

**MINUTES OF THE 25 MEETING OF COUNCIL**  
**HELD ON 22 February 2024 VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM**

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<b>Present:</b>	Professor Todd Landman ( <i>Chair, Senior Independent Member</i> )
	Professor Rachel Brooks
	Professor Jane Duckett
	Mr Mike Emmerich
	Professor Lasana Harris
	Ms Desirée Lopez
	Mr Ben Page
	Professor Kimberley Scharf
	Professor Sir Bernard Silverman
	Professor Jackline Wahba
	Sir Chris Wormald (Civil Service attendee)
	Professor Sarah Sharples (CSA)
<b>Apologies:</b>	Emily Clarke ( <i>Deputy Director of Strategy and Partnerships</i> )
<b>Office:</b>	Stian Westlake ( <i>Executive Chair</i> )
	Alison Park ( <i>Deputy Executive Chair</i> )
	Claire Graves ( <i>Chief Operating Officer</i> )
	Jen Gold ( <i>Director of Research</i> )
	James Canton ( <i>Deputy Director of Public Policy Engagement</i> ) item 7
	Peter Ethelston ( <i>Associate Director for Governance and Policy</i> )
	Flo Bradley Sutton ( <i>Secretariat</i> )
	Pam Mason (ESRC) item 6, Lucy Thorne (ESRC) item 8, Joanna Lake, (ESRC) item 8 Elaine Dobson (ESRC) item 8
<b>Guests:</b>	Benjamin Steyn DSIT, Kersten England CBE YPIP Co-Director Representing Yorkshire and Humber Councils Chair and Gary Dymski YPIP Principal Investigator Professor of Applied Economics, Leeds University Business School

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

<b>1.</b>	<b>Welcome and apologies</b>
1.1	Professor Todd Landman welcomed members to the 25th meeting of Council. Apologies from Emily Clarke. Noted a few members were having some travel difficulties and would join shortly.
1.2	Members were reminded to check their details currently being held on the UKRI Declarations of Conflicts register and update as necessary. Members were asked to raise any conflicts arising during the course of the meeting.

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<b>2.</b>	<b>Minutes of the previous meeting</b>
2.1	The minutes of the previous meeting were <b>agreed</b> as an accurate record. There was an addition added to the minutes under papers by discussion by exception.
<b>3.</b>	<b>Matters arising</b>
3.1	Members were updated on the status of matters arising from the previous meeting.
<b>4.</b>	<b>Executive Chair's business and update on context</b>
4.1	<p>Stian Westlake welcomed everyone. Stian reflected on the recent changes for ESRC and UKRI from the Grant review and the UKRI Organisational Change programme. He shared ESRC's three priorities for 2024 with Council: maximising the impact of social science research, Simpler and better funding, and investment in data infrastructure.</p> <p>Maximising impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stian noted the next stage in the Strategic Delivery Plan had begun for 2025-2029. There would be more focus on this topic in the May agenda.</li></ul> <p>SBF reflections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stian spoke about the challenges faced by an increase in applications. The SBF team would be working with panels and researchers closely. Important changes involve focusing panel time on projects close to the critical fundable threshold and moving away from universal post-panel feedback (while retaining expert review feedback). SBF will communicate clearly with the research community on plans, recognising these as an opportunity to learn.</li></ul> <p>Investment in data infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stian spoke about managing Data Infrastructure pressures and costs, and noted there would be more discussion at the May Council, including potential opportunities to secure additional funding.</li></ul>
4.2	<p>Stian updated Council on a range of policy issues, including the Government's response to the Tickell Review of research bureaucracy. He discussed the announcement that UKRI's CEO would step down at the end of her term in 2025 and invited Council members to nominate suitable candidates for the recruitment process for a replacement.</p> <p>A discussion took place about the expected general election, in particular the impact of the pre-election period ('purdah') on Councils and Research Organisations. It was noted that UKRI guidance will be produced. Stian updated Council members on DSIT rules on UKRI staff engaging with Opposition MPs and Shadow Ministers.</p>

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4.3	<p>Council discussed the Executive Chair business.</p> <p>Rachel Brooks asked for more clarification on point 1.4 on the role of Independent Research Organisations. Stian advised that this work would consider a range of institutions within the social science ecosystem, including but not limited to IROs, to understand whether there are gaps that limit our ability to promote the impact of social research.</p> <p>Lasana Harris asked to include universities in the SBF work.</p> <p>Jane Duckett spoke about her work with various ESRC colleagues and the surge in applications in the latest responsive mode call.</p> <p>With Desiree and Mike demitting at end March 2024, Stian thanked them for all their hard work with Council.</p>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Metascience</b>
5.1	<p>Todd welcomed Ben Steyn and thanked him for joining the meeting. Jen Gold introduced UKRI's new Metascience Programme delivered jointly with DSIT and invited Council to discuss the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What does success from this ESRC-DSIT partnership look like to you? What would you like to see the programme achieve?</li><li>• Internal experiments: Are there any ways in which you would like to see UKRI experiment with its funding processes?</li><li>• External grant making: Are there any topics you would like to see addressed via the metascience grants programme?</li></ul> <p>Council welcomed ESRC's leadership role in setting up a joint unit with DSIT. Council noted that current metascience scholarship builds on more than 60 years of contributions from a variety of disciplines. Sarah Sharples noted the warm reception given to the unit by the Chief Scientific Adviser Network who could see opportunities for their departments to benefit from the outputs of the programme. Council discussed opportunities for the academic community to access UKRI data for metascience research purposes. Jen Gold and Alison Park noted the level of interest in our data from the academic community and the challenges and opportunities for UKRI in making this data available. Council identified areas that could be within the scope of the programme, including the role of artificial intelligence in preparing proposals and how applicant feedback is used.</p> <p>Council thanked Ben Steyn and Jen Gold for the discussion.</p>
<b>6</b>	<b>To engage Council in the development of an ESRC Global Strategy, gaining their insights and advocacy to shape and strengthen our approach to international collaboration.</b>
6.1	<p>Alison Park welcomed Pam Mason. Alison introduced the Global Strategy paper. Council were invited to discuss the following:</p>

