



**Minutes of the UKRI Board Meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

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Date: Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021  
Time: 10:00-15:30  
Location: By Zoom

<b>Board Members and Observers</b>	
Sir John Kingman (Chair)	Fiona Driscoll
Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser	Sir Harpal Kumar
Siobhan Peters	Professor Max Lu
Lord Browne	Vivienne Parry
Sir Peter Bazalgette	Professor Dame Sally Davies
Professor Julia Black	Professor Ian Diamond
Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz	Dr John Fingleton
Lord Willetts	
<b>Attendees</b>	
Emma Lindsell (Exec Dir, UKRI)	Jo Shanmugalingam, BEIS (pm only)
Tim Bianek (COO, UKRI)	Katrina Nevin-Ridley (Director, Comms, UKRI) (for item 5-7)
Alex Jones, BEIS (am only)	David Rogers (for item 5)
Patrick Middleton (Deputy Director, Comms and Engagement, UKRI) (for item 5-7)	Rosie Cornelius (Deputy Director) (for item 6)
Jo Allison (Deputy Director) (for item 6)	Karen Salt (for item 8)
Frances Downey (for Item 8)	Karoline Vinsrygg (Egon Zehnder) (for item 9)
Simon Page (Egon Zehnder) (for item 9)	
<b>Secretariat</b>	
Hannah Berriman	Tim Russell

## 1. Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1. John Kingman welcomed Board members to the meeting, noting this will be the last Board meeting for Professor Max Lu, Sir Peter Bazlagette and Vivienne Parry. John thanked the departing members for their time on the Board. John noted that recruitment to fill the upcoming vacant positions on the Board was ongoing.
- 1.2. John asked Board members to declare any conflicts ahead of the meeting. No conflicts were declared.

## 2. a) Minutes of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021 b) Action Log and c) Forward Look

- 2.1. The Board approved the minutes of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021, and noted the action log without comment.
- 2.2. Board members noted the Forward Look and suggested the following items should be included on upcoming agendas;
  - Emerging issues across UKRI
  - Innovation Strategy discussion ahead of upcoming spending review
  - A more in depth discussion on commercialisation; and
  - UKRI's strategy for engagement with business

Secretariat to update the Board Forward Look and liaise with relevant teams about producing items for upcoming Board meetings.

## 3. CEO Report to Board

- 3.1. Ottoline updated the Board on a number of live issues not covered on the agenda, including;
  - 3.1.1. Senior Appointments – Ottoline noted that she hoped an announcement on the Innovate UK Exec Chair appointment would happen mid April. The Board noted that Ottoline is speaking regularly with Exec Chairs and senior HR colleagues regarding upcoming potential reappointments and vacancies. Ottoline noted the team will develop a succession plan.
  - 3.1.2. UKRI Strategy – Ottoline noted that work to build on the vision and mission outlined in the corporate plan has begun, noting that the initial focus is on the shifts needed under 4 categories; diversification, resilience, connectivity and engagement. Ottoline noted there had been significant engagement both across UKRI and with external stakeholders.
  - 3.1.3. The Board noted the need for a clear, coherent plan for what UKRI is doing and that it is was important for Ottoline to continue to communicate her approach to UKRI and its role within the system. The Board requested an update on next steps

on development of a strategic document, noting the comments raised during the discussion about focussing on messaging rather than developing a formal strategy.

**ACTION:** Ottoline to provide an update to the Board on next steps for a strategic document.

3.1.4. Alex Jones noted that she is meeting weekly with the Secretary of State to discuss the Innovation Strategy as his way of communicating his vision to Government. The Board noted that UKRI is represented on the Innovation Strategy Steering Committee.

#### **4. CFO Report**

4.1. Siobhan Peters presented the Chief Finance Officer's Report, which covers the period from 8<sup>th</sup> January 2021 – 26<sup>th</sup> February 2021, providing an update on relevant items not covered by the wider agenda.

4.2. The Board noted that Bronze, Silver and Gold business continuity teams are developing plans for a safe return to the office, in line with Government guidelines. Siobhan noted that we had received confirmation of successful bids to the BEIS Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund to help reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions for a number of UKRI sites.

4.3. Siobhan noted that the Government's Integrated Review of security, defence, development and foreign policy has been published on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021. The Board noted that the UKRI Trusted Research and Innovation programme will work closely with Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI) and BEIS to identify how those in academia or industry can protect their research and innovation from international threats.

4.4. The Board noted that five new staff inclusion networks will be launched on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2021, which will help strengthen our approaches to EDI across the organisation.

4.5. Siobhan highlighted that a paper seeking an amendment to MRC's charter to allow completion of the project for the transfer of assets from the residual legal entity of the MRC to UKRI will be circulated following the meeting.

4.6. The Board noted the membership of the Audit, Risk, Assurance and Performance Committee had been refreshed

#### **5. Spending Review and Allocations**

5.1. Siobhan Peters provided an update on the Spending Review and allocations process, noting that we will be writing to BEIS shortly with proposed council level allocations. Alex Jones (BEIS) commented that BEIS allocations advice had been provided to ministers the previous week and they are currently working through it and ensuring ministers are sighted on potential options. Alex noted that discussions regarding the total amount of funds available are still ongoing.

- 5.2. Siobhan provided an update on the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget, noting that the sector was unhappy with the proposed cuts. The Board acknowledged the importance of continued engagement with the community in a factual and managed way.
- 5.3. Emma Lindsell updated the Board on the proposed plans for communications and engagement. The Board noted that we need to be a champion for the wider system and support the community to focus its energy on constructive public dialogue, speaking coherently and consistently with common messaging. The Board noted the importance of fact based communications.
- 5.4. The Board noted the recommended communications and stakeholder engagement activities to manage announcement on the spending review outcome.

