

## ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL

### EDITED MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 04 JULY 2017 AT GLASGOW UNIVERSITY

Council Members: Dr P Golby (Chair)  
Professor P Nelson  
Mr J Boyer  
Professor M Calder  
Ms B Dean  
Professor A Finkelstein  
Professor Sir R Friend  
Professor T Jones  
Baroness Neville-Jones  
Dr H Neville  
Professor M Rosseinsky  
Professor M Smith  
Professor T Whitley

BEIS: Dr S Axford, Deputy Director RC Policy and Funding

Executive: Dr A Bourne  
Mr A Lewis  
Dr K Pandya  
Professor T Rodden  
Dr N Viner

Secretary: Mr A Paul

#### **1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

**Oral**

- 1.1 Dr Golby welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Lord Ara Darzi and Professor Richard Jones.
- 1.2 There were no new declarations of interest from members.
- 1.3 Dr Golby thanked members for their responses to his letter of 08 June setting out the arrangements for Council post-April 2018 including the legacy responsibilities and the future Council. He said that Research England would be the first part of UKRI to go out to advert for their new Council, and that this was due to happen shortly. He said that it was anticipated that the process for EPSRC would begin early autumn and that members would be kept informed of progress including application procedures.

## 2. OPENING REMARKS

Oral

- 2.1 Professor Nelson updated Council on some recent developments. He reported that, he had recently attended a BEIS event attended by senior BEIS colleagues and ministers. **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 2.2 Professor Nelson provided a brief update on developments with the transition to UKRI. He said that an announcement about UKRI Board appointments was expected shortly, together with the key appointment of the UKRI Chief Financial Officer (CFO). **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.** Formal engagement with TUs on the transition had started, and it was anticipated that there would be more to report at the next Council meeting.
- 2.3 Professor Nelson provided a brief update on progress with calls for expressions of interest associated with the “wave” 1 of ISCF funding. He said that progress had also been made in identifying ideas for the next tranche of funding. He added that 41 ideas had come forward and 9 areas had been shortlisted for “deep dives” over the summer, of which 8 had strong EPSRC involvement. The final shortlist would be submitted to the Ministers in September. Members **noted** the importance of ensuring attendance from the community (both academia and industry) and building on the lessons learnt from the organisation of the Wave 1 workshops.
- 2.4 **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**
- 2.5 Finally, Professor Nelson drew Council’s attention to the additional support for Fellowships that was set out in the Executive Update paper (EPSRC 27-17). This comprised a further £160 million from the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) to specifically support new fellowships for early and mid-career researchers in areas aligned to the Industrial Strategy.

## 3. INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

(EPSRC 22-17)

- 3.1 Dr Viner introduced this item. He reminded Council that at its meeting in March 2017 it had requested an update on EPSRC’s international strategy. He provided an overview of EPSRC’s current international strategy and set out a number of key environmental

factors which now needed to be considered in determining the ongoing strategy. He invited Council to consider the following future options with regards to the current international strategy:

- i) *Maintain* the existing strategy;
- ii) *Expand* the global reach of the existing strategy to include a wider set of countries with which we look to proactively build greater collaboration e.g. South Korea, Singapore, Australia, Canada;
- iii) *Enhance* the current approach by introducing an international scheme that would provide dedicated funding to promote collaboration – this could be focused on linking UK based EPSRC funded centres of critical mass with similar centres in other countries and provides an opportunity to align with similar schemes run some of our international counterparts.

3.2 Members discussed the proposed options. Council **agreed** that there was a need to take positive action in anticipation of a wider, UKRI, international strategy. Members noted the risk associated with doing nothing and recognised that EPSRC had a strong foundation and capability to deliver more, including more effectively publicising the international aspects of current activities. A globally ambitious, centre-to-centre approach, building on existing links, appeared to offer benefits.

3.3 Members discussed the broader potential implications associated with EU Exit and noted that implementing option 3 was not a replacement for current EU provisions, which should be considered separately.

