

EPSRC Strategic Advisory Team Conference Report

18-19 March 2013

St John's Hotel, Solihull

The 2013 SATs conference brought together members of EPSRC's Strategic Advisory Teams (SATs) and Strategic Advisory Network (SAN) in order to share information and gather input on a range of issues. The aims of the event were to:

- Share key messages and progress against the Delivery Plan with our strategic advisors and the wider community
- Gather advice on possible areas of focus for EPSRC during the remainder of the Delivery Plan period, helping to develop thinking within SAN on priority issues for consideration in 2013/14
- Provide briefing to SAT and SAN members on EPSRC's approach to portfolio management, our advice streams and peer review

All members of EPSRC's Strategic Advisory Teams (SATs), Strategic Advisory Network (SAN) and Council were invited to attend. 47 SAT and SAN members attended the event; all EPSRC-led SATs, or equivalent advisory bodies, were represented.

Two members of the independent panel reviewing EPSRC's strategic advisory routes also attended: Professor Richard Brook, AIRTO Ltd and Sir David Wallace, Churchill College, Cambridge.

The event was a mixture of presentations and interactive sessions to gather advice on a number of topics. This advice will be used to develop our thinking on future EPSRC policy.

Welcome Address and Q&A

The event began with a welcome address from EPSRC's CEO Professor David Delpy; highlighting the strategic context in which EPSRC operates and progress towards achieving the goals set out in our Delivery Plan.

This was followed by a panel Q&A with Professor Delpy, Dr Lesley Thompson (Director, Science and Engineering), Dr Liam Blackwell (Theme Lead, ICT) and Dr John Baird (Theme Lead, Digital Economy).

The discussion during the Q&A primarily focussed on impact and advocacy covering issues such as: how we capture evidence of impact and lobbying for the next spending review. Other topics covered included: early career researchers, Doctoral Training Grant allocations in Mathematical Sciences, the eight great technologies and engagement with the devolved governments.

Representatives of the professional and learned societies were invited to attend this first session. The Council for Mathematical Sciences, Institute of Physics and Royal Society of Chemistry were all represented.

A film of the welcome address and Q&A session is available online -

<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/newsevents/news/2013/Pages/satconferencewelcomeaddress.aspx>.

A transcript is available on request.

EPSRC Delivery Plan - Session 1

During this session we asked delegates to discuss opportunities for EPSRC both within the current Delivery Plan period (2011-15) and for the 2015/16 Spending Review. Following round table discussions, groups were asked to prioritise their top three topics.

Topics identified during this session included:

- Evidence of impact: *how we identify, collect and use evidence to make the case for the impact of EPSRC research*
- Lobbying: *how can EPSRC work with others to make the case to government for investment in engineering and physical sciences research*
- Academic valley of death: *how we ensure that support is available at all career stages from PhD to established researchers – discussion focussed on early career and mid-career support*
- Creativity and adventure: *support for creative and adventurous research at all career stages, engaging with industry and other users*
- National resource sharing: *resource and equipment sharing on a national basis*
- Aligning students to grants: *explore opportunities for aligning studentships with research grants*
- Monitoring and transparency of shaping: *monitoring the effects of shaping, looking for gaps/issues and taking account of the views of both industry and academia*
- Risks of a capital only funding environment
- Creative responses to funding constraints
- REF2014: *winners and losers – will this result in research concentration by default?*
- Connectivity with industry: *can we learn from other countries e.g. US and Germany?*

Capital Equipment

In the 2010 Spending Review EPSRC's capital budget was cut by 50%. In the period since then additional capital has been made available in specific areas including graphene, e-infrastructure, and power electronics. RCUK has received a total of £815M in additional capital investment with £236M (29%) allocated to EPSRC. EPSRC needs to prepare large-scale bids (~£50M) now in order to take advantage of future capital investments.

Delegates were asked to identify strategically important areas for engineering and the physical sciences where significant capital investment was required. These were placed on a matrix aligned to the eight great technologies. Delegates were also asked to comment on which sectors would be involved and people/organisations that could help us develop the idea further.

After Dinner Speaker

Professor Adam Tickell, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Transfer at the University of Birmingham gave a thought provoking after dinner talk on open data. Professor Tickell was a member of the Finch Group, on open access, and the Open Data User Group to the Cabinet Office.

