

## Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting held on 23 September 2025 in London.

Those attending:

Dr James Briscoe (BBSRC Senior Independent Member and Chair of Council)  
Professor Tim Dafforn  
Professor Anne Ferguson-Smith (BBSRC Executive Chair)  
Professor Anjali Goswami (Defra CSA)  
Professor Christine Orengo  
Dr Neil Parry  
Professor Guy Poppy  
Professor Jo Price  
Professor Steven Spoel  
Professor Eriko Takano

Also attending:

Dr Amanda Collis  
Laura Dance  
Dr Jef Grainger  
Dr Karen Lewis  
Dr Sarah Perkins  
Dr Emma Hudson (Secretary)  
Jackie Rostill

### Item 1. Opening Remarks

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. The Chair welcomed Anjali Goswami to her first Council meeting in her DEFRA CSA observer role.
3. This was Guy Poppy's last Council meeting as his term was due to finish on 30 September 2025. The Chair, on behalf of Council and BBSRC Executive Leadership Team, thanked Guy for all his contributions, during the last year, in his role of Council Member and for also providing invaluable support to Anne when she joined BBSRC in her Executive Chair's role.
4. Apologies were received from Ijeoma Uchegbu, Ewan Birney, Andy Griffiths, and Zahir Sachak.
5. Members were reminded to declare any changes to their declarations of interests. They should be highlighted by Council members at the meeting and the Secretariat will follow-up to update declarations via the Portal after the meeting. Members were asked to raise any conflicts arising during the meeting.

### Item 2. Minutes of the Council Meeting Held On 11 June 2025 (UKRI BBSRC 15/2025)

6. The minutes were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

### Item 3. Progress on Actions and Matters Arising (Oral)

7. The Chair noted that all actions had been completed.

### Item 4. Executive Chair's Report (UKRI BBSRC 16/2025)

8. Anne presented her report and highlighted the following key points:
  - Ian Chapman started his appointment as UKRI CEO in August 2025. He has been engaged with UKRI teams since his appointment was announced. He is very outcomes focused and will lead UKRI to deliver on government priorities as well as recognising our role as guardian for curiosity driven research.
  - He will be driving the Spending Review 2025 process and intends to set out a new UKRI strategy in Spring 2026.
  - Cristobal Uauy started as new Director of John Innes Centre adopting a very collaborative approach.
  - Anne joined Andrew MacKenzie (UKRI Chair) and Russell Schofield-Bezer (UKRI Board) on their visit to the Norwich Research Park in July 2025. The team did a wonderful job showcasing the attributes of the Institutes, their connectivity, and how the campus ecosystem was successfully enabling translation of discovery into social and economic impact and growth. Andrew greatly appreciated the opportunity for dialogue throughout the visit and left with a different perspective of what we do.
  - BBSRC published our refreshed Forward Look for UK Bioscience in July 2025. BBSRC was working on a short-form version tailored to wider audiences, including policymakers and the public.
9. This section of the minutes is deemed business sensitive and has therefore been recorded separately.
10. Mid-term reviews for all BBSRC strategically funded Institutes would commence at the end of October 2025, focused on strategic direction of travel and outcomes (a different approach to previous mid-term assessments). Council was informed that a discussion paper would be brought to the Council meeting in March, once all reviews have been completed. Council wanted to hear more about assessment of the projects that were previously close to the threshold and was assured that BBSRC was having active discussions with the relevant Institute Strategic Programme Grants (ISPGs) holders and these will feed into forward strategies. Council members attending the mid-term reviews were welcomed to provide comments on what might be needed at the mid-term reviews, or if anything was missing.

Action 05/2025: Mid-term review outcomes will be brought to Council meeting in March 2026 (Sarah Perkins, Ksymena Grzybowska).

11. It was noted that Responsive Mode success rates had decreased due to an increase in value, and a small increase in numbers. Council noted that other Councils were

experiencing similar trends, the current UKRI position was to tolerate for the time being and continue to monitor.

12. Council asked about how US-National Science Foundation opportunities/activities have been affected by the US political landscape and was informed that, since January 2025, UKRI and BBSRC have been working closely with our US counterparts to understand and mitigate the situation. Some 'in-flight' activities have taken six months to resolve but funding has now been confirmed.
13. Council was pleased to see that following the successful pilot, planning was underway for a second BBSRC Pioneer Awards call to incentivise original, early-stage research with the potential to transform our fundamental understanding of biological systems. It was noted that the indicative budget was £5m and given the high number of applications received for the last round, BBSRC was looking carefully at demand management, considering triage and piloting best practices from the Metascience Unit. Regarding budget, this increased substantially for the last round, this might be possible again but will depend on outcomes from Spending Review allocations. More details on handling of demand and resource for the Pioneer Awards could be shared with Council.

