

Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting held on 12 March 2024 in London.

Those attending:

Steve Bagshaw
Professor Ewan Birney
Professor Anne Ferguson-Smith
Professor Gideon Henderson (Defra CSA)
Professor Martin Humphries (Chair of the meeting)
Professor Andrew Millar
Professor Christine Orengo
Professor Guy Poppy (UKRI-BBSRC Interim Executive Chair)
Professor Jo Price
Professor Nigel Scrutton
Professor Malcom Skingle
Professor Steven Spoel
Professor Ijeoma Uchegbu

Also attending:

Dr Amanda Collis
Dr Jef Grainger
Dr Karen Lewis
Dr Sarah Perkins
Bill Poll
Zahir Sachak
Dr Rosie Cornelius
Tim Bianek (item 4 only)
Dr Nick Bassett (item 6 only)
Dr Lee Beniston (item 6 only)
Dr Samana Brannigan (item 6 only)
Dr Sarah Goulding (item 6 only)
Dr Stella Peace (item 6 only)
Dr Stephanie Blackwell (item 8 only)
Dr Natalia Gilles (item 10 only)
Sarah Cresswell
Ksymena Grzybowska (Secretary)

ITEM 1. OPENING REMARKS

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. The Chair thanked the following Council members, whose term was coming to an end on 31 March 2024, and this was their last Council meeting:
 - Malcolm Skingle served six years on Council.
 - Andrew Millar served six years on Council.
 - Nigel Scrutton served three years on Council.
3. The Chair thanked them for providing valuable contributions during their tenures.
4. The Chair informed Council about four new Council members, who would be joining Council on 1 April 2024 and 1 October 2024 as follows:

- Andy Griffiths – Global Head of Sustainable Procurement, Diageo, start date 1 April 2024.
 - Neil Parry – Research Programme Director, Biotechnology and Biosourcing, Unilever, start date 1 April 2024
 - Professor Tim Dafforn – Director of Knowledge Exchange, School of Biosciences, University of Birmingham, start date 1 October 2024
 - Professor Eriko Takano – Professor of Synthetic Biology and Deputy Head of School of Chemistry, University of Manchester, start date 1 October 2024
5. There were not any apologies received for this meeting.
 6. 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 course of the meeting.

ITEM 2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 DECEMBER 2023 (UKRI BBSRC 01/2024)

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

ITEM 3. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AND MATTERS ARISING (ORAL)

8. The Chair went through the actions and most of them were either in hand or completed.

ITEM 4. UKRI ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE (ORAL)

9. The Chair welcomed Tim Bianek, UKRI Chief Operating Officer, to the meeting.
10. Tim Bianek thanked Council and BBSRC Executive for the invitation to the meeting and introduced this item by saying that the UKRI organisational change programme would deliver more world – leading research and innovation by improving efficiency, effectiveness and agility (UKRI sixth strategic priority) and help meeting efficiency targets from DSIT by the end of March 2025.
11. Tim talked about integration and harmonisation of processes across UKRI where appropriate, bringing Councils together, increasing collaboration and reducing duplication. There were four groupings that would help UKRI deliver operational change: funding (including The Funding System); pan-UKRI services (including SHARP and Technology Portfolio); governance, data, insight, advice and influence; people and innovating Innovate UK, centres, institutes, units and infrastructure.
12. The aim of this session was to consider organisational change implications on external communities and what role Council has in supporting and communicating these changes.
13. The following points were made in the discussion:
 - a) Council commented positively about the overarching principles for change set out by Tim in his introduction and was interested to hear more about how the new structure of UKRI would interface with stakeholders especially in the context of FTEs reductions and centralisation of awards and post awards processing. Council was reassured that organisational change was about optimisation, not centralisation or removing resources from Councils. It was key to understand where the skills and knowledge were across UKRI and how different parts of UKRI carry out the same activities and harmonising approaches where appropriate.

