

Minutes of the UKRI Board Meeting

Date: Wednesday 21 January 2026
Location: Polaris House, Swindon
Time: 9:00am – 5:00pm

Board Members and Observers	
Sir Andrew Mackenzie (UKRI Chair)	Professor Sir Ian Chapman (UKRI CEO)
The Baroness Bull CBE	Russell Schofield-Bezer
Annie Callanan	Nigel Toon
Rita Dhut	Priya Guha MBE
Ruwan Weerasekera	Professor Nola Hewitt-Dundas
Alexandra Jones (Director General for Science, Innovation and Growth, DSIT)	Professor Jane Norman

Executive Committee Attendees	
Juliette Meek (UKRI Finance Director) (deputising for Siobhan Peters)	Gemma Bailey (UKRI Chief People Officer)
Hugh Harris (UKRI Chief of Investment Planning and Strategy)	Stian Westlake (ESRC Exec Chair)
Christopher Smith (AHRC Exec Chair), items 1-10	Christine Ashton (UKRI Chief Information Officer), item 6-11
Michele Dougherty (STFC Exec Chair)	

Attendees for items only	
UKRI Deputy Director, Culture and Inclusion - for item 7	UKRI Director of Risk and Assurance - for item 8
UKRI Head of Risk & Assurance - for item 8	UKRI Corporate Performance Lead- for item 9
UKRI Head of Corporate Planning and Performance- for item 9	UKRI Planning and Performance Specialist - for item 9
UKRI Evaluation and Performance Lead- for item 9	UKRI Head of Evaluation and Performance – for item 9
UKRI Senior Evaluation and Performance Analyst – for item 9	UKRI Deputy Director, Funding Services- for item 11
UKRI Associate Director, Funding Service- for item 11	

Apologies	
Siobhan Peters, UKRI CFO (Board Member)	

Secretariat	
UKRI Integrative Secretariat Function – Strategic Lead	UKRI Integrative Secretariat Function – Strategic Manager



1. Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1. Andrew Mackenzie welcomed members to the Board meeting and noted apologies from Siobhan Peters, UKRI Chief Financial Officer. Andrew reflected on the Board and ExCo Away Day noting how it demonstrated effective co-working between Executive Committee and the Board. He also reiterated the discussion from dinner and provided an overview of his meeting with the Office for Students Chair, Professor Edward Peck. Jessica Corner, (Research England's Executive Chair), Ian Chapman and Jane Norman also attended the dinner. Andrew highlighted the discussions on opportunities for better data sharing between UKRI and the Office for Students and encouraged Jessica to cement the opportunity and come back to Board with an update.

ACTION: Jessica Corner will have confirmed opportunities for data sharing with the Office for Students and will have provided an update to the Board by March 2026.

2. a) Minutes of 12 November 2025 UKRI Board meeting; b) Action Log; and c) Forward Schedule

- 2.1. Following minor suggested amendments, the Board approved the minutes of the 12 November 2025 meeting.

DECISION: The Board approved the minutes of 12 November 2025 meeting.

- 2.2. The Board noted the action log. They were satisfied with progress to closure on open actions. The Board requested actions B.2025.05 and B.2025.35 are kept open until a formal update can be shared with the Board

ACTION: Hugh Harris and Daniel Shah will have provided an update on open actions B.2025.05 and B.2025.35 before the next Board meeting in March 2026.

- 2.3. The Board noted the forward schedule and were invited to suggest future agenda items.

- 2.4. The Board noted that an update on the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) was scheduled for March 2026. The Board suggested waiting until the new CEO had had the opportunity to embed in the organisation and delaying the item, noting the intention to invite the ARIA CEO to join the discussion.

ACTION: Secretariat will have liaised with Ian Chapman and Alex Jones on the correct timing and format for an update on ARIA, and how to bring in the new CEO, by March 2026.