#### Item 5. Updates From Government Departments and The Wider CSA Network (Oral)

14. Anjali Goswami (Defra CSA) shared the following comments:
  - Anjali has been in post for three months. So far, she has been focused on remit and government working – understanding how different activities interact with each other, e.g. research, policy.
  - Growth was a key government priority, making sure that Defra is maximising the potential of agriculture in terms of growth agenda (e.g., land use, feedstocks and biomass).
  - Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) was leading on clean energy, Defra's focus in this space is on tackling agricultural emissions.
  - Key priorities: data sharing, driving innovation, agri-tech (a great deal of shared interest in this area at the US-UK trade meetings and an important area in the Tech Prosperity Deal), land use, resilience (biosecurity and ecosystem resilience).
  - Frustration from government regarding translation of research to field.
  - Current programmes with UKRI were valuable – strengthening the resilience of the UK food system (interventions and informing policy); Land Use for Net Zero (emphasising that Net Zero and biodiversity were different things that needed different approaches to address); Veterinary Vaccine Platforms (will be very important); Farming Innovation Programme (want to see this moving to a larger scale).
  - Defra Agricultural Productivity Review – R&D will be a key element.
15. In discussion it was agreed that more needs to be done between partners to link up and support activities, collaborations and partnerships, particularly around agri-tech.
16. Tim Dafforn shared the following updates from Ministry of Defence:

- Budget has increased, 5000 scientists at Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), will play a central role in the UK's national rearming strategy.
- Have sovereignty for Chemical Biology – need to have capacity to deal with national threat. Engineering Biology is another area of great relevance to Dstl.
- Net zero in defence is a challenge.
- Very interested in bioeconomy, need to contribute to national growth. There is a drive to increase engagement with technology base.
- National resilience, supply chains – working with Defra on this.
- Engaging with BBSRC and UKRI - materials and food would be key areas of mutual priority.

17. The Chair thanked Anjali and Tim for their updates.

#### Item 6. BBSRC Objective Centric Risk Refresh (UKRI BBSRC 17/2025)

18. Alice Summers, UKRI Head of Risk and Assurance, presented the slides on BBSRC objective centric risk refresh. Council was informed that UKRI had encouraged all Councils to review their risk registers over the Summer, to make sure they were still relevant, and aligned to current objectives. BBSRC ELT had a couple of sessions to review the BBSRC risk register and discussed the initial framing of BBSRC's objective centred approach and alignment to existing risks on the register.
19. Council members wanted to know how the new approach compared to the previous one and noted that we previously identified risks and mapped against objectives, sometimes too late, and we are now doing the opposite. The new approach to risk across UKRI will help us manage risks more effectively, i.e. before they materialise. It places risk at the forefront of objective planning.
20. It was noted that most Councils were still working on their risk registers still in draft form; but we were seeing more consistency across Councils and a fewer number of risks.
21. Council was assured that existing risks would not be lost, and they would all be mapped over.
22. Council noted that it would be good to see what the risk profiles are and how they change over time – a dynamic review.
23. The Chair thanked Alice for attending the meeting and providing an overview on the new objective centric approach to risk across UKRI.

#### Item 7. Update On Spending Review (UKRI BBSRC 18/2025)

24. The Chair invited Laura Notton, BBSRC Associate Director, Strategy and Planning, to present the update on Spending Review 2025 allocations.
25. Council noted the update and key points from discussions were:

- BBSRC shared some further details surrounding the uplift in budget from DSIT to support activities associated with the National Engineering Biology Programme and infrastructure.
- Comments were made regarding the relationship between ARIA and UKRI, and perception within the community that ARIA, rather than UKRI, will only support high-risk research.
- It was agreed that BBSRC needed to be working more closely with other funders, however, the community should be encouraged to seek opportunities for funding wherever they might lie. This could potentially affect BBSRC/UKRI routes to impact narrative if support for activities is picked up by others, which should be considered.
- The landscape was evolving, UKRI's underpinning narrative must be around how taxpayers' money is spent, and the outcomes delivered.

26. The Chair thanked Laura for presenting the update on the Spending Review 2025. It was noted that a further update on Spending Review allocations would be presented at the December 2025 Council meeting.

#### Item 8. Right-Shaping of Institutes (Oral)

27. The Chair welcomed Alasdair Taylor, Head of UKRI Research Sustainability Policies, to introduce this item and provide an update on progress around UKRI's right-shaping of Institutes (the term Institutes in this context refers to a broad range of organisations that includes facilities, centres and units, and catapult).

28. Alasdair presented his slides providing an overview of the right-shaping of Institutes review that Anne was leading across UKRI. This work was driven by an opportunity to take a holistic approach to UKRI Institutes that occupy unique positions within the R&D landscape but are diverse and varied. The primary outcome UKRI was seeking to achieve was ensuring that we are investing in the national capability the UK needs, considering both strategic priorities and scientific value, and make decisions to adjust if we are not.

