

Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting held on 25 September 2024 in Manchester.

Those attending:

Steve Bagshaw
Professor Ewan Birney (via Zoom)
Professor Anne Ferguson-Smith (BBSRC Executive Chair)
Andy Griffiths
Professor Gideon Henderson (DEFRA CSA)
Professor Martin Humphries (Chair of the meeting)
Professor Christine Orengo
Dr Neil Parry
Professor Jo Price
Professor Steven Spoel
Professor Ijeoma Uchegbu

Also attending:

Dr Amanda Collis
Dr Jef Grainger
Dr Sarah Perkins
Bill Poll
Professor Guy Poppy
Zahir Sachak
Laura Notton (item 7 only)
Jared Bayley (item 8 only)
Ksymena Grzybowska (Secretary)

ITEM 1. OPENING REMARKS

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and in particular Anne Ferguson-Smith to her first meeting in her role of BBSRC Executive Chair.
2. The Chair thanked Guy Poppy as it was his last Council meeting in his role of BBSRC Deputy Executive Chair (previously BBSRC Interim Executive Chair) before his departure to take up the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation role at The University of Bristol on 1 October 2024. The Chair also congratulated Guy as he would be taking up his BBSRC Council member role as of 1 October for one year (until 31 September 2025).
3. The Chair thanked Bill Poll (BBSRC Chief Operating Officer) for his contributions during his time at BBSRC. Bill would be leaving BBSRC in the beginning of October 2024.
4. Apologies were received from Karen Lewis.
5. 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 12 JUNE 2024 (UKRI BBSRC 17/2024)

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

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

7. The Chair went through the actions and all of them were completed.

ITEM 4. EXECUTIVE CHAIR'S REPORT (UKRI BBSRC 18/2024)

8. The Chair invited Anne Ferguson-Smith to introduce this item and reflect on her time in BBSRC since 1 July 2024 when her appointment commenced.
9. Anne said that her time so far at BBSRC had been fantastic but also very intense. BBSRC colleagues were very supportive and Anne thanked Guy for leading BBSRC in the interim period. Anne also offered her personal thanks to Bill Poll, BBSRC Chief Operating Officer (COO) who had worked for BBSRC for 15 years and navigated BBSRC through change in UKRI and BBSRC. Anne wished them both all the best for the future. Council was informed that an advertisement for BBSRC COO's role was live.
10. Anne talked about UKRI's evolution, new energy within the Executive Committee and also informed Council of UKRI leadership changes. Council noted that Poli Stuart-Lacey was the new UKRI Chief of External Affairs and Communications and Stella Peace was stepping in as Innovate UK Interim Executive Chair. Michele Dougherty has been appointed as the new Executive Chair of STFC.
11. Anne reflected on her induction programme and meeting other Executive Chairs and other key UKRI staff. Anne had also met with all strategically funded Institutes' Directors, DEFRA CSA and other departments' CSAs.
12. Anne had an introductory meeting with Patrick Valance, Minister for Science, and commented on opportunities to work with the new government. The Minister had talked about priorities and opportunities such as deploying research and connectivity across sectors, supporting companies and their growth, connectivity between research outcomes, products and the society. There was also a need for national security and resilience perspective. The Minister talked about his interest in developing missions fund in five areas and the importance of financial sustainability of universities. Council commented that the Minister's interactions with the Treasury would be key. Council welcomed the update from that meeting and commented about the importance of connectivity across sectors with Innovate UK. Council was hoping that there would be more discussions about opportunities with Innovate UK.
13. Anne set out her personal priorities as follows:
 - working with UKRI Executive Chairs to respond to UKRI People Survey results.
 - Workforce evaluation – ensuring the right balance of people to deliver in the context of Full Time Equivalent constraints.
 - Progressing dissemination of funding.
 - Institutes –key elements Anne would like to contribute to in this area were increasing connectivity within stakeholders and sectors, finding ways to incentivise, co-creation of opportunities, maintaining high-quality of research and motivating and nurturing.
14. *This section of the minutes was deemed business sensitive and therefore recorded separately.*
15. Anne updated Council on the UK Bioscience Forward Look community consultation that was now closed and said that the Forward Look would be discussed by Council in December 2024.
16. Council also noted that the Council meeting on 12 March 2024 would be followed by the 30th anniversary event.

