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UKRI Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council

Approved minutes of the Council meeting held virtually on 6 December 2023

Council Members: Professor Mark E. Smith (Chair)
Professor Miles Padgett
Professor Alison Etheridge
Professor Deborah Greaves (from 10:00 onwards)
Professor Nick Jennings
Professor Dame Jane Jiang
Ms Siân John (from 09:18 onwards)
Professor Martin Schröder (from 09:30 onwards)
Dr Joe de Sousa (until 12:30)
Professor Tim Whitley
Professor Andy Wright

Executive: Dr Andrew Bourne
Professor Jonathan Dawes (Items 1-7 only)
Dr Nicola Goldberg (Items 4-13 only)
Ms Helen Morgan
Ms Jane Nicholson
Dr Kedar Pandya
Professor Mark Parsons (Items 1-4 and 7-13 only)
Dr Alison Wall (Item 5 only)
Dr Amanda Chmura (Item 9 only)
Dr Derek Craig (Item 9 only)

Others: Dr Neil Robinson
Mrs Gillian Bartoszewska
Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser (Item 7 only)
Dr Nick Cooper (Item 9 only)

Secretariat: Mrs Beth Amer
Ms Tracy Keys
Ms Kerry-Anne Young

1. Meeting Formalities

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Siobhan Peters, Alex van Someren and Peter Williams.
- 1.2 Gillian Bartoszewska was welcomed as an observer.
- 1.3 There were no new declarations of interest from Council members.

2. Draft Minutes of the Meeting 4 October 2023

- 2.1 Council agreed with the record of the last meeting, with the exception of amending the record to note apologies from Joe de Sousa.

3. Actions and Matters Arising

- 3.1 There were four outstanding actions from the last meeting. Council noted those which were either completed or in hand. Council requested updates at subsequent meetings on the Quinquennial Review of the Alan Turing Institute and the refresh of the UKRI AI Deep Dive, with a specific emphasis on the EPSRC perspective.

Action: Kedar Pandya

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4. Executive Update

- 4.1 Council received an update on The Funding Service. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 4.2 Council thanked UKRI for the recent engagement at the Board Executive Councils Conference, held in November 2023 at the British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge. Council commented that the event demonstrated the work that has been done to bring the constituent parts of UKRI into a cohesive identity. Council looks forward to receiving the outputs from the conference and participating in future events.
- 4.3 Council received updates on recent events, including the 2023 Key Partners Event, Council Member Recruitment, the 2023 Autumn Statement, and the DSIT Secretary of State's Open Letter on Research England's EDI Advisory Group.
- 4.4 Council formally thanked the EPSRC Key Partners Event organisation team for their hard work on an excellent event.
- 4.5 On the Autumn Budget, Council questioned the impact of the establishment of an AI Safety Institute on UKRI budgets.
- 4.6 Building on the skills and training discussions of the 2023 Key Partners Event, Council was briefly updated on recent meetings within UKRI and with the Chief Scientific Advisers Network regarding Centres for Doctoral Training, and the need to work together and with industry to help make the best possible case regarding doctoral training for the upcoming spending review.
- 4.7 Professor Miles Padgett provided closing reflections on his time as Interim EPSRC Executive Chair and shared his best wishes with the EPSRC Executive, wider EPSRC colleagues and the incoming EPSRC Executive Chair. This would be Professor Padgett's last meeting with Council, and he thanked Council for their support and engagement.

5. Centres for Doctoral Training (CDT) Update and Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTP)

Secretary's Note: For this item, specific declarations of interest were made by Professor Jane Jiang and Professor Tim Whitley for the CDT update. No action was deemed necessary given the high-level nature of the briefing and discussions which limited the members ability to influence any outcomes or decisions.