3.4 Members asked for a stronger statement of our international vision and of the precise motivations behind implementing changes, but were strongly supportive of amplifying mechanisms and expanding our international reach. Members said that further work was needed to understand the implications of budget allocations and how outputs from existing activities could be enhanced.

3.5 Council therefore **directed** the Executive to produce a revised statement of international strategy, to provide further detail on how existing activities could achieve a higher profile, and to quickly outline specific actions that could enhance activity - if necessary drawing on support from a Council sub-group. Council also **requested** an update at its next meeting on EU funding and contingency plans for EU Exit.

## 4. INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY (EPSRC 23-17)

- 4.1 Dr Bourne began by providing a brief presentation which focussed on EPSRC's portfolio from a "place" perspective, and on how this mapped to the Industrial Strategy Challenge areas and EPSRC's investments from a regional perspective.
- 4.2 Council **noted** the presentation and felt that having access to this visualisation of data was useful and it was important to communicate the distribution of the current portfolio more broadly.
- 4.3 Members discussed how this data could be used to make investment recommendations to government should place-based funding opportunities emerge. Members highlighted that the relationship between research investments and local economies was complex and may not deliver proportional benefits. Council **agreed** there was a need to think about the role of, and interplay between, skills, impact and innovation in a place-based agenda.
- 4.4 Members discussed the importance of being part of an ecosystem in this space and having joined-up strategies, noting the risk of the commitment to excellence being deprioritised. Members stressed the need for excellence to be balanced with the need to demonstrate benefits into the local economy.
- 4.5 Dr Pandya provided Council with a brief presentation which described EPSRC's current engagement and collaboration activities with SMEs, and set out potential opportunities for supporting the needs of SMEs and how these might focus effort effectively to engage these stakeholders.
- 4.6 Council **noted** the presentation. Members felt that EPSRC was uniquely placed to drive this engagement, given the strength of our relationships with universities who were themselves best placed in practice to achieve local economic stimulus through SME development. Members said there were possible lessons to be learnt from the experience of the RDAs. Council **recommended** further engagement across a broad range of stakeholders to acquire further intelligence, including from LEPs, chambers of commerce, business schools and SME networks themselves, in order to better understand the landscape.
- 4.7 Members reflected that, given the diversity in the sector, the SAN workstream should consider developing a range of models to pilot and noted that existing schemes, such as Prosperity Partnerships and Impact Acceleration Accounts would continue to play an important role. Members highlighted that greater understanding of existing mechanisms and linkages across the sector was a key part

of this work to identify where EPSRC can exert direct or indirect influence.

- 4.8 Council advised that the two topics were highly linked and **requested** the Executive to continue to progress these areas, utilising Council expertise as necessary.

## 5. UPDATE ON THE “BIG IDEAS” PIPELINE

(EPSRC 24-17)

- 5.1 Professor Rodden introduced the item, which provided an update on progress with the development of a pipeline of potential investment ideas. He reminded Council that the aim was to develop an approach to identifying and prioritising new “Big Ideas” that was flexible, responsive and organisationally robust. He said that good progress had been made in establishing a standing advisory group as recommended by Council. He added that Muffy Calder and Jack Boyer had agreed to be on the group and representatives of both the SAN and SATs had also been invited to join. Richard Friend had agreed to act as chair. The precise role of the group would be to act as a sounding board and challenge group, helping EPSRC to develop and implement processes, and test and improve the strength, and quality of the ideas under development.
- 5.2 Professor Rodden said that in addition to the advisory group, an internal working group had been established, involving Portfolio Managers from across the Themes, and led by Dr Susan Morrell, who was responsible for the development and implementation of the Ideas Factory approaches such as sandpits, retreats, and the Big Pitch. This group would be working to develop the Big Ideas raw material further.
- 5.3 Council **noted** the update and **requested** the Executive to report back to those involved in the initial ideas generation activity. Members stressed the importance of clearly articulating the research challenges and preserving the innovative aspects as the ideas move through various stages of development, noting the risk that over-work can lead to blandness. Council **directed** the Executive to focus on the basic research and multidisciplinary aspects of the work, now that the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund areas were well developed. Council **asked** to be kept informed as this work progresses.

