



**MINUTES OF THE 16th MEETING OF COUNCIL
HELD ON 11 NOVEMBER 2021 AT BROADWAY HOUSE AND VIA ZOOM**

Present:	Professor Diane Coyle (Chair, Senior Independent Member)
	Professor Jane Duckett
	Professor Jane Falkingham
	Professor Lasana Harris
	Ms Desirée Lopez
	Professor Melinda Mills
	Mr Ben Page
	Professor Sir Bernard Silverman
	Professor Todd Landman (from 14:00)
	Professor Sir Simon Wessely
Apologies:	Professor Dame Rachel Griffith
	Sir Chris Wormald
	Mr Mike Emmerich
Office:	Professor Alison Park (Interim Executive Chair)
	Dr Claire Graves (Chief Operating Officer)
	Mr Jeremy Neathey (Director of Strategy)
	Dr Jen Gold (Director of Research)
	Dr Catherine Bromley (Deputy Director Data Strategy and Infrastructure)
	Ms Frances Burstow (Deputy Director of Skills and Methods)
	Dr James Canton (Deputy Director of Public Policy Engagement)
	Dr Emma Gordon (Director ADR UK)
	Ms Melanie Knetsch (Deputy Director of Innovation and Impact)
	Mr Damien Smith (Deputy Director of Research Economics)
	Dr Emily Swaine (Deputy Director of Strategy and Partnerships)
	Ms Joy Todd (Deputy Director of Research Portfolio)
	Mr Peter Ethelston (Associate Director for Governance and Policy)
	Dr Pamela Mason (Head of Strategy and Head of International Development)
	Dr Charlotte Sausman (Senior Research Advisor)
	Dr Tom Roberts (Secretary to Council, Minutes)
	Mr Doug German (Private Secretary to Executive Chair)
	Ms Gillian Bartoszewska (Secretariat)
Guests:	Ms Joanne Allison (Nominated UKRI observer and Deputy Director of Corporate Strategy, Governance & Performance)

Minutes do not necessarily reflect the precise order in which items were discussed.

1.	Welcome and Apologies
1.1	The 16th meeting of ESRC Council was a hybrid meeting at Broadway House, London and online.
1.2	Professor Coyle, Chair, welcomed members to the 16 th meeting of Council.
2.	Minutes of the Previous Meeting (ESRC 2020-23)
2.1	Minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.
3.	Matters Arising
3.1	Members were updated on the status of matters arising from the previous meeting.
4.	Interim Executive Chair's Business and Update on Context
4.1	Professor Park offered a warm welcome to Professor Gold as incoming ESRC Director of Research. She informed Council that Professor Alan Penn, CSA of DLUHC, would be joining ESRC Council. She explained that this would be the penultimate meeting for Professors Mills and Falkingham whose terms were due to end and conveyed ESRC's debt of gratitude for their immense and varied contributions. She also thanked Professor Duckett for taking on the role of Grants and Delivery Group Chair from Professor Falkingham.
4.2	Professor Park highlighted recent successes from key investments including ESRC's COVID-19 actionable insights seminars on a range of topics, in collaboration with HM Treasury and the cross government Policy Profession and Analysis Function. These have had excellent levels of attendance from across Whitehall and the devolved nations and are in addition to regular policy seminars run by ESRC's Policy Observatories (most recently between the Economic Observatory and Levelling Up Unit at the Cabinet Office). Also relevant here is the ongoing recruitment of ESRC policy fellowships which will embed social scientists within government departments. She referenced key milestones with flagship ESRC investments such as the Productivity Institute (which has set out its key research questions) and the Programme on Innovation and Diffusion (which is planning the next round of its longitudinal survey of management practices) and ADR UK (whose third Annual Report details recent achievements including examples of its support for the management of the pandemic). Council were also informed that the UK Committee on Research Integrity (UK CORI) had been launched with responsibility for promoting research integrity, and that this would initially be hosted by UKRI.
5.	UKRI Observer update
5.1	Ms Allison provided Council with a detailed update on the SR noting an increase in the R&D spend across government rising over three years and thanked Council for their collective and individual efforts at shaping a strong bid. She explained