- b) Council appreciated the importance of activities and processes alignment across UKRI and asked about an extent to which Councils have co-created the organisational change agenda and narrative. Council was informed that co-creation and involving all Councils was the way how organisational change was being delivered. Reaching out to parts of the organisation, using their connections and expertise was fundamental in co-designing organisational change.
 - c) In relation to communications with stakeholders and working with users, there was a strong recognition of connections and where they were made across the sector and strengthening them.
 - d) Council commented about benchmarking against other international organisations and potential risks relating to focusing on cost savings only.
 - e) Council discussed ensuring expertise was in the right place and understanding how other disciplines/Councils use different functions differently. Collaboration, horizontal linkages and drawing from expertise across UKRI was critical to ensure different perspectives were considered. Council stressed that specialist expertise in different Councils must be preserved.
 - f) Council noted that UKRI was investing in leadership development programme for both senior and emerging leaders across UKRI.
 - g) Council was concerned about staff and talent and creating a better operational environment within UKRI and it noted the necessity for UKRI to find solutions and drive efficiencies to meet targets given by DSIT. There had been recruitment restrictions that created pressure across the organisation. However, the aim of organisational change was largely to relief these pressures. Some relief would come from automation too e.g. through SHARP and The Funding Service.
 - h) Council commented that since the formation of UKRI in 2018, collaboration has improved and Council reiterated it had welcomed creating collective talent funding.
 - i) Council raised a question about the design of grant review processes and its potential for cost saving and ensuring appropriate management of the process, external reviews, ranking and safeguarding of taking right decisions that have profound impact on what we fund as UKRI. Tim assured Council that reviewing and awarding grants, including EDI, was a key area and UKRI would monitor if changes have profound impact on what we fund and outcomes.
 - j) Council emphasised the importance of post-panel feedback to grant applicants and optimising it.
 - k) Simplification and streamlining to access papers by external attendees (e.g. in one pdf document) and learning and sharing within UKRI was highlighted by Council.
14. The Chair thanked Tim for attending the meeting and answering Council's questions. The Chair noted that there were important points raised in the discussion for Council to take away in their role of being UKRI ambassadors (refer to item 5 below).

ITEM 5. EXECUTIVE CHAIR'S REPORT (UKRI BBSRC 03/2024)

15. Council reflected on the discussion about the UKRI Organisational Change at item 4 of the agenda and the following comments were made:
- a) Council had been aware of three priority areas identified by Guy Poppy, one of them being people and BBSRC's efforts to tackle staff's lower morale and pressures by establishing four bottom-up focus groups. Following engagement with staff via focus groups and all staff away day in November 2023 staff morale was improving (e.g. staff were more engaged and there were opportunities to contribute). BBSRC will compare People Survey results from last year with this year's results. Council also noted that BBSRC staff had positively commented on the opportunity

to meet Council members in December 2023 in Polaris House and Council Secretariat will arrange Council meetings once a year in Swindon.

- b) Council asked about leadership training and noted that it was available for Executive Directors, Associate Directors and senior leaders across UKRI (three levels). The format of the training was group coaching, action learning and personal reflection. It also provided an opportunity to speak to colleagues from other parts of UKRI.
 - c) Council noted concerns and uncertainty about UKRI communication function currently delivered as business partnership model. The same solution applied to HR and finance functions. Council reiterated the importance of communications with the research community, especially in light of The Funding Service and review of peer review. Researchers need to be aware what is going to change for them. They also need to know about the benefits and that changes were not only about saving resources.
 - d) Council noted that UKRI was at a pivot point to implement organisational change. However, the difficulty was that organisational change and restructure was taking place at the same time as the delivery of two major systems, SHARP and TFS, and understanding efficiency delivered by SHARP and TFS would have been useful to inform organisational change implementation.
 - e) Council noted the update on review of peer review. A centre of excellence was discussed in UKRI and Innovate UK had most advanced approaches that UKRI was learning from. UKRI took advantage of different moving pieces, including DSIT MetaScience Unit. There was a lot the Unit could do to evaluate current peer review system and Guy was meeting with leaders in UKRI and DSIT to determine what the first experiment might be.
 - f) It was noted that the narrative from UKRI was that UKRI was close to meeting DSIT FTEs and Operational Expenditure (OpEx) targets.
 - g) There was a recognition of some tensions within UKRI between different cultures in the organisation (civil servants/discipline Councils).
 - h) Council considered ways of influencing the discussion in DSIT and with the Minister.
16. In summary of the organisational change discussion, the Chair said that Council members in their role of UKRI ambassadors could help communicating about the UKRI Organisational Change. BBSRC will share BBSRC briefing for the Science Minister and key messages from the discussion.