- 2.5. Members noted that the forward schedule from May onwards. In particular, that upcoming strategy work, organisational changes and new groups focused on IS8 programmes will require engagement from the Board. The Board would welcome future discussions on how UKRI are managing communications and external affairs, on UKRI's AI Strategy, Place and on potential rises in scientific fraud. The Board also highlighted the benefit of Executive Chair engagement at the meetings.

ACTION: Secretariat and Ian Chapman will have reviewed the Forward Schedule and update ahead of March 2026 meeting.



3. Board Committee Updates

a) Nominations and Remuneration Committee (NomCo)

- 3.1. Andrew Mackenzie noted that there had been no Nominations and Remuneration Committee in January but provided an update on ongoing recruitment and succession planning. Andrew noted that the process to recruit a new chair and a new Board member has been initiated.
- 3.2. Members noted that the process to appoint a new AHRC Executive Chair is close to being finalised, with the process to appoint a new Research England Exec Chair expected to launch next month.

b) Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC)

- 3.3. Ruwan Weerasekera, Chair of ARAC, provided an update to the Board on the meeting held on 1 December 2025. In particular, he highlighted the importance of UKRI's relationship with UKSBS and the request by ARAC for specific reporting on service performance and errors. Ruwan highlighted that the committee also discussed early thinking on timelines for the UKRI Annual Report and Accounts and the redefinition of funding assurance as an activity.
- 3.4. Ruwan also noted that the executive accountability exercise has been launched, and that the Government's Internal Audit Agency (GIAA) has provided a substantial opinion on this process, indicating positive progress.
- 3.5. The Board noted that there are two new leads for GIAA and the National Audit (NAO) that will attend ARAC regularly, and that the transition will need to be managed smoothly.

c) Board Investment Committee (BIC)

- 3.6. Priya Guha, Chair of BIC, updated the Board following the meeting on 13 January. The meeting had a strong focus on critical technologies, with Charlotte Deane, Executive Chair of EPSRC, joining to discuss streamlining all forthcoming critical technology business cases.
- 3.7. Priya highlighted that the good joint working between DSIT teams and UKRI was discussed, in particular in the context of the National Infrastructure Roadmap refresh. UKRI is leading on behalf of government, with a target publication date of Spring 2026.
- 3.8. Priya added that the NAO report into the infrastructure programme is expected shortly, with no major issues identified to date, although the volume and detail of required business cases remains very high.

d) Growth Committee

- 3.9. Nigel Toon, Chair of Growth Committee, provided an update on the meeting of 16 January, which focused discussions on the innovation ecosystem.
- 3.10. The committee received input from Stian Westlake, Executive Chair of ESRC, on research into economic growth, which is expected to provide useful evidence for the ecosystem. The committee also discussed exploitation of UKRI generated intellectual property, highlighting how this could be better coordinated across the UK to increase exploitation.
- 3.11. The Board discussed the future of the Growth Committee, including whether it should remain as a separate committee or could its remit be covered by the main Board and the



Board Investment Committee. The Board agreed that the committee should continue as it is in 2026 and will be reviewed at the Board in January 2027.

4. CEO (Accounting Officer) Update

4.1. Ian Chapman presented his CEO update to the Board, including updates on;

Allocations

- Ian thanked the Board for its support
- the level of flexibility UKRI will have between the different buckets (research and development priorities) will be confirmed in writing from DSIT

Local Innovation Partnership Fund

- Ian noted that the first assessment panel took place in early December, where they reviewed readiness check submissions for wave 1 of the earmarked strand. Following discussion with Minister Vallance it was agreed that submissions identified by the panel as having minor weaknesses could get a short extension to resubmit a strengthened application.
- Ian welcomed the role of the independent committee, which had been able to provide appropriate challenge and push back where necessary.