Mini-workshops

On day two we held a number of information sessions designed to provide a brief overview of some of EPSRC's key processes. The sessions were originally designed for Council members where they were well received. We therefore felt there was benefit in running them again for our strategic advisors. Each session lasted half an hour and attendees were able to select two they would like to attend from the following:

1. Portfolio management

An overview of how EPSRC manages its portfolio of research and training.

2. How EPSRC gets advice

An overview of the way EPSRC currently gets advice on both strategic and operational matters.

3. Peer review

An overview of the EPSRC peer review process.

EPSRC Delivery Plan - Session 2

Using input from the facilitated discussion on day 1 and inspired by some of the topics raised during the Q&A session, the EPSRC Executive proposed seven 'provocations' for delegates to discuss. The 'provocations' were statements setting out ways in which EPSRC could address issues that had been raised during the event – the intention of each statement was to provoke discussion and debate between the delegates.

Each group was given a different statement, asked to discuss its pros and cons, and to indicate whether, on balance, they supported the idea. If the group did not support the idea they were asked to build on their discussion and suggest an alternative approach.

A summary of the provocations and outputs are given in the table below.

Provocation	Outcome of discussion
You must have a positive assessment of your past impact before you can apply for further funding	An alternative approach suggested was: Established researchers must have a positive assessment of their past impact before they can apply for further funding
Without a full picture of impact from an institution we will, year on year, reduce the DTG	The group agreed with this approach.
HEIs are our institutes so we will build on our partnerships by establishing 'fellowship accounts' to help foster early career researchers' careers. These would be awarded by peer review.	The group did not support this approach and felt the focus should remain on the individual rather than the university.
We will transfer our 'challenge funding' – 40% of budget – to TSB to enhance industry partnerships and focus our attention on responsive mode only	An alternative approach suggested was: Joint calls between EPSRC & TSB in 'Global Challenge' areas
In 2015/16, only people within 15 years of their PhD can apply for funding	An alternative approach suggested was: Every grant has to have a Co-I within 15 years of their PhD (or start of professional academic researcher career if they don't have a PhD) from 2015/16 onwards.
All Programme Grants have to direct 50% of their funding to new academics	An alternative approach suggested was: All Programme Grants have to direct 50% of their funding to early career researchers. It might also be good to have a target for RAs.
We will use our 'challenge funding' (40% of budget) to establish a national EPSRC institute undertaking research in energy, healthcare etc	An alternative approach suggested was: Fixed term discipline specific hubs with clear deliverables and outward facing subject evangelists.

Next Steps

EPSRC will develop an action plan to take forward the outputs of the event.

It should be noted that the outputs will be used to develop our thinking and are not policy.

Attendance List

Name			Organisation	Membership of EPSRC group
Professor	Uwe	Aickelin	University of Nottingham	ICT SAT
Dr	John	Baird	EPSRC	Staff
Dr	Francis	Bealin-Kelly	SABMiller Plc	Manufacturing the Future SAT
Dr	Liam	Blackwell	EPSRC	Staff
Dr	Andrew	Bourne	EPSRC	Staff
Professor	Richard	Brook	AIRTO	Advice stream review panel member
Dr	Alex	Broomsgrove	EPSRC	Staff
Dr	Dorothy	Buck	Imperial College London	Healthcare Technologies SAT
	David	Chilvers	Consultant	Digital Economy PAB
	Katie	Daniel	EPSRC	Staff
Dr	David	Delpy	EPSRC	Staff
Professor	Richard	Dendy	UKAEA	Physical Sciences SAT
Dr	Jean-Christophe	Desplat	Irish Centre for High-end Computing	Research Infrastructure SAT
Prof	Pete	Dobson	University of Oxford	Healthcare Technologies SAT
Professor	Patrick	Dorey	Durham University	Mathematical Sciences SAT
Mrs	Sue	Dunkerton	TWI Ltd	Healthcare Technologies SAT
Professor	Alicia	El Haj	Keele University	SAN & Healthcare Technologies SAT
Mr	Ivor	Evans	Cambridge Silicon Radio	ICT SAT
Dr	Martin	Garnett	University of Nottingham	Healthcare Technologies SAT
Professor	Kevin	Glazebrook	Lancaster University	Mathematical Sciences SAT
Dr	Paul	Golby	EPSRC	EPSRC Chair
Dr	Jason	Green	EPSRC	Staff
Ms	Clare	Gryce	University College London	Research Infrastructure SAT
Professor	Yang	Hao	Queen Mary, University of London	ICT SAT
Professor	Mark	Harman	University College London	ICT SAT
Dr	Clive	Hayter	EPSRC	Staff

