



Approved by AHRC Council:
Author: Amy Smith

Minutes of the AHRC Council meeting of 10 March 2026

Date: Tuesday 10 March 2026

Time: 09:30 – 16:00

Location: SPARK, Cardiff University and via Teams

Council Members and Observers	
Ms Emma Kane (Chair)	Professor Ambreena Manji
Professor Christopher Smith (Executive Chair, AHRC)	Dr Bridget McConnell
Ms Zeinab Badawi	Professor Sue Rigby
Ms Anita Bhalla	Professor Adrienne Scullion
Professor Tom Crick	Professor Steven Spier
Mr Tim Gardam	Professor Michael Thomas
Ms Seetha Kumar	
Attendees	
Dr Jaideep Gupte (Director of Research, Strategy and Innovation, AHRC)	Mr Tom Goodsir (Associate Director for Governance and Planning, AHRC)
Dr Allan Sudlow (Director of Partnerships and Engagement, AHRC)	Kate Priest (International, Head of Governance and Assurance, UKRI – for item 11)
Dr Dan O'Connor (Director of Portfolios, Partnerships and Engagement, AHRC)	Professor Sara Pepper (Co-Director of the Creative Economy Unit, Cardiff University – for item 12)
Ms Stella Power (Chief Operating Officer, AHRC)	Professor Verity McIntosh (Associate Professor of Virtual and Extended Realities, UWE Bristol – for item 12)
Ms Cathy Kerfoot (Interim IS8 Programme Director for Creative Industries, AHRC)	Professor Tracy Bhamra (Observer)
Professor Roger Whitaker (Pro Vice Chancellor Research, Innovation and Enterprise, Cardiff University – for item 2)	Professor Richard Follett (Observer)
Professor Kate Griffiths, (Dean for Research and Innovation for the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences – for item 2)	Professor Funmi Olonisakin (Observer)
Ms Gillian Collins (Head of Strategy, Impact and Evidence, AHRC – for item 10)	
Secretariat	
Amy Smith (Senior Governance Manager, AHRC)	Amanda Pope (PA to Associate Directors, AHRC)
Apologies	
None	

Introductory Items	
1.	Welcome, Apologies, and Declarations of Interest
The Chair welcomed Council members to the meeting. The Chair welcomed Dr Dan O'Connor, Director of Portfolios, Partnerships and Engagement, AHRC. Dr O'Connor will be taking over from Dr Allan Sudlow who is retiring in April. The Chair thanked Dr Sudlow for his time at AHRC and the many programmes he has helped steer to success. The Chair also welcomed Ms Cathy Kerfoot, Interim IS8 Programme Director for Creative Industries, AHRC, and Professor Michael Thomas, DfE Chief Scientific Advisor who have joined Council. The Chair noted this was Professor Manji and Ms Badawi's last Council meeting due to their tenures finishing. The Chair thanked both for their time serving on Council and the insight and advice they have shared. AHRC's new Council members Professor Bhamra, Professor Follett and Professor Olonisakin joined to observe the meeting and were welcomed by the Chair. The Chair noted no apologies were received prior to the meeting. No conflicts of interest were declared, and the Chair reminded all members to refresh their declarations by year end.	
2.	Welcome from Professor Roger Whitaker, Pro Vice Chancellor Research, Innovation and Enterprise, Cardiff University
Professor Whitaker welcomed Council to Cardiff University and shared an update on the University's strategy, priorities, and forward look. Professor Whitaker also showcased some AHRC funded research and discussed the School of Global Humanities.	
3.	Minutes, Actions, and Matters Arising
Council approved the minutes of 2nd December 2025. The Chair updated Council on actions taken at the last meeting.	
Updates and Operations	
4.	Executive Chair's Report
Professor Smith extended his thanks to the departing Council members and welcomed the new ones. Professor Smith updated Council on the Spending Review allocations and the potential impact of this on both the Arts and Humanities and AHRC. Council discussed AHRC's relationship with other Councils, benefits realisation and impacts, the industrial strategy, Creative Industries, and how AHRC's portfolio maps to the other IS8 areas.	