Alan Turing Institute and AI

- Ian updated the Board on future plans for the Alan Turing Institute, noting that engagement with DSIT, institute leadership and the National Security and defence community is ongoing.
- Ian confirmed that interviews for the new CEO took place last week and noted that the new CEO will be involved in defining the new scope of the institute.
- Ian explained that the UKRI AI strategy is expected to rest on three pillars aligned to the existing funding buckets. These are: a single or distributed “frontier” institute; applied research, in which the Alan Turing Institute will play a key role; and translation activity, led by the UKRI Hartree Centre.
- In parallel, work continues on how best to support business adoption of AI through targeted interventions, including ongoing discussions with the Hartree Centre

<Withheld from publication.>

5. Future Options for STFC disciplines, facilities and lab

5.1. Michele Dougherty, STFC’s Executive Chair, provided an overview of the financial and cultural background of the STFC facilities and labs. Michele highlighted that the paper represents only a first step, with further iterations expected.

5.2. The Board highlighted potential conflicts between STFC’s current facilities and the future vision. The Board noted that STFC’s cost base had increased significantly due to the type of facilities and services it manages, noting a reset is needed as currently STFC’s costs will outpace the funding available.

5.3. The board also praised the strategy’s thoughtfulness and complexity but sought clarity on National Labs strategic value and sustainability, including external revenue generation. Michele noted that a review of UKRI institutes is ongoing, with discussions due to take place at the February Executive Committee.

5.4. The Board endorsed the approach outlined by Michele Dougherty.



6. CFO Update

- 6.1. Juliette Meek updated the Board on highlights in the following areas, drawing from recent HMRC audit activity, IT resilience, and operational progress:

HMRC Audit

- HMRC audit is currently underway. Juliette is working closely with HMRC, alongside Gemma Bailey (UKRI Chief People Officer) and UK Shared Business Services (UKSBS), reviewing activity that took place prior to Christmas 2025. Juliette noted that the audit has covered a range of issues such as global staff mobility, payroll and expenses. The Board noted that a new customer compliance manager has been appointed by HMRC, and Juliette is working with them to ensure they fully understand UKRI as an organisation.
- *<Withheld from publication.>*

IT Service Resilience and Cyber Awareness

- one incident occurred where a pre-authorised firewall was triggered, impacting IUK; a formal incident report has been completed with recommendations for improvement
- a January back-to-work phishing exercise was conducted, with a high number of staff clicking on the email and opening it, and 10% of those inputting their credentials
- Christine Ashton is working to complete a targeted campaign to raise awareness on the risks of phishing breaches. Staff are the first port of call for safety, as acquired credentials would enable easy access to most systems

Hybrid Working

- the team are continuing to engage trade unions; a working group has been established and a draft policy with a tiered approach has been developed
- the plan is to launch some aspects soon with full deployment in the summer after Trade Union and further staff engagement

Invoices

- the initial incident on invoices has been closed; there was a backlog on Purchase Orders not matched to invoices, with about 6000 invoices on hold last autumn
- when we turned on the invoice matching function, it created a further issue. The team are working with UKSBS to clear a further 5000 invoices, with UKSBS allocating additional resources to help

- 6.2. An update on manual system interventions and automation in TFS and Fusion will be presented to the Board in November 2026.

7. UKRI People Survey 2025

- 7.1. Gemma Bailey introduced the People Survey results, noting that 55% of the UKRI workforce participated in the survey, offering a stronger evidence base than in previous years, while acknowledging that the participation rate is still below the Civil Service average. The Board noted that participation within Centres, Units and Institutes (CIUs) is particularly low, and encouraged the team to investigate ways of improving this.
- 7.2. The Board discussed the relatively slow pace of change in key indicators within the results and cautioned against over-celebrating these micro-movements. Gemma expressed concern over the limited changes in results and highlighted the need for thorough exploration of the options. Gemma noted that a newly established ExCo subcommittee, the People and Workforce Planning Committee, will oversee work and actions emerging from the results.



- 7.3. The Board suggested a pause from the annual survey cycle would be helpful, proposing calibrated pulse surveys. Board members were in agreement that Pulse surveys should target low-scoring areas while noting the Civil Service is already shifting away from annual surveys to pulse surveys as standard. The Board praised the transparency of the results and urged focusing on participation rate as a starting point for engagement.

