 2025. Priya highlighted the discussion on "right-shaping" of UKRI investment across three main workstreams, focused on balancing funding within a long-term vision, and allowing informed choices to be made.

3.7. Priya highlighted that she and Ruwan, as Chairs of BIC and ARAC, would be working on closer alignment between the two Committees to aid a considered approach to investment risk.

3.8. The BIC also discussed the National Infrastructure Roadmap Refresh and environmental sustainability; and Priya emphasised the importance of this narrative to the Spending Review (SR) conversations.

3.9. Priya noted that interested Board members may attend future BIC meetings, and that the secretariat will share dates of future meetings. The next meeting is on 1 July 2025. This will be followed by an outreach meeting on 14 October 2025 at the UK Astronomy Technology Centre in Edinburgh.

**ACTION:** UKRI Secretariat will have sent out the dates of upcoming BIC meetings to Board members by the end of May 2025

**d) Growth Committee**

3.10. Nigel Toon, Chair of the Growth Committee, noted that the Committee had met for the second time on 13 May 2025 and is still very much in their discovery phase in terms of the Committee's role and remit. Nigel noted that at the meeting held the previous day the commercialisation team had shared a comprehensive breakdown of activities across UKRI, exemplified by work on the life sciences. The board noted that this is a complicated space and the committee will work closely with the executive, including Innovate UK's newly



appointed Executive Chair Tom Adeyoola, to ensure they can add value and be helpful in supporting UKRI to foster economic growth and leverage private investment.

- 3.11. Nigel highlighted that he is keen to ensure there is significant join up in this area and is keen to meet with Lord Vallance to discuss his work with the DSIT Growth Committee and ensure the two committees are fully aligned.

#### **4. CEO Priorities**

- 4.1. Ottoline Leyser provided an update to the Board. Reflecting on her time as CEO, she thanked Andrew and the Board for their support over her five-year tenure.
- 4.2. Ottoline added that the current landscape is complex and fast-moving, both nationally and internationally. There is an urgent need to boost productivity and growth in the UK, in a way that is inclusive and supportive of communities across the UK. Ottoline highlighted that system change is needed, noting that Higher Education Institutions will play a vital role in this area and therefore supporting the financial sustainability of the sector is key.
- 4.3. Ottoline noted that the UKRI can provide thought leadership to help the research and innovation community, including across government, to traverse a complicated landscape. Ottoline highlighted the need to be proactive, while retaining the ability to react to changing government priorities and a complex geopolitical context.
- 4.4. Ottoline noted that the ongoing work on the spending review was allowing teams to work closely with DSIT and wider government departments in a more collaborative and integrated way. The Board noted that the significant work on government missions, including through the R&D Missions Accelerator Programme and Industrial Strategy, is allowing UKRI to demonstrate how the work we do can be harnessed and captured to deliver cross-government priorities.
- 4.5. Ottoline noted that it was a truly exciting time in UKRI's journey, highlighting that UKRI can build a shared endeavour across communities to navigate the current environment. She added that she remains incredibly inspired by the cutting-edge research she sees on her tours of the UK and by the people who are making it happen.

#### **5. CFO Update**

- 5.1. Siobhan Peters highlighted the finance update included in the papers. She noted that UKRI is expecting to land within 1% of its agreed budget for financial year 2024-25 with zero overspend. She reported that, subject to audit, UKRI had hit this target. She added that new financial management principles are being developed, which alongside the launch of Oracle Fusion will strengthen financial planning going forward.
- 5.2. Siobhan highlighted that the organisation continues to manage health and safety (H&S) well. Siobhan highlighted two significant H&S incidents that have been reported since April 2025 and reassured the Board that both were being fully addressed.
- 5.3. Siobhan explained to the Board that well-being is a major focus of UKRI's Health and Safety consideration, taking into account the impact of stress on staff who may already feel tired and overloaded. UKRI is expanding its network of wellbeing allies and those who are able to intervene in a mental health crisis.



- 5.4. Siobhan drew the Board's attention to positive progress regarding Global Staff Mobility (GSM). The focus is on ensuring we can deploy staff abroad for scientific purposes (eg to CERN) and on limiting the risks for employees and employers of overseas working without a business decision to deploy staff to that location.
- 5.5. Siobhan updated the Board on continuous improvement work to support the HR function. Members of staff and their stakeholders have highlighted key areas of opportunity, including around role clarity, workload pressures and strengthened connections amongst HR teams and with the rest of the organisation.
- 5.6. Siobhan noted that work continues to secure a small London base when the lease on Caxton House expires in 2026.
- 5.7. Siobhan provided a brief update on the Covid Inquiry noting that the organisation had completed its engagement on Module 5, which focused on procurement. Siobhan added that we may be called to give evidence for additional modules (specifically Module 9 and 10) and that early scoping of what will be in scope has started. The Board noted that there are legal costs to engaging with each module.
- 5.8. Finally, Siobhan updated the Board on organisational change, in particular the launch of Oracle Fusion in early June. She praised the communications campaign to staff in the run-up to this.
- 5.9. The Board asked about the assurance process after go-live and Siobhan noted that any issues would be identified and resolved rapidly in the "hypercare" period as staff and suppliers begin to use the system after the black-out period. There will then be sustained effort towards the longer-term vision of what this system can deliver beyond the core functionality. The Board were very keen to support this effort; and were also reassured that cyber security was being taken very seriously in this process.