- 5.1 UKRI Collective talent funding was announced in May 2022, with the aim of harmonising and simplifying funding mechanisms across UKRI. Council was updated on UKRI's Collective Talent work to harmonise support mechanisms for PhD training across UKRI.
- 5.2 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.** Council recommended that EPSRC maintains the same balance as is currently in the portfolio for CDT, DTP and Industrial Cooperative Awards in Science and Technology.
- 5.3 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.** Council continued to stress the importance of studentships for both the UK and the global talent pool.
- 5.3 Council was given a high-level update on the 2023 CDT call, noting progress, the anticipated shape of the portfolio of investments and the strategies being implemented to enhance the number of Centres EPSRC can support. Council was also updated on EPSRC's Science Engineering and Technology Board's (SETB) review of the balance of

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the CDT portfolio with relation to the EPSRC Delivery Plan and geographical representation. Council formally noted thanks to EPSRC and SETB colleagues for their work on this important area.

6. Council Discussion ahead of UKRI CEO Session

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

7. Discussion with UKRI CEO

- 7.1 Council was pleased to welcome Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser to the meeting. Council greatly appreciated the time spent discussing diverse topics, including the 2023 Key Partner Event, UKRI's Operating Model, people and skills, the innovation and commercialisation pathway, equality, diversity, and inclusivity in research and innovation, UKRI's relationship with government and the anticipated Spending Review. Professor Dame Leyser thanked Professor Padgett for his contribution to EPSRC as interim Executive Chair.

8. Reflection on Discussion with UKRI CEO

- 8.1 Council welcomed the positive and constructive discussion with Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser. Council valued Professor Dame Leyser's perspective on the importance of the engineering and physical science community in supporting the government to advance the UK's research and innovation agenda. Council reaffirmed its commitment to providing ongoing support to UKRI's initiatives on equality, diversity, and inclusion and their continued support for the UKRI vision, mission and strategy.

9. Pulse Funding

Secretary's Note: For this item, declarations of interest were made by Professor Miles Padgett, Professor Jonathan Dawes and Professor Mark Parsons. These members did not take part in discussions so as to not influence decisions and outcomes.

- 9.1 Due to the delay in the UK's association to Horizon Europe, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) has reallocated some funding arising from the underspend. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 9.2 Council endorsed EPSRC's approach to delivering the investment made available by DSIT. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 9.3 Council commended EPSRC's ability to leverage well-established structures to ensure that funding is utilised to maximise its impact for engineering and physical science research and innovation and provide value to the UK taxpayer.
- 9.4 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

10. Council Effectiveness Review

- 10.1 A discussion was held regarding the 2023 EPSRC Council Effectiveness Review results. UKRI Councils are expected to periodically review their effectiveness and ensure that they are operating efficiently and in keeping with their Terms of Reference as determined by the Higher Education and Research Act. A total of 12 Council members and one Chief

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Scientific Advisor (CSA) completed their returns, representing a completion rate of 100%.
Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

10.2 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

10.3 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

10.4 Council commended the EPSRC Secretariat team and EPSRC and UKRI colleagues for facilitating well-structured and engaging meetings, which consistently generated valuable insights which empowered Council to effectively advise and support EPSRC on behalf of the engineering and physical sciences' community.

11. Any Other Business

11.1 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

11.2 Professor Nick Jennings was warmly thanked for his term with EPSRC Council and for his very significant contribution to both EPSRC and UKRI. This was Professor Jennings final Council meeting.

11.3 Kerry-Anne Young and Tracy Keys were thanked for their effective and committed work as EPSRC Council Secretariat as this was their last official meeting.

11.3 This was Professor Miles Padgett's final Council meeting. Professor Padgett joined EPSRC Council in April 2022 and became EPSRC's interim Executive Chair in June 2023. Professor Padgett's contributions and dedication were acknowledged by Council and EPSRC colleagues and he had struck an excellent balance in the interim role.

12. Next Meeting

12.1 The next EPSRC Council meeting will be held in Swindon on 27 and 28 March 2024.

13. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**