DECISION: the Board supported shifting to pulse surveys for 2026/2027

- 7.4. The Board observed that upcoming organisational changes may lead to some lack of clarity around top talent skills and positioning. It was agreed that Gemma will bring back a discussion on critical skills and experience, including succession planning, following the conclusion of the Shaping our Future Programme. The Board noted this should be a prioritisation following the transformation work.

ACTION: Gemma Bailey will have updated the Board on top talent skills and succession planning once the Shaping our Future Programme work has concluded.

8. UKRI Board Risk Update

- 8.1. Juliette Meek introduced the item, providing a brief overview, with a focus on UKRI's annual risk reviews and changes to principal risks since the last ExCo meeting in December 2025. Juliette discussed the executive accountability exercise, noting it is an important year-end assurance activity that is currently live. Data from the executive accountability exercise will be reflected in the Annual Report and Accounts. The Board noted the proposed levels of assurance, agreed by ExCo, with the majority at high assurance. For areas of operational activity, medium assurance was agreed.
- 8.2. Head of Risk and Management Assurance noted that the annual risk review provides an opportunity to make changes, which were approved by ExCo in November. There has been an escalation in the Data and Information Management risk, one of 10 risks considered at UKRI Board level. The Board noted that the refreshed Risk Appetite Statement has been utilised to propose target levels of assurance for the executive accountability exercise. These were confirmed as agreed by ExCo, with the majority at high assurance due to the legal, regulatory or government standards nature of the areas of delegation, with areas of operational activity agreed at a medium level of assurance.
- 8.3. The Board noted that two new principal risks were agreed by ExCo:
- approach to national capabilities
 - governance aligned with organisational risk
- 8.4. Head of Risk and Management Assurance highlighted that a newly established subcommittee of ExCo (Governance and Risk Assurance Review Committee) will look at risk in detail, reporting directly into ExCo.
- 8.5. Juliette confirmed that target rating scores are regularly reviewed and that they are encoded into regular risk reviews.
- 8.6. Andrew Mackenzie expressed concern about fragility of the Financial Sustainability of the UK research system risk and sought suggestions from Board members. Impact remains high and likelihood medium, so the Board agreed it should be moved on the heatmap. The Head of Risk and Management Assurance confirmed that the Research Financial



Sustainability Programme Board will meet end of January and are expected to agree this change.

- 8.7. The Board were happy to approve the Annual Risk Review, noting that it reflected the status of risks in November. An explanation should be provided to the Board to confirm that timing differences accounted for the differences in risk information between the Board risk dashboard and the annual risk review.

ACTION: UKRI Risk team will have circulated a note to the Board reconciling the Board risk dashboard Annex for January with the November annual risk review.

9. UKRI's Framework for Performance: Annual Balanced Scorecard and Q2 Progress and Performance Report

- 9.1. Hugh Harris presented the Annual Balanced Scorecard and Q2 Progress Report, covering over 80 annual and quarterly performance measures with narrative summaries. Two data tones were highlighted: broader annual metrics versus Q2 specifics, noting familiar issues like high Research Council grant processing times. The Board noted positive user satisfaction rises for The Funding Service (TFS).
- 9.2. Hugh highlighted that the ongoing work to develop a set of Key Results will result in updated quarterly reporting from spring 2026, and the introduction of PowerBI later in the year will enhance data collection efficiency.
- 9.3. The Board queried the measure that appears to show a fall in number of UKRI enabled publications, noting that this may be partly due to late attribution of articles. The board requested an update and the team noted they will continue to explore the data in more detail.

ACTION: Hugh Harris will have updated the Board on the causes behind the reported fall in the number of UKRI-enabled publications as the UK total stabilises at the July 2026 Board meeting.

- 9.4. The Board suggested it would be useful to have access to a high-level dashboard with live data and encouraged the team to consider options for the future.