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- Global Talent Mobility – connecting people
- International Development – addressing global challenges

Council observed that there were a number of schemes in the ‘connecting people’ space; it will be important to be clear about the value ESRC activity could bring. It was noted early career researchers (ECRs) do not have the same opportunities for international collaboration as senior colleagues and there was an appetite to address this.

Council discussed the relationship with scholars and partnerships with the US, and the challenges caused by the different application systems that can be involved in collaborative schemes; addressing this would require activity at a UKRI level.

The need for a strategic approach to collaboration was noted; ESRC needs to focus on research areas and nations where collaboration is key to success. There is potential for new partnerships (for example in Asia), but Council noted a number of barriers to this including language. In relation to GCRF/ODA, there were varying views about the extent to which the academic community were aware of the changed funding landscape, though it was noted that the communities and momentum built through GCRF is now not being taken full advantage of.

Council suggested that ESRC/UKRI try to find ways to “smooth out” ODA peaks and troughs, to create more certainty and stability in the funding landscape. It was however noted that ODA allocations and spend is not something ESRC or even UKRI have much control over, as this, and associated reporting requirements, is overseen by HMT.

Council were interested in the role UKRI could play in helping the UK research community to reengage with Horizon Europe. Philanthropic funding was discussed, and the constraints recognised (for example in terms of the nature of the research they will cover). Council discussed University visits and influencing those in senior leadership (who may be from other disciplines), who are not aware of how tricky this type of funding is. Council thanked Pam Mason.

### **7. Local Policy Innovation Partnerships (LPIPs)**

7.1 Todd welcomed James Canton, Kersten England and Gary Dymski. James gave a brief introduction to the Local Policy Innovation Partnerships programme, which drew connections between the programme and ESRC’s strategy on place that was discussed at the November 2023 Council meeting. James described the four LPIP projects that have received funding under phase two of the programme, including the Yorkshire LPIP. Kersten and Gary set out how universities and local authorities across Yorkshire have come together to collaborate on the Yorkshire LPIP (YPIP). Some of the areas of focus for YPIP are local economic performance through inclusive growth; living and working sustainably in a greener economy; data and informatics. The partnership is committed to deep community engagement.

Council welcomed the opportunity to hear how the programme was working in practice. Chris Wormald noted opportunities for YPIP to collaborate with parts of the UK national government with a presence in Yorkshire (e.g. departments with ‘second HQs’) and the government Policy Campus in Sheffield. The presenters and Council discussed regional level data that could be used by YPIP and the long-term impact they hoped to see from YPIP.

Council thanked James, Kersten and Gary.

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<b>8.</b>	<b>Enhancing research skills training and capacity building in the social sciences</b>
8.1	<p>Todd welcomed Lucy Thorne, Jo Lake and Elaine Dobson. Alison introduced the paper. Council were divided into two break out rooms to discuss:</p> <p>How can we effectively implement this new model? What should be immediate priorities for the new infrastructure investment?</p> <p>Feedback from the breakout rooms included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Skills gaps identified included including writing skills, data visualisation (including Tableau), communication with non-academic communities, research</li><li>• ethics, data driven research skills, programming. It was noted that foreign language skills are an important part of communication skills for those working on international collaboration</li><li>• It will be important to pay attention to the fact that the nature of TCB required later in a person's career may differ to that needed at ECR stage.</li><li>• There was helpful discussion (and broad support for) the hub and spoke model and the best use of spokes. Council advised that ESRC carefully considers the terms and conditions for spokes and focus on identifying the benefits for the spokes as well as the hub. The plans were seen as ambitious, so careful thought about phasing and management will be required.</li><li>• A suggestion was made regarding developing a 'menu' of options, with main courses, starters, sides etc. The relevance of private providers was noted.</li><li>• Thought should be given to join up with the mandatory Training Needs Assessments in DTPs and throughout academic careers</li></ul> <p>Council were asked to get in touch if they'd like any involvement in supporting the roll out of the new investment in research skills. Lucy confirmed a workshop will take place in March 2024 (aimed at existing investments with a training offer) and a roll out in the early summer to start in 2025. Lucy noted a survey will be launched which ESRC will share with Council.</p> <p>Council thanked Lucy, Jo and Elaine.</p>
<b>9.</b>	<b>Papers for discussion by exception and any other business</b>
9.1	<p>No additional papers and any other business. Council noted the next meeting would be in person on 15 and 16 May 2024, in Edinburgh.</p>
<b>10.</b>	<b>Close of Meeting</b>
	<p>There being no further business, Todd closed the meeting at 12:40</p>