

Minutes of UKRI-BBSRC Council meeting held on 5 December 2023 in Swindon.

Those attending:

Steve Bagshaw
Professor Anne Ferguson-Smith
Professor Martin Humphries (Chair of the meeting)
Professor Andrew Millar
Professor Christine Orengo
Professor Guy Poppy (UKRI-BBSRC Interim Executive Chair, via Zoom)
Professor Jo Price
Professor Nigel Scrutton (via Zoom)
Professor Malcom Skingle
Professor Ijeoma Uchegbu

Also attending:

Dr Amanda Collis
Dr Jef Grainger
Dr Karen Lewis
Dr Sarah Perkins
Bill Poll
Zahir Sachak
Dr Rosie Cornelius
Dr Frances Burstow (item 7 only)
Dr David McAllister (item 7 only)
Michelle Snowden (item 8 only)
Sarah Cresswell
Ksymena Grzybowska (Secretary)

ITEM 1. OPENING REMARKS

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. The Chair welcomed Zahir Sachak, BBSRC Finance Director, to his first Council meeting. Zahir attends BBSRC Executive Leadership Team (ELT) meetings and has recently become a formal member of BBSRC ELT and therefore going forward he will be attending BBSRC Council meetings.
3. Council noted the progress on appointing four new Council members and the Executive Chair's successor.
4. Apologies were received from Ewan Birney, Steven Spoel and Gideon Henderson.
5. Members were reminded to declare any changes to their registers. 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 20 SEPTEMBER 2023 (UKRI BBSRC 17/2023)

6. The minutes were agreed as a correct record of the meeting subject to the following changes:
 - Inclusion of an action relating to reporting on the evaluation of BBSRC's investments in Industrial Biotechnology.
 - Correcting spelling in agenda item 9 in the minutes
 - Clarifying the action relating to sharing the draft vision of the BBSRC open data and research data management policy discussed by BBSRC Transformative Technologies Strategy Advisory Panel.

Action UKRI BBSRC 92/2023: Ksymena to update the minutes before sending to the Chair for signature (completed).

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

7. The Chair went through the actions and most of them were either in hand or completed. Specifically, Council noted the following:
 - Action UKRI BBSRC 90/2023 - outcomes of the evaluation relating to BBSRC attributable spin outs would be shared with Council in December 2023. Update from the meeting – this would be part of the innovation discussion scheduled for the March 2024 Council meeting.

ITEM 4. EXECUTIVE CHAIR'S REPORT (UKRI BBSRC 18/2023)

8. 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 2.
9. Council asked about an update on the pausing of the specific Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) advisory group operation mentioned in the Secretary of State's letter from 28 October 2023 as it would be difficult for them to operate in the current circumstances. Council noted that UKRI's other EDI activities were continuing as normal, which included BBSRC activity. UKRI remained fully committed to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. UKRI was monitoring the number of resignations across UKRI advisory bodies.
10. Council expressed its concern about BBSRC capacity/resources and high staff turnover as there was a potential impact on delivering BBSRC's mission and considered it a risk. BBSRC Executive Chair said that there was BBSRC prioritisation and escalation task and finish group to consider the impact of resourcing issues on current and forthcoming funding opportunities, and to collectively agree approaches to deal with issues and prioritise opportunities. Council also noted that the staff turnover was mainly due to pay constraints and the fact that 70% of staff was at the bottom of the pay scale. There was ongoing work to reintroduce progress within pay scales, but this work would take some time before it was implemented. It was also noted that staff workloads were unmanageable due to implementing UKRI strategy on current systems, designing and testing new systems and resourcing managed mode activities. BBSRC was hopeful that 2024 would bring some reduction of pressure on staff. Council was interested in the staff turnover data and reasons for staff leaving BBSRC and discussed the importance of ensuring that staff felt valued, and priorities were clearly set. Council offered to help and asked that BBSRC keeps Council informed on this matter.
11. Council was interested to hear more about exploring different approaches to peer review and Guy informed Council about areas of focus such as different expert evaluation approaches (e.g. reducing number of experts), more innovative and creative ways of conducting assessments to reduce pressure on resources and to encourage novel partnerships, e.g. in managed mode. Council was informed that DSIT offered DSIT/UKRI Metascience Unit resources and expertise to evaluate efficiency of programmes and improving how we fund and support research and innovation.
12. Council asked about the dynamic 'spotlights' programme noting low success rates in the initial rounds. Council was informed that there was one more round to go and the 'spotlight' mechanism would be reviewed in 12 months' time. Council suggested a discussion at a future Council meeting as to how different mechanisms work together to deliver a balanced portfolio of funding. Council also noted that, in terms of horizon scanning, BBSRC Strategy Advisory Panels undertook horizon scanning on an annual basis, BBSRC also captured what excited community through community webinars and the annual strategic workshop. BBSRC also launched the Big Ideas Pipeline to get input from the community regarding new ideas and emerging technologies and had five submissions to date. BBSRC would also be launching the Forward Look refresh.