10. AHRC Technical Deep Dive: Arts and humanities between experiment and mission, or Living, Loving, Party-Going

- 10.1. Christopher Smith introduced the session, highlighting AHRC's role in supporting curiosity-driven arts and humanities research and its distinctive position within UKRI. He noted recent changes to AHRC's funding portfolio, including an increase in the size of large grants from £1 million to £1.5 million and a continued emphasis on team-based projects and larger funding packages. The Board discussed the opportunity presented by AHRC's openness to lateral movement across topics and disciplines and the need to position AHRC appropriately within the wider European Research Council (ERC) and UKRI landscape so that scholars have clear pathways and routes to impact.
- 10.2. The Board reflected on the SHAPE versus STEM framing and its implications for AHRC. It was noted that SHAPE thinking sits largely outside UKRI but has been adopted in some international funding contexts and has helped expose the limitations of STEM-only narratives, which now appear dated as a recruitment device. The discussion underlined the



strategic importance of AHRC's collaborative projects, particularly with EPSRC, and the need to ensure that arts and humanities are recognised as central to UK soft power.

10.3. The Board highlighted the increasing public and media interest in the value of arts and humanities, including recent external scrutiny in the financial press. They emphasised the importance of a joined-up approach across UKRI in defending the contribution of arts and humanities to the UK's creative industries, soft power and societal resilience. The Board encouraged AHRC and the wider UKRI to work on key industrial strategy areas where arts and humanities perspectives are essential.

10.4. The Board thanked Christopher for his update and continued leadership in arts and humanities research.

11. Deep Dive into Research Council Application Processing Times

11.1. Stian Westlake, introduced the item, noting that 2024/25 processing times exceeded 180 days, but 2025/26 times are now under 175 days. He proposed ambitious targets of 120 or 90 days through trials of distributed peer review, desk rejections by UKRI staff, and clearer future guidance on researcher requirements, framing these as experiments.

11.2. The Board highlighted the limitations of transactional metaphors for non-standardised applications, advocating experimentation with workflow interventions. The Board raised concerns about migrating legacy grants to TFS, prioritising new grant processing while planning to move 13,000 live Siebel grants over the next year, balancing speed with relevant controls fraud prevention.

11.3. The Board expressed enthusiasm for ambitious targets, drawing parallels to MRC's early triage and criteria-setting, and queried automation of checks, hybrid workflows, industry precedents for desk rejections and grant panel frequency impacts on start dates.

11.4. The Board sought assurance on controls to prevent delays, with explanations of past issues like TFS cut-offs and changes. It was confirmed that senior accountability rests with Christine Ashton (Chief Information Officer) and Stian Westlake, supported by the Business Design Authority refresh and Michael Baker as Chief of Operational Delivery. The Board endorsed exploring peer review alternatives via the metascience unit.

11.5. The Board noted that the data provided focused on research council application processing times and would welcome a similar deep dive into the application processing times in Innovate UK.

ACTION: Tom Adeyoola will have brought a deep-dive on Innovate UK grants application processing time to the Board for discussion by [Date TBC]

12. AOB

12.1. The Board approved the granting of authority to the Chief of Operational Delivery on a permanent basis and to the UKRI Finance Director on a temporary basis, to apply the UKRI seal on behalf of UKRI.

12.2. The Board noted the following:

- Update on Public and Senior Succession and Appointments
- National Infrastructure Roadmap Update



**UK Research
and Innovation**

- UKRI Finance Update
- Executive Committee minutes – 28 October and 25 November 2025
- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee minutes – 6 October 2025
- Growth Committee minutes 23 September 2025 and 14 November 2025

13. Non-Executive Session

13.1. The Board agreed to freeze recruitment of Council members to the UKRI Councils for the next year. Ian Chapman will bring back a update on the councils' Councils to a future meeting.

ACTION: Ian Chapman will have updated the Board on future plans for the UKRI Councils at the November 2026 meeting.