## **6. UKRI Board Risk Update**

- 6.1. Siobhan Peters introduced the item, highlighting that the only change in score in Board level risk is the reduced score for the Organisational Change risk. The likelihood score has been reduced slightly which reflects the significant planning and testing that is ongoing to reduce the likelihood of an issue. However, the impact of not delivering organisational change is still high and will remain under scrutiny.
- 6.2. Siobhan spoke about the National Audit Office (NAO) report *UK Research and Innovation: providing support through grants*. This was an extensive value for money study, which has largely focused on the need for a clearer direction and approach to using risk in decision making. There has been a lot of dialogue with the NAO to define the risk landscape and make the distinction between the approach to risk within our funding processes versus within the research itself, within the common framework of supporting well-managed risk taking. We now have the final report and welcome its five recommendations. UKRI has a strong foundation of controls and counter fraud measures to build on and the recent Risk and Assurance team restructure will support the improvements UKRI is keen to make.
- 6.3. Ottoline added that another aspect of this is managing performance evaluation and monitoring of a complex portfolio over multiple axes. This does not necessarily lend itself to



standard monitoring tools and UKRI need to demonstrate the benefits that can be gained by taking a different approach, while welcoming specific, measurable, timebound objectives where they support the delivery of good value for money.

6.4. The Board discussed the report, making the following key points:

- the question of whether UKRI is taking enough risk should be continually assessed
- level of return is crucial – low risk/high return is clearly important, as is high risk/high return
- UKRI's strategic narrative needs to make the approach clear
- qualitative and quantitative evidence needs to be balanced in assessments of impact

6.5. The Board noted DSIT's draft objectives for UKRI. Alex Jones noted that the draft objectives have been discussed previously and have now been updated in light of current ministerial priorities in order to provide a robust framework for UKRI. Alex noted that Lord Vallance wants stretching objectives that follow the SMART framework. The Board noted that the aim is to publish the objectives later in the year. Alex Jones welcomed any feedback within the next few days before they go forward for ministerial approval.

**ACTION:** Board members will have reviewed the UKRI objectives from DSIT and provided feedback and comments to Alex Jones by Monday 19 May 2025.

6.6. In initial discussion, Board members recommended consideration of a number of points:

- metrics for the objectives where possible
- grouping of common themes
- references to "knowledge" rather than "science" where relevant
- additional references to inclusivity
- reference to UKRI's role in relation to large research-intensive business
- an increased reference to Place

6.7. Finally, Siobhan updated the Board on the annual Executive Accountability Exercise, where the Risk and Assurance team work with Executive Committee members on their entire portfolio of risk accountabilities, bringing the outcomes back for collective discussion and improvement.

## **7. UKRI Annual Report and Accounts (ARA)**

7.1. Andrew Mackenzie summarised the process to date noting that an early draft of the ARA had been shared with Board for comment. Ruwan noted that due to the tight timescale, the draft had been shared with the Board in parallel with ARAC who had provided comments direct to the team. Siobhan noted the meticulous planning that has gone into development of the ARA, noting that she is working closely with the NAO to ensure we minimise any potential unforeseen issues.

7.2. The Board feedback was generally positive, noting that the graphic representations were strong. There was appetite to reduce word count where possible and ensure that language is accessible to the external reader. The Head of Corporate Planning and Performance noted that the ARA is being reviewed in parallel for plain English and readability.

7.3. There was some discussion about the level of detail and positioning of risk information. It was felt that it was important that risk is seen in a positive way, helping to generate and manage opportunity.





- 7.4. The Board considered suggestions for longer-term improvements, including being able to use data sets to tell a richer story and considering developing a separate impact report, noting that the ARA has several different potential audiences.

## **8. Update on Spending Review 2025**

- 8.1. Alex Jones provided context to the Board, highlighting that SR negotiations are currently live. She emphasised that it will be really important for the government to be able to demonstrate the impact of their investment into research and development via UKRI. Conversations over the next couple of weeks will be vital noting that she will continue to champion the value that UKRI can deliver. Alex encouraged UKRI to use scenario planning.
- 8.2. Hugh Harris, Chief of Investment Planning and Strategy, provided further detail on UKRI's proposals within the DIST SR bid. UKRI is communicating the efficiencies made since the last spending review in terms of operating expenditure and headcount and ensuring that underlying cost pressures are understood. They are working through the risks involved in different scenarios both this year and for future years. Hugh noted that the aim is to build in as much flexibility and clarity of expectations as possible for the future. Hugh asked the Board for their support in terms of shaping and promoting the role of UKRI in delivering impactful R&I to the benefit of the UK.