## 6. UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT – STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRESS REPORT (EPSRC 25-17)

- 6.1 Dr Bourne introduced this paper which provided a status report on EPSRC’s university partnership activities, and asked Council to

provide steers on how EPSRC might further evolve its relationship-management with key university partners – especially in the light of discussions earlier in the meeting relating to place, SMEs and ideas-generation.

- 6.2 Council **noted** the update and felt that university relationships were currently working well and commended EPSRC continuing to deliver this. Members highlighted that greater sight of the feedback received from university engagement would be of interest. The Executive highlighted a further wave of engagement dates due in Autumn 2017 and noted that feedback would be shared as part of future Executive Updates. Council **requested** to be sent the visit schedule to allow attendance where possible.

## **7. PROPOSED STRUCTURE FOR OCTOBER REPORT ON DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS (EPSRC 26-17)**

- 7.1 Dr Bourne introduced this paper which provided an outline proposal for a report to be presented to the October Council meeting. This report was intended to summarise progress on the Delivery Plan, one year in. It would be complemented by poster sessions at which members would have the opportunity to hear from staff in more detail about portfolio highlights and progress so far. Dr Bourne asked Council to consider whether the proposed content looked right and invited them to suggest any additional content they might wish to see at the October meeting.
- 7.2 Council **noted** the paper and **agreed** that a light touch approach was appropriate. Council were asked to feed any further areas of focus to the Executive.

## **8. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

- 8.1 The minutes were **accepted** as a true record of the meeting.

## **9. ACTIONS AND MATTERS ARISING**

- 9.1 Actions from the previous meeting were completed and included in the meeting papers, or were scheduled for future agendas, with the exception of the following items:

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

Minute 9.3 – Mr Lewis reported that an event was planned in early 2018 to celebrate past EPSRC success and to look forward

to UKRI and EPSRC's contribution to the future science base. Council **noted** the update and highlighted the importance of getting invites out early to ensure attendance.

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## **10. EXECUTIVE REPORT (EPSRC 27-17)**

10.1 Council **noted** the update; **Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

## **11. REPORT FROM ARAC 25 APRIL 2017 (EPSRC 28-17)**

11.1 This report summarised the work of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee during financial year 2016/17. Ms Dean noted that the process for completing and signing off the accounts had been improved this year.

11.2 Council **noted** the report from ARAC.

## **12. OPERATIONAL UPDATE (EPSRC 29-17)**

12.1 Mr Lewis introduced the report which provided an update on the final outturn position and the preparation of the 2016/17 Annual Report and Accounts. He said that Professor Nelson had signed the Accounts and it was anticipated that they would be signed by the Comptroller and Auditor General and be laid before parliament before the summer recess.

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

12.3 Council **noted** the Operations Report.

## **13. ITEMS TO NOTE ONLY**

13.1 There were two information papers.

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|-----|-----------------------|-------------|
| i)  | Communications Update | EPSRC 30-17 |
| ii) | Corporate Risk Log    | EPSRC 31-17 |

13.2 Council noted the update and felt that EPSRC could build further on the scale and scope of existing messages. Professor Nelson

provided an update on current communication campaigns to emphasise Council's role in fundamental science. Council **agreed** that fundamental research messages needed reinforcing and **requested** that EPSRC work with strategic partners to more explicitly link their announcements with Council's investments.

#### **14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

14.1 There was no other business.

#### **15. NEXT & FUTURE MEETINGS**

15.1 The next meeting would be on 03 October 2017 at Polaris House, Swindon.