

**UKRI Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council**

**Minutes of the EPSRC Council**

**Date:** 12 and 13 March 2025

**Location:** Swindon

**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 Dame Jane Jiang  
Ms Siân John  
Mr Alan Newby  
Professor Martin Schröder (Council member)  
Mr Alex van Someren (CSA)  
Dr Joe de Sousa  
Professor Andy Wright

**Attendees**

Andrew Bourne (Executive Director, Partnerships)  
Nicola Goldberg (Chief Operating Officer)  
Jane Nicholson (Executive Director, Research Base)  
Kedar Pandya (Executive Director, Cross-Council Programmes)  
Helen Morgan (UKRI Senior Finance Business Partner)  
Christine Ashton (Chief Information Officer)  
Tamsin Mather (Senior Strategic Scientist, Ministry of Defence) – item 7  
Kate Bowman (Head of Security & Resilience) – item 7  
Adam Luqmani (Head of Business Partnerships) – item 7  
Ruth Kelman (Deputy Director for International Partnerships and National Security) – item 7  
Amanda Chmura (Deputy Director for Industry Partnerships and Innovation) – item 12  
Tony Soteriou (UKRI Director, Commercialisation) – item 12

**Secretariat/Observers**

Gillian Bartoszewska (Senior Governance and Operations Manager)  
Cerianne Whitehead (Head of Private Office)  
Neil Robinson (Secretary to EPSRC Council)  
Megan Maycock (Executive Assistant and Governance Manager)

**Apologies**

Jonathan Dawes (Deputy Executive Chair)  
Siobhan Peters (UKRI Chief Financial Officer)  
Richard Meadows (UKRI Senior Strategy Advisor)

**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. Context setting**

3.1. Council agreed on topics that would merit discussion with the Senior Strategic Scientist, Ministry of Defence.

3.2. Council stated that the publication of a UKRI value statement covering research and innovation with potential impact on National Security and Defence would support researchers and Higher Education Institutes undertaking Engineering and Physical Science research. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

**4. UKRI colleague update**

4.1. Christine Ashton gave an overview of UKRI activity that included an update on UKRI Senior Leadership membership and UKRI Change programmes.

4.2. Council welcomed the positive and constructive discussion with Christine and noted the announcement that The Funding Service (TFS) had successfully passed its public beta assessment. Council noted that TFS digital team would continue to enhance the platform based on feedback from UKRI colleagues and external users.

4.3. Council appreciated that a timeline of prioritised improvements had been planned and asked for this to be shared and discussed at the next Council meeting.

4.4. Council noted the improved enterprise management approach, the better oversight and forensic evaluation of issues, and the use of user journeys in which EPSRC was a key user persona.

4.5. Council highlighted the need for ongoing operational expenditure in a constrained environment to maintain, scale and improve TFS functionality, particularly in EPSRC-specific areas, and Council agreed to maintain contact with UKRI Board to ensure centralised risk ownership.

**5. Reflections on UKRI colleague discussion**

5.1. Council discussed how future communications should specify how Simpler Better Funding goals were being achieved, and Council was asked to feed-in experiences from the external user community to inform future conversations.

**6. Spending Review information sharing**

6.1. Council was updated on the Spending Review phase 1 allocations progress and current status, followed by emerging positions and further steps for phase 2.

**7. Session with Senior Strategic Scientist, Ministry of Defence (MOD)**

7.1. Council was provided with an insight into MOD structures and discussed how EPSRC could best interact with the MOD through the science and technology portfolio, focussing on areas of joint interest and enduring scientific challenges.

7.2. Council noted the positive feedback on the Defence and National Security Sandpits led and delivered by EPSRC Innovation and Partnership teams.

7.3. Council discussed developing strategies and routes for engagement, using UKRI and EPSRC's convening power to act as a bridge between academia and the MOD. Challenges around differences in funding models, grant schemes and career structures between the different organisations were noted.

**8. Closed Council session**

8.1. A closed session was held with Council.

**9. Council closed session feedback**

9.1. Council provided feedback on the key discussion points from its closed session. Council discussed working with government departments and building successful relationships to best support the industrial strategy and fundamental research key to delivering growth.