## 6. Performance Framework and Measures

- 6.1. Deputy Director of Analysis and Performance, introduced the item noting that the proposed new performance management framework was previously discussed at the Board meeting in January 2021, where members recommended the project team look for ways to minimise the data gathering burden on councils and identify priority areas to focus on for the first year. The Board noted that the team are recommending developing a set of 12 priority performance questions, focusing on measures that will tell us the most meaningful information about UKRI's performance.
- 6.2. The Board were very supportive of the 12 priority performance questions and the approach proposed. The Board discussed other key areas, including;
  - Industrial challenges
  - Ability to communicate impact
  - Demand management
  - Ability to facilitate multidisciplinary work
- 6.3. The Board were keen for the team to start using the balanced scorecard as soon as possible, noting this would be an iterative process which could be refined over time as we learn and adapt. The Board requested the team come back to discuss the performance report and measures further at a future meeting (in 6 and 12 months' time).

**ACTION:** Performance Report to be discussed and reviewed at future Board meetings (Sept 2021 and March 2022).

- 6.4. The Board noted the importance of understanding how we are viewed by the community and would be supportive of an attitudinal survey.

**DECISION:** The Board approved the approach to prioritising measures, managing the volume of data requested and improving business-related measures. The Board approved the plan to develop a proof of concept alongside Q4 reporting.

## 7. Developing a Communications and Engagement Strategy 2021/22

- 7.1. Katrina Nevin Ridley, Director of External Communications, Communications and Public Engagement, introduced the draft refreshed UKRI Communications and Engagement Strategy, noting that the development of the strategy aligned to the new Corporate Plan and built on the bespoke communication plans for the nine individual Councils as well as the ongoing work to refresh the Public Engagement strategy.
- 7.2. Katrina noted that the new structure for the communications team has been successful in meeting the comms needs across the whole of UKRI, noting that while more development is needed the teams are striving to understand our audiences better and develop effective working networks.
- 7.3. Katrina noted there is an ongoing challenge in balancing the needs of the organisation with the resource available. The Board raised concerns about the comms team's freedom to operate, acknowledging the push from Government to centralise communication teams. Katrina noted that they are continuing to work with Government to get clarity on what is being discussed.
- 7.4. The Board raised a query about the website and the need to ensure this work continued. Katrina noted that the new website project is now in its final year and will be completed shortly with the transition of council sites across to the main site.
- 7.5. Katrina noted that the final iteration of the strategy will be shared with the Board by correspondence for approval.

**ACTION:** Katrina Nevin Ridley to circulate the final iteration of the Communications and Engagement Strategy to the Board for approval by correspondence.

## **8. Update on Research and Ethics**

- 8.1. Ottoline Leyser introduced the item to discuss UKRI's role in convening the key players across the currently fragmented research and ethics landscape. Ottoline noted that there had been engagement with Vivienne Parry, as well as the Executive Committee and the Chair of the Nuffield Council of Bioethics (David Archard).
- 8.2. The Board noted that UKRI has an opportunity to be a convener in the research ethics space, ensuring appropriate horizon scanning is undertaken to allow a better understanding of where real concerns and difficulties lie. This is an opportunity to bring disparate bodies together and reduce the instances of duplicated work.
- 8.3. The Board noted the important role UKRI has as a convener, to bring together a fragmented and distributed ethics landscape. The Board agreed that it was not the role of UKRI to define what constitutes ethics.

**DECISION:** The Board agreed UKRI should have a role in convening key players within the research and ethics community to catalyse discussions and build a clearer sense of how to address ethical issues arising as a result of research.

## **9. Board Effectiveness Review**

- 9.1. John Kingman introduced the item, giving Board members the opportunity to discuss the Board Effectiveness Review report from Egon Zehnder. The Board noted that they felt the report was a fair analysis of the current situation. Representatives from Egon Zehnder joined the meeting to provide a more detailed breakdown of the report.
- 9.2. The Board noted that the report will act as a helpful and analytical breakdown to how the Board is currently managed and will help the new chair to identify any changes that could be made.
- 9.3. The Board acknowledged the importance of engaging with and developing stronger relationships with individual councils, noting that the UKRI Board and Council conference is being held in May and would be a great opportunity to discuss UKRI's connectivity with councils and their members.
- 9.4. Egon Zehnder invited Board members to contact them if they would like to receive anonymised individual feedback

## **10. UKRI Transformative Technologies**

- 10.1. Ottoline requested that any comments on the Transformative Technologies papers be sent to the secretariat. The Board requested versions of the papers that were not confidential and could be shared outside of UKRI.

**ACTION:** Ottoline to work with Lynn Gladden and Melanie Welham to develop versions of the Transformative Technologies papers that could be shared outside of UKRI.

## **11. UKRI Quarterly Performance Pack: Quarter 3, 2020-21**

- 11.1. The Board noted the UKRI Quarterly Performance Pack.

## **12. Strength in Places fund – Wave 2**

- 12.1. The Board noted that the proposed projects within the recommendation were very exciting and reiterated the importance of issuing funds within an appropriate timescale. The Board were happy to approve the advice to BEIS ministers on the project recommendations for Wave 2 and noted the impact of current financial restraints on the funding envelope for Wave 2.

## **13. AOB**

- 13.1. John Kingman noted that there would be a briefing session for Board members on Open Access on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2021 to give Board members the opportunity to discuss the details of the proposed policy and associated funding ahead of the Board meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2021. At the Board meeting, members will be asked to approve the final policy.

13.2. John highlighted the upcoming UKRI Board and Councils Conference which is being held on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

#### **14. Non Executive Session**