

OFFICIAL



Item 2 Paper: ESRC 2025-01

MINUTES OF THE 28th MEETING OF COUNCIL HELD ON 28th November 2024 VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM

Present:	Professor Todd Landman (Chair, Senior Independent Member) Professor Rachel Brooks Anita Charlesworth Professor Jane Duckett Professor Lasana Harris (attended until item 7) Ben Page (attended until item 5) Professor Kimberley Scharf Professor Sarah Sharples (CSA) (attended until item 7) Professor Jackline Wahba
Apologies:	Chris Wormald, Bernard Silverman and Peter Ethelston
Office:	Stian Westlake (ESRC Executive Chair) Alison Park (ESRC Deputy Executive Chair) Claire Graves (ESRC Chief Operating Officer) Jennifer Gold (ESRC Director of Research) Sam Richardson (ESRC Senior Manager, Executive Chair office) Flo Bradley Sutton (ESRC Secretariat) Emma Gordon (Director ADR UK), Beccy Shipman (ESRC Deputy Director Data Strategy and Infrastructure), Richard Welpton (ESRC Head of Data Services Infrastructure) and Kirsten Dutton (ESRC Senior Portfolio Manager – Data Infrastructure) - Item 7 Joy Todd (ESRC Deputy Director of Research) and Nina Marshall (ESRC Head of Responsive Funding Strategy) - Item 8
Guests:	Ottoline Leyser (UKRI CEO) – Item 6
Observing:	Huw Vasey (ESRC Deputy Director of IBEC)

These minutes do not necessarily reflect the precise order in which items were discussed.

1.	Welcome and apologies
1.1	Professor Todd Landman welcomed Council members to the 28 th meeting of Council.
1.2	Council Members were asked to review their details currently being held on the conflict of interest's portal and update as necessary. Council members were reminded to raise any conflicts during the meeting.
2.	Minutes of the previous meeting
2.1	The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record, noting that the Secretariat made amendments as requested by Jane Duckett (a change

OFFICIAL

	from Lancashire University to Lancaster University) and Anita Charlesworth (attendance at the July Council meeting).
3.	Matters arising
3.1	Members were updated on the status of matters arising from the previous meeting.
4.	ESRC Council Planner Forward Schedule
4.1	The Chair reminded Council members that suggestions for future agenda items are welcome at any point in the year; to suggest items, please contact the secretariat team.
4.2	Council members agreed that future updates on the UKRI Environmental Sustainability Policy, particularly on any impacts on the grant application process would be welcome. Council members requested that the Spending Review and ESRC strategy in respect of the social science ecosystem be discussed at the May Council meeting.
4.3	Council members requested more highlights and engagement on the impact of major investments, and it was agreed that more regular communications would flow from the Executive to members to provide evidence in support of their role as ambassadors for ESRC.
5.	Executive Chair's business
5.1	The Executive Chair presented, and members discussed the Executive Chair report.
5.2	Council welcomed the focus on clear priorities for ESRC moving into next year and the commitment to engage with the Government Missions in tandem with the wider ESRC remit. Council discussed the importance of working across UKRI to deliver cross-cutting priorities and it was agreed that ESRC should play an active coordinating role, where possible, to maximise the benefits and impact in key areas.
5.3	The opportunity to streamline multi-stakeholder engagement in the National Data Library was raised and members were updated on ongoing activity with the Office for National Statistics and the effective relationship established with the relevant teams and stakeholders.
5.4	Council was given an update on Metascience Unit, and were supportive of the ambition support a cross-government community of practice. ESRC is working with DSIT on longer term plans to be delivered by the Metascience unit.
5.5	Council members were given an update on the UKRI CEO recruitment and were reassured that it was progressing well.
6.	UKRI update
6.1	Council welcomed Ottoline Leyser (OL) to the meeting.
6.2	Council members were given an update on the Spending Review process. UKRI is working with DSIT on a two phased approach: it is expected the second phase will commence in Spring 2025.

OFFICIAL

6.3	Council highlighted that there is flexibility needed in spending review process, and agreed that the “right-shaping” of Council’s portfolio will be important.
6.4	Council members were given an update on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029. Council noted the importance of REF in allocating funding as part of the dual support system, also acknowledging that formal responsibility for REF lies with Research England and their counterparts in the devolved nations.
6.5	Council discussed the importance of EDI data capture, acknowledging that there is a challenge to get people to provide their data.
6.6	Council members discussed Net Zero as part of the grants system and noted that UKRI have signed up to be Net Zero by 2040.
6.7	Council thanked Ottoline for her time and useful discussion.
7	Delivering our vision for Future Data Services
7.1	Council welcomed Emma Gordon, Beccy Shipman, Richard Welpton and Kirsten Dutton to the meeting and Alison Park introduced the item.
7.2	Council members discussed the ways in which data users currently find, access and use data and ESRC agreed the benefits of coordinated user engagement and user experience as part of delivering a UK wide vision for data services.
7.3	Council discussed the goals and objectives set and noted the importance of resources to be targeted to achieve these objectives. Council members also noted the importance of technological advances in helping facilitate improved data discovery and access.
7.4	Future Data Services updates on outputs, implementation and monitoring plans (including connections with broader data activity including the National Data Library) will be scheduled at future council meetings, at appropriate times.
7.5	Council thanked Alison, Beccy, Emma, Richard and Kirsten for attending and for their insightful conversation.
8.	Investment Strategy – applicant-led and targeted research
8.1	Council welcomed Joy Todd and Nina Marshall to the meeting and the Executive Chair thanked everyone involved in producing the paper. The Executive Chair noted that the paper will help shape how ESRC uses both applicant led and targeted modes of funding to deliver its investment strategy as part of its wider Strategy that is currently being drafted.
8.2	Council agreed that a more purposeful and focused approach with ESRC’s targeted funding would be beneficial. Council agreed that a more strategic applicant-led mode would also be valuable, and welcomed the idea of a gradual increase in the size of applicant-led mode relative to targeted mode over the upcoming SDP period.

OFFICIAL

8.3	The COO discussed the importance of ensuring that the peer reviewers are involved in discussions about applicant-led mode; careful communication is planned to further their understanding of the funding modes and how they are used at ESRC.
8.4	The Executive Chair welcomed Council members to volunteer to participate in follow up conversations, with an update on this to be brought to the next Council meeting, as part of the Executive Chair's report.
8.5	Council thanked Joy and Nina for joining Council today and their meaningful conversation.
9.	Papers for discussion by exception and any other business
9.1	The Executive Chair discussed the Government's Industrial Strategy green paper, ESRC is coordinating UKRI's response to department for business and trade consultation.
10.	Meeting closed