Action UKRI BBSRC 93/2023: Council suggested a discussion at a future Council meeting as to how different funding mechanisms work together to deliver a balanced portfolio of funding, including reflections on the discussions from the annual strategic workshop (Sarah Perkins, ongoing)

13. Council congratulated BBSRC on the success of Round 1 of BBSRC's Business and Academia Prosperity Partnerships and was pleased to note that BBSRC's Discovery Fellowship programme would be held in December 2023. It was expected that up to 15 awards would be made representing an investment of £7M, supporting early career researchers to carry out independent research and gain leadership skills.
14. Council discussed BioFAIR and its key role to advise on data management. Council noted that an interim Director had been appointed and would work with BBSRC and MRC to prepare the business case for BioFAIR, and with the user and infrastructure communities to prepare for the implementation phase of the programme starting (subject to funding) in 2024.
15. BBSRC was engaged with Innovate UK via the Project Board on the merger of its three Agri-Tech Centres to create a new integrated capability. The three Agri-Tech Centres were Crop Health and Protection, Centre for Innovation Excellence in Livestock and Agricultural Engineering, Precision and Innovation Centre. The new single entity would facilitate a stronger cross-sectoral approach and drive better outcomes for the agri-tech sector across innovation, commercialisation, and adoption, as well as research. Together they were being invited to develop a proposal to establish an agri-tech Catalyst. Council discussed their geographical spread and their real advantage.

ITEM 5. UPDATES FROM UKRI (ORAL)

16. The Chair welcomed Rosie Cornelius to the meeting. Rosie offered reflections on the relationships with DSIT to date, an update on the Autumn Statement and evidence gathering for spending review, government response to the landscape review, the DSIT/UKRI Metascience Unit, UKRI organisational change and activity mapping analysis, The Funding Service and SHARP (HR, finance and procurement system).
17. Council suggested that it would be useful to see heat maps addressing 'place' agenda (spend in sectors) to enable strategic consideration. UKRI observer would consider this and come back at the next Council meeting.

Action UKRI BBSRC 94/2023: Council suggested that it would be useful to see heat maps addressing 'place' agenda (spend in sectors) to enable strategic consideration. UKRI observer would consider this and come back at the next Council meeting.

18. The Chair thanked Rosie for providing her update to Council.

ITEM 6. UPDATES FROM GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND THE WIDER CSA NETWORK (ORAL)

19. Gideon Henderson (Defra CSA) sent apologies for this meeting hence there was no update provided.

ITEM 7. UPDATE ON THE COLLECTIVE TALENT AND BBSRC DOCTORAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY (UKRI BBSRC 19/2023)

20. The Chair welcomed Frances Burstow, UKRI Director, Talent and Skills, and David McAlister, BBSRC Director Talent and Funding Delivery, to the meeting.
21. The Chair invited Frances to present her slides. Francis provided an overview of UKRI Collective Talent Strategy and funding plans, including the recently published work to consolidate UKRI's investment routes for doctoral training, and early work on simplifying UKRI's fellowships offer.

