



**MINUTES OF THE 13th MEETING OF COUNCIL  
HELD ON 04 FEBRUARY 2021 VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM**

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<b>Present:</b>	Professor Diane Coyle ( <i>Chair, Senior Independent Member</i> )
	Professor Alison Park ( <i>Interim Executive Chair</i> )
	Professor Jane Duckett
	Mr Mike Emmerich
	Professor Jane Falkingham
	Professor Dame Rachel Griffith
	Dr Lasana Harris
	Ms Desirée Lopez
	Professor Melinda Mills
	Mr Ben Page
	Professor Sir Bernard Silverman
	Professor Todd Landman
	Professor Sir Simon Wessely
	Sir Chris Wormald
<b>Apologies:</b>	None
<b>Office:</b>	Dr Claire Graves ( <i>Chief Operating Officer</i> )
	Mr Jeremy Neathey ( <i>Director of Strategy</i> )
	Professor Paul Nightingale ( <i>Director of Special Projects</i> )
	Dr Catherine Bromley ( <i>Deputy Director Data Strategy and Infrastructure</i> )
	Dr James Canton ( <i>Deputy Director of Public Policy Engagement</i> )
	Ms Teresa Griffiths ( <i>Deputy Director of Planning, Operations and Governance</i> )
	Ms Melanie Knetsch ( <i>Deputy Director of Innovation and Impact</i> )
	Mr Damien Smith ( <i>Deputy Director of Research Economics</i> )
	Dr Emily Swaine ( <i>Deputy Director of Strategy and Partnerships</i> )
	Ms Joy Todd ( <i>Deputy Director of Research Portfolio</i> )
	Dr Charlotte Sausman ( <i>ESRC Rotator Research and Portfolio</i> )
	Dr Tom Roberts ( <i>Secretary to Council, Minutes</i> )
	Mr Doug German ( <i>Private Secretary to Interim Executive Chair</i> )
	Ms Gillian Bartoszewska ( <i>Secretariat</i> )
	Mr Harry Cavey ( <i>Secretariat</i> )
<b>Guests:</b>	Ms Isobel Stephen ( <i>UKRI Executive Director Strategy</i> )
	Ms Joanne Allison ( <i>Nominated UKRI observer and Deputy Director of Corporate Strategy, Governance &amp; Performance</i> )
	Ms Fiona Driscoll ( <i>UKRI Board, UKRI Audit Committee</i> )
	Dr Tony Soteriou ( <i>UKRI Director for Commercialisation of Research</i> )
	Professor Julia Black ( <i>Strategic Director for Innovation</i> )

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

<b>1.</b>	<b>Welcome and Apologies</b>
1.1	The 13th meeting of ESRC Council took place online due to COVID-19 restrictions.
1.2	Professor Diane Coyle, ESRC Council Chair, congratulated Professor Griffith on her recent Damehood and welcomed Professors Jane Duckett and Todd Landman, Ms Desirée Lopez and Mr Ben Page – as incoming ESRC Council members – to their first meeting.
<b>2.</b>	<b>Minutes of the Previous Meeting (ESRC 2020-01)</b>
2.1	The minutes of the previous meeting were <b>agreed</b> as an accurate record.
<b>3.</b>	<b>Matters Arising</b>
3.1	Members were updated on the status of matters arising from the previous meeting.
<b>4.</b>	<b>Interim Executive Chair's Business</b>
4.1	Professor Park updated Council on the appointment of Tim Bianek as permanent UKRI COO as well as three new appointments to ESRC's senior leadership team: Dr James Canton (Deputy Director for Public Policy and Engagement), Ms Teresa Griffiths (Deputy Director for Planning, Operations and Governance) and Dr Emily Swaine (Deputy Director for Strategy and International Partnerships).
4.2	It was explained that UKRI is working collectively to prepare for COP26 and that ESRC is leading on behaviour change and showcasing economic and social science research activity. Council were also updated on progress with flagship ESRC activities and programmes. These included: the International Public Policy Observatory based at UCL (whose initial focus is on understanding research user needs across the UK); the recommissioned Economics Observatory (whose focus will now include post-COVID-19 topics); ADR UK (whose business case has received approval for further funding until 2026); the Productivity Institute (whose early activity has focused on place) and the Programme on Innovation and Diffusion; successful submissions to the UKRI Infrastructure Fund (including a recommendation for funding of a new £28 million Early Life Cohort); and launch of ESRC's <a href="#">Big Ideas Pipeline</a> (an open process for systematically capturing, curating and developing ambitious and transformational ideas).
4.3	Professor Park noted UKRI are in the process of reviewing resubmission and demand management policies as part of the Simpler and Better Funding reforms. Given the relevance of this agenda to Council's interests, the UKRI Programme Director for Reforming Our Business Programme will be attending the next Council meeting.
4.4	Council welcomed this and requested greater social science community engagement in contributing to this agenda given the communities' continued