	that while this meant welcome certainty of three years of funding and an increase of £1.1bn per year for core research by 2024/25 compared to 2021/22, there was still a lot of detail to be worked through and the next financial year would likely face constraints. Ms Allison noted that this includes the cost of association for Horizon Europe. It was explained that the allocations process within UKRI was at an early stage but there was appetite within UKRI to maximise the opportunity of this multi-year settlement to align allocations with the ambitions set out in the UKRI strategy and that there was a commitment to keep Councils updated on progress.
5.2	Council thanked Ms Allison and suggested that Indro Mukerjee be invited to a future ESRC Council meeting to better understand and explore Innovate UK plans and how their interests relate to priority areas for ESRC.
6	ESRC's Future Strategy and Delivery Plan
6.1	Mr Neathey outlined progress in refining the vision and mission of ESRC's Delivery Plan and acknowledged Council members' invaluable input with shaping it both at full Council meetings and through the formation of a subsequent Delivery Plan subgroup. He explained that the subgroup would meet on a monthly basis and a full draft of the plan would come for discussion at the next Council meeting in February, informed by a programme of consultation and external validation with key stakeholders.
6.2	Ms Allison thanked Mr Neathey and Council for work undertaken to align the themes and pillars with the UKRI strategy. She noted the resonance across areas and invited the team to draw out the innovation themes across other areas.
6.3	Council welcomed progress and noted that the task now was to narrow down and think carefully about what should be included in the final version. It was suggested that there was more work to do to think about integration at the UKRI level and that ESRC seek to maximize leveraged funding in areas of mutual interest such as health and net zero.
7.	Strategic Initiatives - updates on Understanding Behaviour, Prosperous Places, and UK in the World
7.1	Dr Gold introduced the session, situating the three specific strategic initiatives in the context of the forthcoming ESRC Delivery Plan. She explained that they were currently being scoped and were at different stages of development. All were designed to be scalable in order to leverage external funding.
7.2	Ms Todd outlined a strategic outline case for a national capability for behavioural research to be delivered through a scalable hub and spoke funding model. She explained the initiative would: seek to reduce fragmentation and build on excellence, have a focus on cutting edge research and research methods, strengthen relationships between academics and broader stakeholders, increase the use of existing data infrastructures and emphasize training and professional development.
7.3	Council welcomed the strategic focus on behavioural research as integral to addressing many societal challenges (from COVID-19 to climate change to

	<p>obesity) and acknowledged the interest from public and private sector stakeholders and opportunities to leverage funding. There was support for the hub and spoke model and plan to co-develop spokes of activity with key stakeholders and partners as the investment developed. It was acknowledged that this would need to be handled carefully. The hub would need to stay fiercely impartial to maintain its broad appeal and avoid groupthink. It would need to consider and integrate the ethical considerations of behavioural interventions to mitigate against misperceptions over the scope of behavioural research as manipulative. The role of politics and political behaviour in behavioural change should also be within scope. Council also suggested the team carefully consider where there is existing capacity in order to manage any overlaps for instance with NIHR activity in Bristol and the work of Professor Lucia Reisch at Cambridge.</p>
7.4	<p>Dr Canton updated Council on progress with developing ESRC's Prosperous Places approach. He emphasised the role of social science in adding value to the delivery of levelling up and place-based policies by equipping local policy makers with access to research, data and evidence tailored toward actionable local policy interventions. Council were invited to comment on the approach and proposed investment in Local Policy Innovation Observatories.</p>
7.5	<p>Council asked that the proposal be revised to be clearer about the criteria for the geographical focus (for instance on particular areas of deprivation) and that priority be given to addressing the deficit of reliable local data and information that posed a barrier to policy making. It was noted that ADR UK data provision at a local level may provide important lessons and that it would be important to learn from previous activity in this area. Future investment would need to be informed by pilot activity that sought to understand the particulars and politics of a given area and what had worked to date and the details and dynamics of current and previous local and regional economic investment initiatives. More thought was needed to situate any future investment alongside ESRC's Productivity Institute and associated regional productivity fora as these would likely involve many of the same actors. There was also a need to tighten up the definitions of better outcomes.</p>
7.6	<p>Mr Smith set out the rationale for the proposed UK in the World initiative and explained that the initiative would cover a number of thematic areas including globalization and interdependence, geopolitics and global political economy; global goods and collective action; global understanding and global perceptions.</p>
7.7	<p>Council noted the breadth and ambition of this initiative and recommended it be narrowed. Greater clarity was needed on the research objectives and proposed beneficiaries and where ESRC was best placed to add value in terms of new or synthetic research. A useful lens it was suggested was <i>cui bono</i>; in what ways does the research benefit the UK and to whose benefit? This would help to tease out questions and themes with a global knowledge focus for instance around supply chains and associated requirements for overseas partnerships. A missing element was the illicit globe and the trafficking of people and drugs. Council liked the thinking behind the proposed observatories, and noted how they might if successful over time increase their reach to Africa, Asia and the Middle East. In terms of capacity there was a further task to map and bring together hitherto fragmented capacities and capabilities. It was agreed that this initiative would be worked up further and brought to a later meeting.</p>