Action UKRI BBSRC 96/2024: BBSRC will share BBSRC briefing for the Science Minister (completed) and key messages from the discussion (completed).

17. Council then went to discuss the Executive Chair's report and noted a performance summary highlighting key achievements, future plans and a scorecard summarising progress against the Near-Term Actions (NTAs) set out in the BBSRC's Delivery Plan as at the end of Quarter 3.
18. Council commented on the strategic and joined up approaches by BBSRC in relation to Engineering Biology Hubs that would act as convenors. However, Council had questions about early-stage translation and access to infrastructure and noted that these aspects would be covered during dinner discussion relating to Engineering Biology.
19. In talent area, there should be more thinking into new solutions such as apprenticeships with the Department for Education and BBSRC confirmed that there had been some interesting developments and Christopher Smith (AHRC Executive Chair) and Indro Mukerjee (Innovate UK Executive Chair) were leading on this piece of work and UKRI Executive Committee would continue discussing this option.

ITEM 6. BIOSCIENCE INNOVATION: DELIVERING BIOBASED SOLUTIONS FOR OUR FUTURE (UKRI BBSRC 04/2024)

20. The Chair welcomed Stella Peace, Innovate UK Executive Director for Healthy Living and Agriculture, Samana Brannigan, Innovate UK Head of Health Technologies, Sarah Goulding, Innovate UK Head of Medicines Manufacturing, Lee Beniston, BBSRC Associate Director-Industry Partnerships and Collaborative R&D, and Nick Bassett, BBSRC Associate Director-Innovation, to the meeting.
21. The Chair handed over to Karen Lewis to introduce this agenda item, which provided an opportunity for Council to engage with BBSRC's current approach to enable bioscience innovation, shape emerging future direction, and participate in a deep dive / focused discussion to influence BBSRC's forward priorities for partnership with Innovate UK.
22. Council noted BBSRC's current approach to supporting innovation set out in the BBSRC Delivery Plan such as enabling short, medium and long-term support for partnerships with businesses, and encouraging the development of enterprise (and underpinned by independent evaluation). Council was invited to comment on current approaches to innovation and emerging plans. Overall, Council clearly endorsed the current approach and emerging future plans recognising that the next stage of iteration will be part of the Spending Review discussion.
23. The following points were raised in discussion:
 - a) There is potential to explore the possibility of developing different types of funding models to secure private investment in bioscience research e.g., could we leverage private sector investment to support Institute Strategic Programmes?
 - b) BBSRC should seek to be ambitious in exploring different approaches to public/private partnerships, whilst being cognisant of the different business models and commercial approaches to collaborative R&D that businesses which can benefit from bioscience adopt (from pharma to farmer).
 - c) It is important to develop a porous research and innovation ecosystem that enables interactions between researchers and businesses, seeking to change attitudes and culture to better enable business and academic researchers connect.
 - d) Council suggested being more creative about supporting early-stage researchers in the context of commercialisation. An example highlighted was the SPRIN-D programme in Germany (which provides mentoring in business development, and direct investment). A key benefit being enabling researchers to recognise at an early-stage market needs and to develop an investment mindset.
24. The purpose of the second part of the session was to consider overall strategic priorities and deep dive into the strategic challenge areas for working in partnership with Innovate UK over the next phase of the BBSRC-Innovate UK Partnership. Karen invited Stella Peace to provide Innovate UK perspective on its strategy and Healthy Living and Agriculture, who highlighted that innovation was a shared endeavour and BBSRC and Innovate UK will work closely bringing different focus and strengths.
25. Council was interested to hear more about how joint working was developing and was provided with examples in the agri-tech and food and health area. BBSRC had a long, successful history of working jointly to support collaborative research and development between businesses and academic researchers in strategic areas and bringing in other partners across UKRI and beyond to deliver (including other Research Councils and Government Departments). Over £200m has been co-invested

through this partnership in targeted joint initiatives and strategically aligned funding since 2007. The forthcoming Spending Review was an opportunity to evolve and scale this strategic partnership.