ACTION: Paper to come to June meeting with options on budgets, portfolio, and finances which the new AHRC Executive Chair will be able to use to aid their decision making. Council to input into this and an accompanying framework.

5. Executive Chair's forward look

Professor Smith noted his priorities moving forward.

6. Chief Operating Officer Update

Ms Stella Power noted the AHRC dashboard including the new measuring reports.

Ms Power updated Council on MAS measures, finances, EDI, and organisational efficiencies.

Council discussed reporting, what is required, and how this can be used to best understand AHRC's position and how to advocate for both AHRC and wider Arts and Humanities.

ACTION: Ms Power to work with her team to iterate the dashboard, providing greater insights on the portfolio and data to Council.

ACTION: Item on strategic workforce planning to be added to forward plan for June meeting.

Council also discussed Curiosity Driven Research and career paths within the Arts and Humanities in the current economic climate.

7. Director of Partnerships and Engagement Update

Dr Sudlow thanked Professor Smith and Council colleagues noting this would be his last meeting on AHRC Council due to his retirement.

Dr Sudlow noted his report and updated Council on AI and data and the need to have an adequate strategy around this to drive the economy forwards and establish AHRC's priorities for future investment.

Council discussed this along with the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (CI PEC), responsible AI and impact, and AHRC's partnership with other Arts Councils across the UK, notably in the immersive arts programme.

Dr O'Connor introduced himself to Council and highlighted his ambitions for this role moving forward.

8. Director of Research, Strategy, and Innovation Update

Dr Gupte noted his report and updated Council on the UKRI centres, institutes, catapults, and units conference, convened by Sir Ian Chapman, which took place at Daresbury.

Council discussed AHRC programmes in the context of outcomes and delivery, embedding arts and humanities into grants and applications and the challenges around supporting a meaningful funding ecosystem.

Dr Gupte noted a cross- council response will be provided to Sir Chapman and that further updates will come to Council in due course.

9. Interim IS8 Programme Director for Creative Industries Update

Ms Kerfoot noted her report and updated Council on the Creative Industries Board, areas for AHRC to prioritise, culture and ways of working within IS8.

Council discussed this along with prosperity partnerships, Horizon Europe and International.

A future session on the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence centre will be added to the forward look.

Items for Discussion

10. AHRC's Portfolio and Impacts

Ms Collins joined Council and shared slides on AHRC's strategy and impact, noting the move to an outcomes-based approach in accordance with steer from UKRI, and the potential opportunities and outcomes from this.

Ms Collins highlighted the impact from AHRC programmes including CoSTAR, BRAID and the Creative Industries Clusters Programme.

Council discussed the need to consider both intended and unintended consequences of an outcomes driven approach. Clearly linking spending to the outcomes it generates will allow a credible narrative to be built ahead of the next SR; however, it is important to note that purely focusing on this is not enough, and having AHRC's Theory of Change will be hugely beneficial.

Council also highlighted the need to adequately capture benefits realisation and proposed engaging AHRC's Advisory Board on this.

ACTION: Ms Collins and her team to be explore self-definition and impact via evolving the Theory of Change and impact analysis.

11. Risk Update and Deep Dive

Ms Priest joined for this item.

Ms Power noted the paper and highlighted what extent Council should be involved in AHRC's risk management and input on what risks are to be focused on for discussion.

Council discussed the test case of reputational risk noting the need to justify the value of arts and humanities in a changing world, to tell our story wider than our own community, and to ensure the loss that would come to the public by removing the work of UKRI and AHRC is clear.

ACTION: Deep dive on AHRC's partners to be added to the forward plan looking at who our partners are i.e. Universities, industry partners and 3rd sector partners, alongside AHRC's partnership with its community.



ACTION: Reputational risk on AHRC's register should be updated to reflect this discussion.

12.	Creative Industries and Immersive Arts Update
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Professor Sara Pepper and Professor Verity McIntosh joined for this item.

Professor Pepper discussed the wider creative industries landscape and creative industries funding.

Professor McIntosh updated Council on the Immersive Arts Programme including partners and funders, partnership model, events and training, continuation planning and highlighted some AHRC funded projects.

13.	AOB
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No AOB was raised.