17. Council 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 1. Council noted that the BBSRC scorecard had been updated with milestones, some actions had been closed and majority of actions were on track.
18. Council was interested to hear from Anne about the expectations from government to deliver on its priorities and ensuring protection of discovery mode. Anne responded that delivering government agenda and getting the balance right between government priorities and discovery science was key. They were not separate - this was a journey from discovery to application, also in the context of government priorities. The narrative needed to evolve to address global challenges and the focus should be on innovation (not only commercialisation).
19. Council was also interested in alignment with the health agenda and BBSRC and MRC's relationship. BBSRC continued to have conversations with MRC how to do things together and Council was assured of strategic approaches and conversations across UKRI. There was a recognition of strong connections with DEFRA and links with other government departments e.g. Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).
20. Council noted that ARIA (Advanced Research and Innovation Agency) was evolving and that many of ARIA's programmes were reaching out to UKRI and BBSRC activities where appropriate.
21. Council asked about review of peer review and incorporating learning from e.g. Strategic Longer and Larger grants that proved very successful. Council was informed that there were many different approaches according to what was needed to be achieved. UKRI was trialling innovative interventions in the peer review process and building the evidence base. Many of Research Councils run programmes to explore alternative methods. MetaScience Unit was also trialling new approaches to expert review. Council was informed that report into interventions in expert review was published and moving forward there would be a lot of reflective practice.
22. Council talked about journey from the discovery all the way through to application and products in the market and the importance of engagement with stakeholders in this process. BBSRC was keen to explore roundtable consultations involving companies. Engaging private partnerships in a visionary way and how they were evolved was key. There was a need for more motivation and networking to shape the direction of travel.
23. The Chair thanked Anne for her report and sharing her reflections. The Chair said that we were at an important point in time of positive change, growing connectivity across UKRI, new BBSRC Executive Chair and new government.

ITEM 5. UPDATES FROM GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND THE WIDER CSA NETWORK (ORAL)

24. Gideon Henderson (Chief Scientific Adviser, Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs, DEFRA) provided updates as follows:

- New government's five missions.
- DEFRA's own set of priorities: water quality, food strategy, floods, protecting nature, circular economy and zero waste.
- Using data.
- Biodiversity summit: COP 16 meeting and opportunities for BBSRC's engagement.

ITEM 6. UKRI COLLECTIVE TALENT AND BBSRC DOCTORAL TRAINING UPDATE (UKRI BBSRC 19/2024)

25. The Chair welcomed Frances Burstow, UKRI Director Talent and Skills, and Rob Hardwick, BBSRC Associate Director Talent and Skills, to the meeting.

26. Frances provided an overview of the proposed collective UKRI vision and priorities for talent in the next SR and beyond.

- They had been co-developed by the talent leads from all the councils to reflect and enable to respond to the needs and priorities within the different disciplines/sectors within a single narrative. UKRI had identified where activity would be led by individual councils and where there would be added value in working more collectively.
- The principle established for this SR was that Councils determine the balance of their investment both within talent and against their wider priorities and portfolio, with funding hard ringfenced for collective activity by agreement.
- There were significant opportunities to align talent investments with UKRI's strategic priorities, government missions, and to build capacity as part of targeted place-based interventions.
- Talent bid proposal was ambitious to reflect the industry demand for skills to support economic growth, the impact of inflation over the current SR period; the governments commitments to a national living wage and the opportunity to address system challenges and strengthen the connectivity and resilience of the Research & Innovation system.
- UKRI's long-term vision was to embed support for people and careers in all we do to maximise our ability to deliver our strategic ambitions and government priorities and demonstrate UKRI's USP.
- Given the challenging fiscal environment and plans for a one year then multi-year SR the bid was scalable.

27. Council commented that it was good to see the distribution of Collective Training Programme spend over last SR period. Council was interested to understand the engagement from industry and emphasised that it was important to seek industry feedback for this Spending Review (e.g. through roundtables). Council also noted that BBSRC was seeing industry engagement through Professional Internships for PhD Students (PIPS) and interesting industry engagement models through Doctoral Training Partnerships.

28. Council was interested to hear more about engagement with different institutions and catapult network in Collective People and Talent and noted that UKRI had been working closely with Research England, Innovate UK and councils. Innovate UK was keen to focus on these connection points and worked closely with catapults. Mobility between different parts of sector was identified as an issue and having more flexibility could help addressing it.

29. The Chair thanked Frances and invited Rob to lead a conversation on the future of BBSRC doctoral focal awards. Rob provided an update on recent and upcoming opportunities provided by BBSRC in

doctoral training. The approach to these opportunities was set in the context of broader UKRI Collective Talent work and shaped by previous discussions with Council and BBSRC Strategy Advisory Panels. Council noted the outcomes from the recent BBSRC and NERC joint-funded Doctoral Landscape Awards (DLA) competition, and upcoming BBSRC doctoral funding opportunities in Industrial Doctoral Landscape Awards and Phase 1 Doctoral Focal Awards (DFA). Council was then invited to suggest topic areas for Phase 2 DFA, scheduled to open for applications in 2026.

