

UKRI Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council

Minutes of the EPSRC Council

Date: 13 June 2024

Location: Edinburgh and hybrid

Council Members	
Professor Mark E. Smith (Senior Independent Member) - remote	Professor Dame Jane Jiang
Professor Jeremy Baumberg	Ms Siân John
Professor Alison Etheridge	Mr Alan Newby
Professor Deborah Greeves	Professor Martin Schröder - remote
Professor Jane Hillston	Dr Joe de Sousa

Attendees	
Charlotte Deane (EPSRC Executive Chair)	Siobhan Peters (UKRI Chief Financial Officer) - remote
Andrew Bourne (Executive Director, Partnerships)	Helen Morgan (UKRI Senior Finance Business Partner) remote
Jonathan Dawes (Deputy Executive Chair)	Kathryn Magnay (Deputy Director for Artificial Intelligence, Cross-Council Programmes)
Nicola Goldberg (Chief Operating Officer)	James Dracott (Team Head, AI and Robotics) – remote
Jane Nicholson (Executive Director, Research Base)	Alison Wall (Deputy Director, EDI and People) - remote
Kedar Pandya (Executive Director, Cross-Council Programmes)	Robert Felstead (Deputy Director, Cross-Council Programmes) – remote

Secretariat/Observers	
Gillian Bartoszewska (Senior Governance and Operations Manager)	Neil Robinson (Secretary to EPSRC Council)

Apologies	
Professor Tim Whitley	Mr Alex van Someren (CSA)
Professor Andy Wright	

1. **Welcome, introductions and declarations of interest**
 - 1.1. Charlotte Deane welcomed attendees, confirmed quoracy and noted apologies.
 - 1.2. Members were reminded to update their declaration of interests during the year. Members were asked to raise any conflicts arising during the course of the meeting; there were no new declaration of interests from Council members.
2. **Minutes, and Action Log**
 - 2.1. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.
 - 2.2. Members were updated on the status of matters arising from the previous meeting.
3. **Review of day one**
 - 3.1. Council noted their formal thanks to the University of Edinburgh for providing a very engaging and thought-provoking day of activities and discussion, and Council thanked all those who had

contributed to making it a successful visit. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

- 3.2. Charlotte Deane provided a summary of the first day of engagement activities, including visits to the Advanced Computing Facility, Genome Foundry, FloWave and Edinburgh Futures Institute.
- 3.3. Building upon the insights provided by the visits, Council discussed barriers to investments gaining self-sufficiency, opportunities for impact studies, potential for collaboration with Innovate UK, and shaping infrastructure for sustainability.

4. **Executive report**

- 4.1. Council reflected on the joint STFC EPSRC Council meeting held on 15 May 2024. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.** Council would welcome further discussions on how to integrate the EPSRC research and user community with STFC infrastructure planning.
- 4.2. Council were provided with reflections on the joint UKRI Executive Committee and Council Senior Independent Member (SIM) conference held on 4 June 2024. Council said that they would welcome greater opportunities for collective dialogue, such as to agree shared messaging for the next Spending Review (SR), both within UKRI and across our diverse research communities. In preparation for developing the next suite of Strategic Development Plans (SDPs), SIMs were asked to share council priorities; **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 4.3. Council received an update on expected fiscal events following the General Election on 4 July 2024 and noted UKRI continued to plan for a variety of SR scenarios. Council noted EPSRC would continue to work with stakeholders and across government departments towards delivering:
- a future proof STEM workforce by creating forward thinking investments in skills and people that would create competitive advantage for businesses and worldclass research and innovation
 - building a sustainable and vibrant National Capability in research and infrastructure that would underpin long term UK resilience and ensure leadership across scientific and technological frontiers
 - catalysing the research and innovation the UK needs in Critical Technologies and Net Zero to spur new inward investment and business impact in high growth industries
- Council noted the importance of maintaining flexibility of spend and agreed to reconvene remotely on request to provide timely advice during the development of the next SDP.
- 4.4. Council were updated on the development of the Exascale business case and other DSIT activities, and the impact of the pre-election period on timings.
- 4.5. Council received an update on large facilities and noted this item would return to Council in the next year following engagement with the Science, Engineering and Technology Board and the wider engineering and physical sciences community.
- ACTION: Jane Nicholson**
- 4.6. Council received an update on the funding workstreams of UKRI's organisational change programme. Council had a rich discussion on the refresh of definitions of responsive and managed modes of funding to enable shared understanding across UKRI. Evolving UKRI's language would provide an opportunity to better articulate our funding opportunities.
- 4.7. Council were provided with an update on Research England's EDI advisory group.

5. **UKRI colleague**

- 5.1. Siobhan Peters gave an overview that included UKRI's change programmes, the Services for HR, Accounting, Reporting and Procurement (SHARP) programme and a new webpage to support UKRI office holders.

6. **Refresh of UKRI's AI strategy**

- 6.1. Council were updated on the refresh of UKRI's AI strategy 'Transforming Our World with AI', where EPSRC are working in partnership with colleagues from across UKRI and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), and considered how we might expect to pursue investment in the SR to enhance the UK's global position on AI. Council noted the context for AI investments provided by DSIT areas of interest and priorities including the AI Safety Institute and AI Missions.
- 6.2. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 6.3. Council recognised EPSRC's leadership role within UKRI in the AI space and that AI would play a pivotal role in the next Spending Review as a driver for increasing productivity, growth and national security.

7. **Evolving EPSRC fellowships**

- 7.1. Council were updated on EPSRC's fellowships offer in the context of the wider landscape of alternative provision, to inform a discussion in the context of UKRI's collective talent work on fellowships and EPSRC's approach for the next SDP.
- 7.2. Comments from members included how aspects of fellowships were valued where they might provide opportunities for portability, flexibility, interdisciplinarity, uniqueness and create space mid-career to expand skillsets.
- 7.3. Council were updated on how successful mission themes could evolve from conception to maturity and migrate, both operationally and strategically, to become embedded in EPSRC's research base.

8. **Any other business**

- 8.1. Charlotte provided an update on changes to UKRI senior leadership and reported recruitment activities would resume after the pre-election period had passed.
- 8.2. The next EPSRC Council meeting would be held in Swindon on 25 and 26 September 2024.
- 8.3. Meeting closed at 12:10