22. Collective Talent would enable UKRI to deliver better against Delivery Plans by encouraging the flow of people and diverse careers in research and innovation, ensuring support for disciplinary and interdisciplinary research and skills development and increasing efficiency. To realise these benefits UKRI looked into how investment is made in talent, and this was done through the Collective Talent Funding Programme. The Programme focused on doctoral training to reframe support around the two types of awards in doctoral training alongside an overarching core offer that will apply to all UKRI-funded students regardless of Council, scheme, or funding exercise.
23. There were two types of awards: Doctoral Focal Award (funding for research training in specific, tightly focused themes or challenges) and Doctoral Landscape Award (broad flexible funding to support the UK's overall capability and capacity needs).
24. Council was pleased to hear that Doctoral Landscape Awards would cover a wider range of disciplines and encourage more multidisciplinary. Council discussed an opportunity for students to have three-month placements such as Professional Internships for PhD Students (PIPS) to carry out work experience unrelated to their doctoral research. Council noted that by thinking about the next Spending Review, UKRI was considering how to structure funding to work more collaboratively, however PIPS came with cost and sometimes it was not possible to have placements. PIPS would continue to be a core requirement for the BBSRC doctoral training programmes and Council commented that sharing review of PIPS across Councils would be helpful.
25. Frances briefly discussed early plans for talent in the next spending review, including increased focus on mobility and porosity, team-based approaches to research, and integration of Innovate UK plans for commercial awareness, entrepreneurship and technical training.
26. The Chair invited David McAllister to present his paper, which provided an updated on BBSRC's strategy for the next phase of doctoral investment across the five-cohort funding cycle (2025-29 intakes), and totalling £270M. The approach was set in the context of the broader UKRI Collective Talent work, and shaped by previous discussion with Council in June 2023, and BBSRC People and Talent Strategy Advisory Panel. It covered the planned approach to rebalancing of the portfolio to include more targeted, thematic investments, a collaboration with NERC for co-delivery of our upcoming funding opportunity, the continuation of non-academic led partnerships, and a consideration of place in application assessment and portfolio balancing.
27. Council noted that currently BBSRC invested 98% of studentships budget into DTP and CTP (Landscape) Awards and 2% into CDT (Focal) Awards and the aim was to invest a minimum 85% of our studentship budget into Landscape Awards and 15% into Focal Awards.
28. Council made the following comments in the discussion:
 - Council asked about focal award mechanisms, e.g. whether it would be a joint bottom-up approach and noted that horizon scanning and using intelligence from across Councils would help to identify areas requiring capacity building. It suggested that community members could provide valuable input that could be tensioned against Councils intelligence.
 - Noting the launch of Collaborative Landscape Award in 2025, Council was interested to hear more about industry partners' role to set the direction and academic partners to train and manage students. Council emphasised the importance of mixed models, encouraging SMEs to come together as partners and enabling ways in which SMEs could actually collaborate and have time to do that.
 - Noting the drive to increase focal awards to lay the groundwork for multidisciplinary, comms were key to address concerns about reducing our numbers for landscape awards within the community.
29. David handed over to Francis, who talked about evolving UKRI Collective Talent Strategy and preparing for the next Spending Review. The focus had been on reviewing progress against UKRI strategic objectives and the commitments UKRI made in the Delivery Plan, identifying emerging priorities for future investments and evidence/analysis needs. In July 2023 UKRI Executive Committee had agreed a set of principles which would guide the development of a collective talent bid.

30. Council noted that talent investments would be presented as a single budget and all Councils, including Innovate UK and Research England, would work together to articulate talent investments for the next SR, to identify where there was added value in working collectively and to advocate for the overall level of talent investment. Research Councils would retain the ability to balance the investment in Talent in their disciplines against their wider priorities/portfolio and would remain the primary channel to engage with, gather strategic and operational input and articulate UKRI's offer to, discipline-specific communities.
31. Council noted that budgets were under pressure due to stipends increases, however was pleased to see that all was going in the right direction and that international benchmarking was undertaken at UKRI level.
32. The Chair thanked Frances and David for presenting to Council and invited them to come back to a future meeting to present updates on the Collective Talent Strategy.

Action UKRI BBSRC 95/2023: Frances and David to come back to a future Council meeting to present updates on the Collective Talent Strategy when available (Ksymena, noted on the forward look).