**10. Executive Report**

- 10.1. Council received updates from the EPSRC Executive:
- 10.2. Recent activity – initial engagement with the new UKRI CEO, Professor Sir Ian Chapman, and a new UKRI Board sub-committee created to focus on economic growth and commercialisation with standing invitations for EPSRC and Innovate UK Executive Chairs. Council was asked to amplify that UKRI was seeking Research and Development Mission Programme Challenge Directors.
- 10.3. Strategic Delivery Plan – the timeline for developing the next strategic delivery plan was shared and several Council members agreed to review the draft document.
- 10.4. The Science, Engineering and Technology Board – Council noted the three main agenda items from the February meeting on the Spending Review, key messages and facilities. Council reflected on the importance of access to large facilities to different parts of the EPSRC portfolio and discussed what parameters should be considered in giving clear strategic advice to the Executive Chair to support future strategic discussions.
- 10.5. AI Opportunities Action Plan – Council discussed the AI Opportunities Action Plan led by Matt Clifford CBD and the government's response to the three opportunities areas:
- Invest in the foundations of AI
  - Push hard on cross-economy AI adoption
  - Position the UK to be an AI maker, not an AI taker
- Council welcomed the collaborative working and two-way information sharing between EPSRC and the relevant DSIT policy teams.
- Council recognised the role of underpinning core foundational science and mathematics in realising the opportunities in AI, stressed the importance of developing future talent, and noted its inclusion in planning.
- 10.6. Industrial Strategy – Council discussed UKRI and EPSRC input into the 'Invest 2035: the UK's modern industrial strategy' consultation and how EPSRC was in a strong position to convene and facilitate across the eight growth-driving industrial strategy sectors identified:
- advanced manufacturing
  - clean energy industries
  - creative industries
  - defence
  - digital and technologies
  - financial services
  - life sciences
  - professional and business services
- Council noted the government's response to the consultation would be included in the final Industrial Strategy and growth-driving Sector Plans, to be published in spring 2025, aligned with the multi-year spending review. Council offered their support to ensure EPSRC could take advantage of future opportunities.
- 10.7. Operations update – Council noted the recent restructure of EPSRC to ensure the research council was positioned to deliver core priorities and connect better across UKRI.

**11. Commercialisation update**

- 11.1. Council was briefed on EPSRC's current approach to supporting the commercialisation of research, an analysis of the current state, and how this work sat within the wider UKRI and government context.
- 11.2. Council considered how commercialisation was interwoven in each of EPSRC's three key priorities for the current spending review:
  - Future proof the STEM workforce for the productivity of UK plc
  - Building a sustainable and vibrant National Capability in curiosity-driven research and infrastructure for science-driven growth
  - Catalyse the research and innovation the UK needs to deliver HMG missions and Critical Technologies
- 11.3. Council discussed the balance of support for commercialisation within the broader EPSRC portfolio and suggested opportunities to maximise the effectiveness of EPSRC's commercialisation offer, including:
  - The importance of recognising and maintaining the strength of the existing industrial base of moveable capitol within the UK
  - Opportunities within various schemes including Prosperity Partnerships, Hubs, Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAAs), Catapults and Centres for Doctoral Training
  - How to leverage investments to bring in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), increase access to facilities and consider how to engage with medium sized enterprises that fall outside existing schemes
  - Developing user journeys to showcase routes through to innovation
  - Opportunities to link venture capitalists to research through an investor showcase concept
  - Reviewing the effectiveness of knowledge exchange opportunities in Hubs
  - Capturing additional evidence for the success of Place Based IAAs

**12. Spending Review Phase 2**

- 12.1. Council engaged in interactive strategic discussions around phase 2 of the Spending Review (SR) and advised how EPSRC's portfolio should evolve over the course of the multi-year Spending Review period.
- 12.2. Council focused on messaging around 'Accelerating economic growth for UK prosperity' and 'Securing UK national resilience and security' and had a rich conversation on how to capture future goals and opportunities based on evidence from prior successes.
- 12.3. Council noted that EPSRC would continue to develop evidenced messaging across priority areas of its portfolio.

**13. Information papers**

- 13.1. Council noted the information papers on:
  - EPSRC Communications and Impact Stories Update.
  - EPSRC Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 Infrastructure Fund Proposal. For this item, a specific declaration of interests was made by Professor Deborah Greaves and the paper circulation was restricted.
  - Reporting data to EPSRC Council and its dependencies.

**14. Any other business**

- 14.1. Council thanked EPSRC colleagues who contributed to the meeting, networking session and who provided contributions to the wide range of briefing materials.

OFFICIAL – FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

- 14.2. Council noted this was Professor Alex van Someren's last meeting and thanked him for his service on EPSRC Council.
- 14.3. Council were updated on the appointment of new Council members and the new Chief Scientific Advisers network representative.
- 14.4. The next meeting will be held on 18 and 19 June 2025.