



Approved by MRC Council: Thursday 12 March 2026
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Minutes of the MRC Council Business Meeting

Date: Tuesday 2 December 2025

Location: Smith Centre, The Science Museum

Time: 09:00 – 12:00

Council Members	
Prof. Patrick Chinnery (MRC Executive Chair)	Prof. Simon Hollingsworth
Ms Kay Boycott (SIM)	Dr Precious Lunga
Prof. Sir Mark Caulfield	Prof. Sir Munir Pirmohamed
Prof. Lucy Chappell	Dr Andy Richards
Prof. Kim Graham	Prof. Eleanor Riley
Dr Roger Highfield	Prof. Dame Nancy Rothwell

MRC Head Office Attendees	
Dr Louise Jones - Director of Investigator Led Themes	Dr Glenn Wells - Deputy Executive Chair
Alastair Lamb - Chief of Staff & Chief Operating Officer	Dr Ceri Williams - Director of Challenge Led Themes
David Stiles – MRC Finance Director	

Secretariat	
Simone Bryan – MRC Associate Director of Governance	Kate Vellender – Strategic Projects Manager

Note:

1. Council Private Business

- 1.1. Before the start of the meeting, Council held a private business meeting. Professor Patrick Chinnery outlined his reflections and thoughts for the future as a 'mid-term review' with Council members providing independent scrutiny, challenge and support. There was recognition of the significant positive changes made in the MRC due to Professor Chinnery's leadership. Discussions touched on portfolio prioritisation; opportunities presented by the industrial strategy and UKRI changes; MRC's role; MRC's relationships with universities,

other Councils of UKRI and industry; clarity on future outcomes and outputs; and operational model, culture and succession planning.

2. Welcome and apologies

- 2.1. Ms Kay Boycott, Senior Independent Member of Council chaired the meeting. Ms Boycott welcomed all members. Apologies were received from Professor Nadeem Sawar. Professor Sir Munir Pirmohamed left the meeting during item five.
- 2.2. Members were asked to declare any new interests. None were declared.
- 2.3. Council approved the minutes of the Council strategy meeting held on 23 September 2025.

3. Council member roundtable updates and reflections

- 3.1. Council was asked to update on current high priorities facing members in their own domains. Members highlighted the following:
 - New financial challenges faced by the Higher Education sector posed by the international student levy and salary sacrifice changes, and the potential impact of these challenges on the overall health of the research and innovation ecosystem.
 - The risks posed by the spread of misinformation, disinformation and anti-science narratives, and the action required to strengthen the integrity of information spaces and to highlight the importance of research. Members emphasised the importance of investment in AI and it was noted Council will discuss this at its meeting in March.
 - Clinical trial redistribution and the risks it poses to UK career opportunities, training, leveraging innovation and to UKRI's mission to drive growth.
 - How MRC, NIHR, MHRA and NICE can work together to promote greater regulatory collaboration and alignment of regulatory requirements for the benefit of research. Attendees also noted that standardised processes were very important in attracting industry to the UK.
 - Factors driving increased funding application numbers, placing acute pressure on peer review capacity and on success rates, and the importance of maintaining a diverse research landscape.
- 3.2. Council then highlighted a number of items for potential discussion at future meetings (see item 6)

4. SR allocations and future planning

- 4.1. At its joint meeting with members of MRC's Science Strategy Board on 1 December Council received an update from Professor Sir Ian Chapman on UKRI's spending review allocations and how these allocations will be directed across three buckets: 1) curiosity-driven research, 2) supporting government and societal priorities and 3) scale-up and growth of innovative UK-based companies (split 50:25:25 for each bucket, respectively).
- 4.2. Following on from this discussion, Dr Glenn Wells, MRC Deputy Executive Chair, gave a brief update to members highlighting potential pressures. In this context, members were asked to consider upcoming major MRC investment decisions and advise how these should be prioritised / deprioritised to ensure MRC delivers high quality outcomes by concentrating

resources on areas of greatest impact. Members welcomed the update and discussed key issues for the Executive to consider when prioritising investments. Council made the following points for consideration:

- Priority should be given to options that carry the lowest risk to the stability and consistency of funding and reputational risk to MRC. Maintaining trust with the community is of critical importance.
- Funding for investigator-led research is a key mechanism to support excellent research from across the UK, critical for the overall health of the research and innovation ecosystem and should be preserved.
- Consideration should be given to whether investigator-led applications can be pivoted to align with government priorities and the delivery mechanisms that might be used to support this.
- The MRC executive should critically review its portfolio to decide which investments are critical to delivering MRC's strategic objectives and which can be disinvested in to allow existing resources to be concentrated on areas of greatest impact.
- Ensuring careful, transparent and timely communication with delivery partners in the higher education and research sectors to maintain trust and manage expectations is critical.
- Consider how best to leverage MRC's existing portfolio of Institutes and Infrastructure investments to deliver MRC priorities.
- MRC may wish to consider opportunities for partnerships with external funders and with other Councils of UKRI, in particular Innovate UK.

5. MRC Major Investments

- 5.1 Dr Ceri Williams, Director of Challenge-Led Themes provided an update on the MRC major investments portfolio, welcoming early input on information members require to inform strategic discussions on the future direction of MRC Centres of Research Excellence (CoRE). The strategic discussion item is planned for Council's July 2026 meeting.
- 5.2 Members were keen to see evidence of how the CoRE model is achieving its strategic objectives specifically; the scientific and geographic spread of the portfolio to-date, summarised outputs from each CoRE, evidence of culture shift, success stories, feedback from award holders and assessment of the co-funding achieved through the model, to inform discussions but recognised this may not be possible to fully capture until the investments have been established for two - three years. A question was raised around whether a funding cycle every year could be too frequent, allowing CoREs to establish before targeting the next round.
- 5.3 Members discussed the benefits of targeting themes vs open rounds and recommended aligning a future theme to priorities highlighted in the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy, Life Sciences Sector Plan to provide targeted direction. Members also noted that the requirement to translate outputs could be a stronger driver in future rounds. Co-funding opportunities should also continue to be explored, although members did acknowledge the time commitment involved in implementation.
- 5.4 The TACOS framework (timeliness, additionality, competitiveness for the UK, opportunity and social value) could be a useful tool to structure strategic decisions on the future direction of MRC CoRE.

ACTION: Director of Challenged-led funding to include information highlighted by members as context for the discussion on CoREs planned at Council's July meeting.

6. Council Forward Plan 2026/27

6.1. Kay Boycott, Senior Independent Member of Council, asked members for input into their forward plan for 26/27 to ensure that it allows Council to fully discharge its duty under its Terms of Reference. Members suggested the following topics/themes and engagement opportunities to be prioritised:

- Partnership working with the Higher Education Sector and MRC's strategy for engagement.
- The Government's Industrial Strategy.
- MRC / NIHR shared priorities and opportunities for partnerships.
- Research boards and funding panels outputs.
- Focused work to identify ways for partners across the research and innovation system to improve efficiencies and reduce bureaucracy.
- How MRC is positioned to deliver the new UKRI mission.
- Global talent and how to best attract overseas researchers into the UK.
- MRC's engagement with the public

6.2. Council reflected on its involvement in MRC Task and Finish (T&F) Groups and made suggestions for how T&F groups operate to support clearer recommendations. It would be useful for T&F Groups to consider the relative balance and size of investment needed to drive forward MRC's strategy, including areas of disinvestment. Recommendations should be framed in the broader context in which MRC can act and specify both near term and longer terms actions.

ACTION: 1. MRC to embed suggestions into T&F group Terms of Reference
2. MRC secretariat to work with MRC Executive to schedule discussion topics/themes into Council's forward plan

Items for Information

7. Updates from the Executive

8. MRC Strategic Delivery Plan Annual Report - 2025 Highlights

Meeting End