29. Alasdair set out areas of focus when considering national capabilities and strategic narrative that was needed to evidence and articulate the value Institutes bring in providing national and scientific capability including across government, in delivery of government priorities and connectivity with other publicly funded research organisations. Alasdair also said that assessment was an important aspect of our governance of the Institute investments, but there is considerable variation across UKRI and we lack a set of common success measures. Similarly, models of governance were different across UKRI Institutes. While there were challenges that sat across assessment, funding and governance, UKRI was considering issues and solutions in the round recognising the diversity of the Institute portfolio across UKRI.

30. Key points from Council discussions were:

- It was important that the framework mapping was right - this has not been done before. BBSRC Institutes have been engaged with data collection which has helped shaped the mid-term reviews.

- UKRI was working closely with the National Research Organisations Group – established ~18months ago. Membership comprises ~20 Institutes and eight Public Sector Research Establishments (PSREs).
- Council members recommended that industry feedback should be sought for their views on the role of Institutes within the ecosystem (i.e., providing an innovation lens).
- Council members emphasised the importance of viewing Institutes within the landscape of PSREs as well.

31. The Chair thanked Alasdair for attending the meeting and updating Council on the Institute right-shaping review.

#### Item 9. Responsive Mode Evaluation – Progress Update and Presentation of Initial Data (UKRI BBSRC 20/2025)

32. Bev Thomas (BBSRC Associate Director of Evidence and Evaluation), Paul Reeves (BBSRC Head of Evaluation) and Jef Grainger provided an update on the responsive mode evaluation reform.

33. At the March 2025 meeting, Council had been informed that BBSRC had initiated a comprehensive strategic evaluation of the BBSRC Responsive Mode (RM) scheme to develop a comprehensive and nuanced evidence base to inform our understanding of the scheme’s strategic positioning and past performance. This was proceeding alongside a parallel project to prepare options for improvement/reform of the scheme, informed in an agile way by the evaluation’s emerging findings.

34. The purpose of this item was to update Council on the progress of the evaluation, including:

- sharing a draft inception report, produced by the appointed consultant, being iterated in close consultation with BBSRC ahead of the launch of community surveys in October 2025.
- sharing initial grants and outcomes data analysis that has been produced in house.

35. Council noted the draft inception report for the community surveys and interviews work package, including proposed methodology and timelines, and commented on the report and the first read out of RM grants and outcomes data from the ongoing internal analysis as follows:

- An expert advisory group will look at the analysis around gaps but just because something is not funded does not mean it should. UKRI needs to decrease the breadth of what we fund so this will provide evidence to feed into that.
- It would be interesting to see the trajectory of change in areas, e.g., why are some better funded than others and is this a reflection of panel makeup etc.
- We need to better understand the type of research being supported within categories, e.g., ‘animal science’ – very broad, is this agriculture or basic neurology etc.
- It would be good to understand what BBSRC is supporting that others are not.
- As this is a 15-year evaluation we would expect to see impact from early investments.

- The government cares about the UK's position globally, what do other countries use as metrics and would our government want the same?

36. The Chair summarised the Council's discussion as below:

- We need to understand what the purpose of responsive mode is, what it needs to deliver.
- It would be interesting to know how the makeup of panels has influenced responsive mode success.
- There is a need to better understand the text-mapping used for analysis.
- It is important to understand how metrics are benchmarked and what good looks like.

37. The Chair thanked Bev, Paul and Jef for presenting the paper.

#### Item 10. Update on Engineering Biology Activities (UKRI BBSRC 21/2025)

38. The Chair invited Amanda Collis to present this paper that provided an update on Engineering Biology activities.

39. Council noted the recent developments associated with UKRI's Engineering Biology portfolio and activities and the following comments were made by Council members:

- It is important to talk to industry regarding the Technology Readiness Level to better understand where needs lie, infrastructure would need to be used 24/7.
- Council welcomed news on international activities – there are areas where UK will be the supplier and areas where we will be the customer.

40. The Chair thanked Amanda for the update.

#### Item 11. AOB And Council Forward Look - Agenda Items (UKRI BBSRC 22/2025)

41. Council noted the schedule of meetings for 2025 and 2026 and future items for discussion.

Council Secretariat

November 2025



Actions from June 2025 Council meeting

- Action 05/2025: Mid-term review outcomes will be brought to Council meeting in March 2026 (Sarah Perkins, Ksymena Grzybowska).  
Noted.

Actions from September 2025 Council meeting

- Action 4/2025: Council suggested a dinner discussion relating to vaccines and inviting Bryan Charleston, Director of the Pirbright Institute. It would also be good that DEFRA CSA was present for that discussion. (Ksymena Grzybowska, scheduled for 8 December 2025 Council dinner). Update: Update: due to unavailability of speakers it is proposed that this docks into the Council-Institute discussion next year.