30. Council commented that there was slight disconnect with agri-food areas and that a greater level of interdisciplinarity was needed. Council asked how much alignment with emerging strategic themes was taken into consideration and noted that this was about language that was recognisable for employers. It was suggested that it could be useful to talk to food systems doctoral training partnerships.
31. Suggestions for focal awards were underpinning technology, plant health, biosensors and tree health.
32. The Chair thanked Francis and Rob for attending the meeting.

ITEM 7. SPENDING REVIEW UPDATE (UKRI BBSRC 20/2024)

33. The Chair welcomed Laura Notton, BBSRC Associate Director, Strategy and Planning, to the meeting and invited her to introduce the paper.
34. Council noted, that since its last meeting in June 2025, there had been major developments, e.g. the Chancellor's announcement of a multi-year spending review (SR25), concluding in spring 2025, to set spending plans for a minimum of three years. The spending review would be conducted in two phases: budgets for financial years 2024-25 and 2025-26 will be announced at Autumn Budget on 30 October; budgets for 2026-27 onwards will be announced in Spring 2025.
35. Council also noted that there would be an additional allocation step within UKRI to allocate funding for Research Councils, Innovate UK and Research England.
36. Council was invited to provide advice to shape the ongoing development of BBSRC and UKRI SR planning and messaging in the context of wider cross-UKRI, cross-sector and cross-government discussions. Council made the following comments:
 - Reiterating the message about cooperating across Research Councils' boundaries.
 - Ensuring balance between discovery research and government priorities (missions) – it was highlighted that phase 2 of the SR25 could be significantly different, especially in relation to the missions. It was noted that work was progressing to see how BBSRC could contribute to the missions identified by the government. Council was reassured about government's recognition of the importance of discovery research funding.
 - In relation to government missions, ensuring strong business engagement to leverage funding from businesses.
 - Being aware of timing and different fiscal pressures for different organisations and businesses would be important to respond in agile way and with adequate operational practices, particularly when establishing partnerships. It was recognised that time for contracts to emerge when developing partnerships could be a barrier.
 - Ensuring resourcing of SR planning and delivery in the context of FTEs reduction.
 - Aligning AI with growth mission.
37. Council noted BBSRC's financial position going into the next SR period available in the paper and was informed that this type of high-level information would be provided to Council going forward.

Council was informed that BBSRC continued working on addressing and managing UKRI overcommitments. Council said that it would be useful to see information on the level of leverage from our investment (including Institutes) overtime (e.g. where the leverage comes from).

38. BBSRC would continue to be proactive in planning and the delivery of SR25 and an update will be provided at the next meeting in December 2024.

Action 1/2024: an update on SR will be provided at the next meeting in December 2024. (Ksymena Grzybowska, Laura Notton, on agenda).

ITEM 8. BIENNIAL RISK UPDATE, REVIEW, AND DISCUSSION (UKRI BBSRC 21/2024)

39. The Chair welcomed Jared Bayley, Risk and Assurance Business Partner, to the meeting to provide Council with the regular update and the oversight of UKRI Risk Management activities operated by BBSRC.

40. *This section of the minutes was deemed business sensitive and therefore recorded separately.*

41. Council noted that full risk mitigations were available on the system and a report including these could be provided to Council.

ITEM 9. AOB AND FUTURE COUNCIL FORWARD LOOK (UKRI BBSRC 22/2024)

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

43. Council discussed the location of future Council meetings potentially taking place in BBSRC campuses.

44. Council suggested a future dinner discussion relating to 'Building a Green Future' strategic theme and reviewing current dinner topics.

Action 2/2024: Council suggested a future dinner discussion relating to 'Building a Green Future' strategic theme and reviewing current dinner topics (Ksymena Grzybowska, noted).

Council Secretariat
November 2024

Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
	<i>Actions from September 2024 Council meeting</i>			
8	<i>Action 1/2024: an update on SR will be provided at the next meeting in December 2024. (Ksymena Grzybowska, Laura Notton, on agenda).</i>	<i>Ksymena Grzybowska Laura Notton</i>	<i>December 2024</i>	<i>Completed – on agenda</i>
9	<i>Action 2/2024: Council suggested a future dinner discussion relating to ‘Building a Green Future’ strategic theme and reviewing current dinner topics (Ksymena Grzybowska, noted).</i>	<i>Ksymena Grzybowska</i>	<i>December 2024</i>	<i>Noted.</i>