**ACTION:** Board members will have let the Chief of Investment Planning and Strategy know where they may have relevant contacts to help ensure key stakeholders understand UKRI's role in ensuring public investment into R&D delivers on priority outcomes for the UK Government.

- 8.3. The SR outcome for DSIT as a department will be known before the next Board meeting and Hugh emphasised that a conversation about “right-shaping” of investment will be crucial at this point. UKRI's budget will be determined in the allocations processes that follow the SR.

**ACTION:** The Secretariat will have added right-shaping to the July Board agenda

## **9. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in UKRI**

- 9.1. Charlotte Deane and Stian Westlake introduced the item, noting the focus of the discussion is on using AI to make UKRI operate more efficiently, reduce costs and deliver value. The Board noted that a discussion on AI in research will come to a future Board. The Board highlighted two key areas regarding supporting effective use of AI across the organisation:
- what data and software infrastructure is needed to exploit AI fully?
  - how do we create the culture where staff want, and are empowered to, use AI? The Board encouraged the team to consider what incentives might help early adoption of AI.
- 9.2. The Board suggested that UKRI should aim to learn from other organisations and from the expertise within the research community. Charlotte noted that a Community of Practice will be developed to share expertise across UKRI.



- 9.3. The Board raised some concerns about inherent biases within Large Language Models (LLM) and how UKRI would be able to mitigate this. The Board were reassured by Charlotte and Stian that AI is not being used for any selection purposes (for example, of reviewers) without human checks and balances. Charlotte noted that as LLMs develop, they can be used to help identify under-represented areas and actively promote inclusion. The Board noted that well developed policies and conditions of use will be key in implementing use of AI across UKRI.
- 9.4. Stian highlighted the work of the UKRI-DSIT Metascience Unit, particularly in terms of bringing researchers together to submit applications to harness the power and potential of AI. Work is ongoing through the data sandpit call to help maximise the potential value of UKRI's own funding data. Charlotte added that a future aspiration might be to harness the value of data about what UKRI have not funded over the years.
- 9.5. Charlotte confirmed that UKRI do not ask for specific AI expertise when recruiting staff, but that a willingness and aptitude to work with this technology will become increasingly important.
- 9.6. The board noted that they would welcome a more in-depth future discussion, including how AI might be used to improve Board papers. There was an appetite to move beyond large language models to areas such as visual AI. They also saw a great potential opportunity for international partnership in this area.
- 9.7. The Board emphasised the importance of ensuring increased use of AI tools is embedded in future OpEx and budget discussions, highlighting that there will be significant costs associated with being at the forefront of this technology. The Board thanked Stian and Charlotte for the update and information sharing discussion.

## 10. Defence and National Security update

- 10.1. Andrew welcomed Tamsin Mather, interim Chief Scientific Advisory (CSA) for the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to the meeting to lead a discussion with Charlotte Deane on on-going activities, strategic development, evolution of the operational landscape and co-delivery of investments relevant to national security and defence.
- 10.2. The Board had an open discussion covering a range of areas. Ottoline noted that she really welcomes how the conversation in this area has moved on during her time as CEO, highlighting the ongoing in-depth collaboration and strong connectivity.
- 10.3. **Commercialisation:** the Board discussed whether work in this area could connect more to commercialisation, with a focus on driving growth across the UK. Tamsin noted there is a lot of ongoing work in this area, including the defence industrial strategy. The Board noted that both UKRI and DSIT, as well as other Government departments, are linked up with the MoD to ensure we create an ecosystem that fosters growth and innovation.
- 10.4. **Collaboration with UKRI:** Tamsin and Charlotte highlighted the range of ways in which the Defence Science and Technology Lab (Dstl) colleagues collaborate with UKRI, and the Board noted the collaborative nature of the relationship, acknowledging the benefit that is being realised from Charlotte representing all of UKRI in her interactions with the security community.





10.5. **Collaboration in the community:** Tamsin noted that it is a shifting landscape, but that coherence is needed across the landscape. She noted there are ongoing conversations with Higher Education Institutions and UKRI institutes.

10.6. The Board thanked Charlotte and Tamsin for the comprehensive update.

## **11. AOB**

11.1. No AOB was raised.

11.2. The Board noted the following:

- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Minutes – 3 February 2025
- Board Investment Committee minutes – 21 January 2025
- UKRI Executive Committee minutes
  - 25 February 2025
  - 25 March 2025

## **12. Non-Executive Session**