ITEM 8. BBSRC COMMUNICATIONS - UPDATE (UKRI BBSRC 20/2023)

33. The Chair welcomed Michelle Snowden, UKRI Communications Business Partner, to the meeting.
34. The aim of this item was to update Council members on BBSRC's communications plan progress and activities since the last report to Council in December 2022. Michelle went through communication aims and objectives and how they aligned with wider UKRI strategic communications. Council noted the progress on delivery against each objective.
35. Council was informed that LinkedIn was the most successful channel for BBSRC and discussed BBSRC's presence in social media.
36. In discussion, Council made the following comments:
 - Increasing BBSRC's presence in mainstream media through rebuilding relationships with journalists and key contacts was key.
 - Challenges relating to resourcing to deliver BBSRC comms objectives within the current model and more focus on Councils as they were delivering the UKRI Strategy. Messages of these challenges should be conveyed to UKRI.
 - Considered ways of informing Council members to be better advocates, e.g. via dashboards available in Executive Chair's reports and reports on trends.
37. Looking to 2024 there were major events/announcements such as Engineering Biology, LUNZ hubs and 30th anniversary of BBSRC and EPSRC.
38. The Chair thanked Michelle for attending the meeting and presenting the slides.

ITEM 9. 2023 INSTITUTE ASSESSMENT EXERCISE – OUTCOMES (UKRI BBSRC 21/2023)

This item was deemed business sensitive and was therefore recorded separately.

ITEM 10. AOB AND FORWARD LOOK (UKRI BBSRC 22/2023)

39. Council noted the dates for future meetings and future agenda items.
40. Council discussed alternating generic dinner discussion topics with strategic/science ones, e.g. BioFAIR, Land Use for NetZero (LUNZ) and Engineering Biology (possibly inviting someone from DSIT for the latter discussion). Land use would be a topic for a joint Council meeting with NERC in September 2024.

Council Secretariat

January 2024

Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
	<i>Actions from March 2023 Council meeting</i>			
4.	<i>Action: UKRI-BBSRC 85/2023: A paper summarising cross-Council responsive mode pilot scheme would be provided to Council, probably at its meeting in March 2024.</i>	<i>Amanda Collis</i>	<i>March 2024</i>	<i>Update: Outcomes are likely to come to Council in June 2024</i>
4.	<i>Action UKRI-BBSRC 86/2023: BBSRC to share draft vision of the BBSRC open data and research data management policy that was discussed by BBSRC Transformative Technologies Strategy Advisory Panel.</i>	<i>Amanda Collis</i>	<i>TBC</i>	<i>Shared in December 2023</i>
	<i>Actions from June 2023 Council meeting</i>			
4	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 90/2023: Karen will share the outcomes of the evaluation relating to BBSRC attributable spin outs.</i>	<i>Karen Lewis</i>	<i>December 2023</i>	<i>Report shared in February 2024</i>

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>	Paul Reeves	March 2024	Ongoing
	<i>Actions from December 2023 Council meeting</i>			
2.	Action UKRI BBSRC 92/2023: Ksymena to update the minutes before sending to the Chair for signature (completed).	Ksymena Grzybowska	January 2024	Completed
4.	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 93/2023: Council suggested a discussion at a future Council meeting as to how different funding mechanisms work together to deliver a balanced portfolio of funding, including reflections on the discussions from the annual strategic workshop (Sarah Perkins, Ksymena noted on the forward look).</i>	Sarah Perkins	June 2024	Noted
5.	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 94/2023: Council suggested that it would be useful to see heat maps addressing 'place' agenda (spend in sectors) to enable strategic consideration. UKRI observer would consider this and come back at the next Council meeting.</i>	Rosie Cornelius	March 2024	Ongoing

Agenda Item	Action Description	Owner	Delivery Date	Status
7.	<i>Action UKRI BBSRC 95/2023: Frances and David to come back to a future Council meeting to present updates on the Collective Talent Strategy when available (Ksymena, noted on the forward look).</i>	<i>Davis McAllister Frances Burstow</i>	<i>When available</i>	<i>Noted</i>