26. Council was then invited to consider the four themes /challenge areas highlighted for future working with Innovate UK. It was recognised that sustainability underpinned all challenges/themes. Another theme raised was animal and human vaccines which could be covered under the Medicines Manufacturing joint area of interest.
27. Council was supportive of the overall direction of travel to broaden the partnership and the specific portfolio of themes for joint working as highlighted in the meeting papers. Council also suggested there could be merit in looking at outcomes of the Big Ideas Pipeline call in progressing these areas.
28. Scaling-up bioscience enabled commercial opportunities, both in a financial and technology context, was recognised as challenging. Council emphasised the need for driving public/private dialogue early before interventions are defined. Council discussed different routes to support financial scale-up and noted the potential to engage with the British Business Bank within this context.
29. Council noted that various interventions are available through UKRI to support scale-up, such as the Catapults and services and products, such as investor partnerships. Also, more broadly there is potential for investment through the British Business Bank. Council asked for examples of investor partnerships and British Business Bank support for scale-up opportunities.

Action UKRI BBSRC 97/2024: Council asked for examples as to how investor partnerships can support scale-up opportunities and progression of current investments (completed).

30. Council further discussed different scale-up models and mechanisms, using the US as an example, and emphasised the importance of providing support to develop skills in early-stage companies. Council highlighted that de-risking technologies was critical to successful commercialisation, however, de-risking deployment was equally as important and other countries were faster than the UK in deploying technologies into the market. Council also noted that government purchasing power was significant and could be used to help de-risking UK based companies. The opportunity of using public procurement to drive innovation was highlighted, with DEFRA reporting this as a useful mechanism, noting a recent BBSRC-Innovate UK-DEFRA multilateral approach to investing through the Small Business Research Initiative model to support plant health.

ITEM 7. OTHER UPDATES FROM UKRI (ORAL)

31. The Chair invited Rosie Cornelius, UKRI Deputy Director Analysis and Performance, to provide UKRI updates. Rosie reflected on Lord Willett's review of DSIT business case approvals processes and recommendations to render the process more efficient and streamlined.
32. Council was also informed about the appointment of UKRI's Chief Information Officer, Christine Ashton, and Spending Review preparations.
33. Rosie presented Council with slides showing distribution of spend by place. However, Council noticed some data discrepancies and asked about tools used. Council was also informed that BBSRC had carried out some data analysis on place and will share this data with Council.

Action UKRI BBSRC 97/2024: BBSRC will share data analysis on place with Council (Sarah Perkins, completed).

ITEM 8. UPDATES FROM GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND THE WIDER CSA NETWORK (ORAL)

34. Gideon Henderson provided updates as follows:

- a) budgets were tight across government departments. Spending Review would take place after the next election and was most likely to be a roll over.
- b) Biodiversity Net Gain was launched in February 2004. It is an approach to development that ensures that habitats for wildlife are left in measurably better state than they were before the development. Any new builds will need to compensate for biodiversity loss.
- c) United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi and agreements about air quality and resources.
- d) Defra was working with Councils, including BBSRC, on one of the pillars (food, bioeconomy, natural resources, agriculture and environment) of Horizon Europe grand challenges to ensure maximising information flows to co-create calls.
- e) Defra was recruiting for a new Chair and four new Members of our Science Advisory Council (SAC). SAC is Defra's pre-eminent advisory committee and advises the Defra CSA and Ministers on science issues across the range of Defra's portfolio.

ITEM 9 BBSRC BIOSCIENCE BIG IDEAS PIPELINE: TARGETED CALL FOR IDEAS (UKRI BBSRC 05/2024)

35. The Chair welcomed Stephanie Blackwell, BBSRC Head of Strategy Coordination and Insight, to the meeting and invited Amanda Collis to introduce the paper, which presented submissions to the Bioscience Big Ideas Pipeline, received in response to a targeted call for ideas from broad stakeholder community to help BBSRC identify adventurous and exciting ideas that have the potential to be transformational.

36. Big Ideas Panel chaired by Jo Price, BBSRC Council member, had met at the end of February 2024 and reviewed submissions and undertaken initial prioritisation of ideas and themes emerging from across the portfolio.

37. Jo commented on the importance and value of this process to identify new ideas and emerging themes. Council noted that 43 ideas suitable for the pipeline were submitted within two months and was presented with a prioritised list. Council noted the portfolio of ideas submitted to the Bioscience Big Ideas Pipeline and their prioritisation status awarded by the Big Ideas Panel.

