

UKRI Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
Minutes of the EPSRC Council

Date: 25-26 September 2024

Location: Swindon and hybrid

Council Members	
Professor Mark E. Smith (Senior Independent Member)	Professor Dame Jane Jiang
Professor Jeremy Baumberg	Ms Siân John
Professor Alison Etheridge	Professor Tim Whitley
Professor Deborah Greeves	Professor Martin Schröder
Professor Jane Hillston	Dr Joe de Sousa
Professor Andy Wright	

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)	Ottoline Leyser (UK Research and Innovation Chief Executive)
Nicola Goldberg (Chief Operating Officer)	Amanda Chmura (Deputy Director, Business and Impact, Partnerships)
Jane Nicholson (Executive Director, Research Base)	Derek Craig (Deputy Director, Cross Council Programmes)
Kedar Pandya (Executive Director, Cross-Council Programmes)	Alison Wall (Deputy Director, EDI and People) - remote

Secretariat/Observers	
Gillian Bartoszewska (Senior Governance and Operations Manager)	Neil Robinson (Secretary to EPSRC Council)
Megan Maycock (Executive Assistant and Governance Manager)	Colin Doubleday (Administrator)

Apologies	
Mr Alan Newby	Mr Alex van Someren (CSA)

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.
2. **Minutes and actions**
 - 2.1. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record as corrected.
 - 2.2. Members were updated on the status of matters arising from the previous meeting.

3. Feedback from Council closed session

- 3.1. Council received a summary of discussions with DSIT and noted EPSRC and UKRI activity around the Spending Review including timescales, processes, and the evolving interactions with government departments.
- 3.2. Council discussed the continuing development of The Funding Service (TFS), including associated reputational risks due to delayed funding announcements and the additional burden on colleagues, to whom they offered encouragement and understanding.

4. UKRI colleague update

- 4.1. Siobhan Peters gave an overview of UKRI activity that included an update on UKRI Board membership, maturing relationships with government departments, effective cross-council collaboration, work to update corporate documents, and UKRI Change Programmes.
- 4.2. Council recognised Charlotte Deane's leadership and contributions to cross-council working.

5. Speed networking

- 5.1. Council engaged with teams from across EPSRC to learn more about their strategic priorities and cross-cutting areas. Council thanked everyone and said conversations had broadened members' understanding of areas outside their expertise and staff showed high levels of motivation and interest in their portfolios.
- 5.2. Council reflected on a wide range of conversations and noted pressures on staff, including around workload and technology systems.
- 5.3. Council requested a summary of networking conversations and feedback on the usefulness of their input.

Action: Andrew Bourne

6. Council discussion ahead of UKRI CEO session

- 6.1. Council agreed on topics that would merit discussion with UKRI's CEO Ottoline Leyser.

7. Discussion with UKRI CEO

- 7.1. Council was pleased to welcome Ottoline Leyser to the meeting, who spoke on building partnerships with government to make use of expertise in our collective endeavours, the importance of research and innovation to drive up the quality in public services and connecting the public sector into the wider research and innovation system for economic growth.
- 7.2. Council greatly appreciated the time spent discussing diverse topics, including reflections on UKRI's cross research council responsive mode pilot scheme, outcome-driven intelligent investment, and the intersectional pressures on university researcher and student numbers.
- 7.3. Mark Smith declared an interest, as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Southampton, which recently successfully applied for UKRI cross research council responsive mode funding.

8. Reflection on discussion with UKRI CEO

- 8.1. Council welcomed the positive and constructive discussion with Ottoline and was pleased to hear about the new UKRI Chief Information Officer, Christine Ashton's preliminary progress on Organisational Change programmes. Council reported that their communities would value further communications on TFS.
- 8.2. Council felt there were further opportunities to shape the Research Excellence Framework by increasing engagement and consultation across UKRI and research councils.

9. Executive report

- 9.1. Council received updates from the EPSRC Executive:

- **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- Council noted the decision to pause some EPSRC Fellowship opportunities to support the development of a more strategic approach to fellowships funding in targeted research areas. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

Action: Jane Nicholson

- STFC-EPSRC Task and Finish Group. Council noted the September meeting was constructive, positive and provided two-way challenge. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
Andy Wright declared an interest in fabrication initiatives and did not take part in the conversation.
- **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- Council noted written updates on Finance and preparations for refreshing UKRI's Strategic Delivery Plans.

10. **Spending Review discussion**

- 10.1. Council were provided with an update on the provisional timetable, sequencing, language, constraints, and preparations for the Spending Review, **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.** Council discussed opportunities to support commercialisation and industrial strategy to contribute to economic growth, including the studentship pipeline needed to support these functions.
- 10.2. Council broke into three groups to discuss EPSRC Spending Review narratives including AI for Research, Critical Technologies, Curiosity Driven Research as a National Capability, Strategic Themes, Infrastructure, Working with Business, Net Zero, and Postgraduate Skills.
- 10.3. Theme leads briefly summarised conversations and Council members were thanked for their input. Council discussed commercialisation, areas of sovereign capability, and opportunities to feed into the refresh of the UKRI infrastructure roadmap programme.
- 10.4. Council said they would welcome further engagement following the Autumn Budget on 30 October and would continue discussions at December Council.

11. **EPSRC communications and impact stories update**

- 11.1. Council noted the information paper and were impressed by the range of impact case studies.

12. **Any other business**

- 12.1. Council thanked EPSRC colleagues who contributed to the meeting, networking session, logistical and admin support, and who provided contributions to the wide range of briefing materials.
- 12.2. Professor Mark Smith, EPSRC Council Senior Independent Member, thanked colleagues for their well wishes as he stepped down from Council. He looked forward to continued engagement with UKRI as he joins Research England Council. He welcomed Jeremy Baumberg as the new Senior Independent Member.
- 12.3. The next EPSRC Council meeting would be held virtually on 4 December 2024.