8.	Big Ideas Pipeline
8.1	Sir Bernard, chair of the Big Ideas Advisory Group explained how the initiative provided an open process for systematically capturing, curating and developing forward thinking ideas from the social science community and beyond and that it built upon similar activities established by other councils. It was explained that the advisory group had met twice since launching in January and had considered ten ideas and that two may warrant further exploration.
8.2	Council thanked the Big Ideas Advisory Group and Sir Bernard for the work undertaken in developing the initiative. It was acknowledged that this was a new venture for ESRC and a very different process to peer review. There was consensus that the ideas put forward while interesting, didn't fully meet the criteria of a 'big idea' and also risked duplicating similar activity elsewhere. It was agreed that further work was needed by the office to re-focus the initiative so that it better signals the scale and ambition expected of future big ideas and their transformative potential in tackling societal and research challenges. It was suggested that the office develop further guidance on this and look at the approach of the ERC Synergy Grants model objectives and transformative fund.
9.	ESRC Data Infrastructure Strategy update
9.1	Dr Bromley outlined ESRC's refreshed data infrastructure strategy and progress towards implementation. She explained the strategy's aim as being to bring a streamlined and coordinated approach to managing ESRC's data infrastructure portfolio that provides secure access to a diverse set of data resources at a time of growing interest and demand for data research. She explained that the strategy was designed to connect to a broad set of audiences including: UK governments (Whitehall and devolved); existing and future users of ESRC data infrastructures; and research organisations and to take account of evolving UKRI Digital Research Infrastructure (with its emphasis on data infrastructure, data services, software development and associated capacity building) as well as to draw more effectively upon the UKRI Infrastructure Fund.
9.2	Council welcomed the strategy and vision. They liked the theory of change and noted how integral the strategy was to ESRC's Delivery Plan. Council made some suggestions for the team to consider when developing the data infrastructure and theory of change further: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The strategy could benefit from more clearly articulating the mechanism and evidence base for determining future funding decisions and priorities. b) The strategy should consider how to best leverage existing data sources to optimally curate and disseminate different types of datasets (from cohort studies to geo spatial and machine learning) and potentially their triangulation in ways that facilitate and inform researcher accessibility and collaboration. c) Consideration is needed as to the most suitable digital portals for making these data resources available. d) The theory of change should better reflect how the data landscape and evidence of need has changed in recent years, and more clearly articulate the primacy of ESRC's role in this space as a funder, curator and gatekeeper of cutting edge research.

	<p>e) Greater consideration could be given to ethical aspects of data research as a complex cross cutting issue.</p> <p>f) To better articulate how the data landscape and demand for data has changed within the evidence of need.</p>
9.3	Dr Bromley thanked Council for an engaging discussion and useful suggestions and explained that the office would use this feedback to develop their thinking further and align the strategy with forthcoming activity on future data services and digital footprints work.
10.	Review of the PhD Report: The ESRC Response
10.1	Ms Burstow thanked Council for their previous support and input into ESRC's response to the review of the PhD to date. Ms Burstow invited Council to endorse the recommendation to extend the length of the PhD funding from 3 to 3.5 years; and to discuss and agree the overall ESRC response to the report.
10.2	Council thanked Ms Burstow and the team and agreed with the proposal to extend the PhD from 3 to 3.5 years. The ESRC response to the review was endorsed subject to one caveat: that while 3 month placements for PhD students could be offered, they should not be made mandatory.
11.	Council Self-Assessment Feedback
11.1	Dr Graves updated Council on the key findings from the recent Council effectiveness review. She explained how there had been a UKRI Secretariat recommendation to postpone the external effectiveness review requirement by a year to allow for other current related UKRI activity, principally the Tailored Review and Operating Model Review to clear. Dr Graves proposed that ESRC use the next year's internal effectiveness review to focus on engagement and forward planning. She urged colleagues to use the buddy system in place to raise any issues and explained that Peter Ethelston as incoming Associate Director for Governance and Policy would be getting in touch to discuss hybrid meetings and ways of working.
11.2	Council agreed to postpone the external review requirement in line with UKRI advice and affirmed their support for the buddy system set up between ESRC's SLT and Council members.
12.	AOB
12.1	No areas of other business were raised.