38. Council made the following comments in discussion:

- a) Council was pleased to see that a lot of ideas were submitted in a short space of time.
- b) Council discussed the balance of ideas, e.g. those that related to current BBSRC/UKRI strategic priorities and completely new ideas.
- c) It was noted that some of the ideas were suitable for Strategic Longer Larger (LoLa) scheme.
- d) Council noted gaps that had been identified by the Panel namely evolution and directed evolution, bioelectronic interfaces with biology, biomaterials and interfaces to understand complex biology, biocomputing, bioquantum, and bio-enabled metamaterial. Council also added understanding the proteome, RNA modification, combining genetic approaches, and soils to the list.

- e) Council considered ways of taking ideas forward and exploring opportunities to co-develop, shape and cluster ideas together, e.g. like LUNZ or BioFAIR.
- f) Council noted that some ideas focused on different approaches rather than brand new ideas.
- g) Council noted that there was cross-UKRI forum looking at ideas received across Councils and identifying emerging themes.
- h) Council discussed the importance of managing expectations and providing feedback to creators of ideas, which had started taking place.
- i) Council raised the importance of knowing the end point of the process and the role of champions (brokers) to take it to the next level and how BBSRC would support such champions e.g. to develop international partnerships.

39. Council noted that ahead of BBSRC Council's meeting in June, BBSRC would, through further consultation, seek to build on the prioritisation process and develop deeper insight into high priority ideas and themes arising from the portfolio. The outputs of this activity, including next steps and engaging stakeholders (non-academic, early career researchers, challenge-led to provide input into next steps) would return to Council in June 2024.

ITEM 10. BIENNIAL RISK UPDATE, REVIEW, AND DISCUSSION (UKRI BBSRC 06/2024)

This section of the minutes has been recorded separately as it is deemed business sensitive.

ITEM 11. ANNUAL APPRAISAL OF UKRI-BBSRC COUNCIL – RESULTS (UKRI BBSRC 07/2024)

40. The Chair invited Ksymena Grzybowska to introduce the paper which provided a summary of the annual appraisal of BBSRC Council. The results were very positive and key messages from the survey related to:

- a) Improving awareness of activities and communications between Council meetings to ensure Council members remain abreast of relevant issues facing BBSRC and UKRI.
- b) allowing more time for strategic discussions on Council agendas and there was a suggestion of 'deep dives' into different areas of activity.
- c) the importance of engaging with other Councils (NERC and EPSRC).
- d) No improvement in survey responses relating to connectivity with the wider UKRI and UKRI Board.

41. In the discussion, Council expressed the importance of inducting new Council members who were joining Council and suggested identifying buddies for them and ensuring thorough induction process, especially for members with industry background.

ITEM 12. AOB AND FORWARD LOOK (UKRI BBSRC 08/2024)

42. Council noted the dates for future meetings and future agenda items.

ITEM 13. FOR INFORMATION ONLY: UPDATE ON SPENDING REVIEW (UKRI 09/2024_

43. Council noted developments in UKRI Spending Review planning, and anticipated implications for BBSRC over the next year.

Council Secretariat

April 2024

Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
	<i>Actions from September 2023 Council meeting</i>			
4	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 91/2023: BBSRC to share the evaluation of BBSRC's investments in Industrial Biotechnology (Paul Reeves, probably March 2024).</i>	<i>Paul Reeves</i>	<i>June 2024</i>	<i>Completed</i>
	<i>Actions from March 2024 Council meeting</i>			
4	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 96/2024: BBSRC will share BBSRC briefing for the Science Minister (completed) and key message from the organisational change discussion (Martin, Ksymena).</i>	<i>Ksymena Grzybowska Martin Humphries</i>	<i>May 2024</i>	<i>Completed</i>
6	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 97/2024: Council asked for examples as to how investor partnerships can support scale-up opportunities and progression of current investments.</i>	<i>Nick Bassett</i>	<i>June 2024</i>	<i>Completed</i>

Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
7	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 98/2024: BBSRC will share data analysis on place with Council (Sarah Perkins, ongoing).</i>	<i>Sarah Perkins</i>	<i>June 2024</i>	<i>Completed</i>