Annex: Attendance list

Name			Organisation	Membership of EPSRC group
Dr	Philippa	Hemmings	EPSRC	Staff
Dr	Ben	Hicks	University of Bath	Engineering SAT
Professor	Karen	Holford	Cardiff University	Engineering SAT
Professor	Rod	Hose	University of Sheffield	Healthcare Technologies SAT
Professor	Steve	Howdle	University of Nottingham	Physical Sciences SAT
Dr	Trevor	Howe	Johnson & Johnson plc	Healthcare Technologies SAT
Professor	John	Hunton	University of Leicester	Mathematical Sciences SAT
Professor	Arieh	Iserles	University of Cambridge	Mathematical Sciences SAT
Professor	Peter	Knowles	Cardiff University	Physical Sciences SAT
Professor	Andy	Lewis	Biocompatibles UK Ltd	Healthcare Technologies SAT
Professor	Robert	MacKay	Institute of Mathematics and its Applications (IMA)	Nominated by Council for Mathematical Sciences to attend welcome address
Dr	Ruth	Mallors	Aerospace and Defence KTN	Engineering SAT
Professor	Peter	Main	Institute of Physics (IoP)	Attended welcome address on behalf of IoP
Professor	Mercedes	Maroto-Valer	Heriot-Watt University	Energy SAC
Professor	Chris	Marrows	University of Leeds	Research Infrastructure SAT
Dr	Hannah	Maytum	EPSRC	Staff
Professor	Bashar	Nuseibeh	The Open University	ICT SAT
Dr	Bill	O'Neill	University of Cambridge	Manufacturing the Future SAT
Dr	Kedar	Pandya	EPSRC	Staff
Dr	Robert	Parker	Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC)	Attended welcome address on behalf of RSC
	Dolly	Parkinson	EPSRC	Staff
Professor	Mike	Payne	University of Cambridge	Research Infrastructure SAT
Dr	Richard	Pinch	GCHQ	Mathematical Sciences SAT
Dr	Richard	Prager	University of Cambridge	Healthcare Technologies SAT
Professor	Gareth	Roberts	University of Warwick	Mathematical Sciences SAT
Professor	David	Robertson	University of Edinburgh	ICT SAT
Mr	Philip	Sharman	Evenlode Associates Ltd	Energy SAC
Mr	Les	Sims	EPSRC	Staff

Annex: Attendance list

Annex: Attendance list

Name			Organisation	Membership of EPSRC group
Dr	Neil	Smart	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority	Energy SAC
Mrs	Alison	Starr	GE Aviation	SAN
Mr	Mick	Steeper	Siemens VAI Metals Technologies Ltd	Engineering SAT
Professor	Greg	Tallents	University of York	Research Infrastructure SAT
Dr	Lesley	Thompson	EPSRC	Staff
Dr	Sarah	Thompson	University of York	Physical Sciences SAT
Professor	Adam	Tickell	University of Birmingham	After dinner speaker
Professor	Nick	Tyler	University College London	Healthcare Technologies SAT
Professor	Ijeoma	Uchegbu	University College London	Healthcare Technologies SAT
Professor	Richard	Vinter	Imperial College London	Engineering SAT
Professor Sir	David	Wallace	University of Cambridge	Advice stream review panel member Nominated by Council for Mathematical Sciences to attend welcome address
Dr	Lindsey	Walsh	London Mathematical Society	
Dr	Matthew	Willis	Oxford Creative Technology Ltd	Digital Economy PAB
Dr	Maggie	Wilson	EPSRC	Staff
Professor	Philip	Withers	University of Manchester	Engineering SAT
Professor	Guang Zhong	Yang	Imperial College London	Healthcare Technologies SAT