	appetite for pathways to impact statements and interest in grant reporting and resubmission processes.
<b>5.</b>	<b>UKRI Strategy and Spending Review</b>
5.1	Ms Isobel Stephen outlined the challenging fiscal landscape due to the impacts of COVID-19 and the lockdown and noted the financial constraints in the 21/22 year ahead. She explained that despite this, the prospect of a three-year settlement for R&D expenditure was a comparatively positive outcome for UK public R&D and a vote of confidence in the role of research and innovation in supporting the UK economy. She explained that there would inevitably be a tension between balancing existing commitments with future opportunities, whilst maintaining the sustainability of the system.
5.2	Council acknowledged budgetary uncertainties, but emphasised the huge scope for R&D and the centrality of social science research to address pressing societal and policy challenges such as the post pandemic economic recovery and levelling-up agendas, the future of trade, and the behavioural and societal changes necessary to meet the net zero challenge.
5.3	Council welcomed careful consideration of decisions about future allocations and funding mechanisms and warned restrictions in the overall quanta of funding would hamper ESRC's ability to effectively respond to the growing demands placed upon it to fund world class social science.
5.4	The Chair acknowledged the existing budgetary uncertainties but asked that UKRI endeavour to support longer term budgetary horizons wheresoever possible going forward to allow councils to plan more strategically and to enable ESRC to be more overt with social science and ensure it is appropriately embedded within cross-cutting initiatives.
5.5	Council thanked Ms Stephen for this update and welcomed her offer to provide a further update at a future meeting.
<b>6</b>	<b>Spending Review update and ESRC forward strategic planning</b>
6.1	Mr Neathey explained ESRC was committed to delivering its existing Delivery Plan commitments but that budgetary uncertainties meant delivery of strategic initiatives and priority areas had to be tensioned and phased, and the office was working to identify where it might minimise financial pressures on its foundational pillars (such as standard grants). Meanwhile, preparations were underway to lay the groundwork for a new corporate plan which covered a variety of possible outcomes and now incorporated 'place' as one of the new foundational pillars.
6.2	Council agreed the proposed short-term planning priorities and approach to the 2021/22 Delivery Plan and welcomed the proposals for the phased development of longer-term strategic priorities.
6.3	It was noted that R&D spending and social science input had changed in response to the pandemic with the role of social science in helping to shape the recovery becoming particularly noteworthy. Notwithstanding budgetary pressures and the capacity of the office to deliver, it was suggested the office should look to build upon the recent success of its commissioning response to the COVID-19

	urgency call as it demonstrated the potential scale and ambition of social science investment and illustrated how commissioning activity can help to ensure ongoing connections between research supply and demand from within government and beyond. Given this, ESRC may also wish to revisit its vision statement.
6.4	Council welcomed the proposed public policy fellowships and the invitation to help shape their development and build upon the success of the ARI fellowship scheme. Council asked that the office look at the shape of the portfolio in light of the SR discussion. Mapping and signposting existing research activities and their impacts and connections between research and users should also be a priority and there may be a role for ESRC's Economics and International Public Policy Observatories in this.
6.5	Futher work on mechanisms, incentives and career structures was needed to support the desire for interdisciplinary activity. Collation of a readily available set of case studies that clearly demonstrated the role and value of social science would provide a welcome resource that could better inform proactive efforts to reach out to other disciplines.
<b>7.</b>	<b>UKRI COVID-19 update</b>
7.1	Professor Nightingale updated Council on the extent of social science activity in the UKRI COVID-19 call and how there had been a very strong response from the community with 41% of grants naming ESRC as the lead council and some 163 proposals, ranging from £9 thousand to £1 million in value. Professor Nightingale acknowledged the diligence and collegiality of the COVID-19 panels and thanked all those involved. Professor Nightingale outlined evaluation plans for the call and asked colleagues to reflect upon the impact of COVID-19 on the disciplines and subject matter of the social sciences, and what that meant for the profile and balance of disciplines within ESRC's portfolio.
7.2	Council welcomed and acknowledged the considerable achievement of the office and wider community in terms of the scale and breadth of response to the COVID-19 urgency call.
7.3	Members noted the scheduled reviews, made a number of suggestions and welcomed the opportunity to provide their input and lessons learnt into the evaluation.
<b>8.</b>	<b>European funding update following EU Exit</b>
8.1	Mr Neathey updated Council on Horizon Europe association. It was explained that UK researchers and organisations will have access to Horizon Europe programmes on equivalent terms to EU countries. Mr Neathey explained that the next step was to refine the details.
8.2	Council welcomed this important clarification, and noted that discussions around European Research Infrastructure Consortiums (ERICs) were ongoing with implications for the UK's hosting of the European Social Survey.
<b>9.</b>	<b>Commercialisation and the social sciences</b>

9.1	Ms Knetsch outlined UKRI's new definition of commercialisation, the establishment of a UKRI commercialisation team headed up by Dr Tony Soteriou and the ESRC's ambitions to support this exciting agenda.
9.2	Professor Julia Black (UKRI Board member and PI of the LSE <a href="#">ASPECT</a> grant) led a discussion about the immense opportunities for the social sciences to better exploit ideas, opportunities, data insights, products and services, as well as the challenges around existing metrics for the commercialisation of social science activity.
9.3	Council welcomed the discussion and reflected on their experiences and the challenges and opportunities they illustrate, as well as the role ESRC can play in influencing the creation of successful institutional support mechanisms that facilitate scalable and impactful commercialisation of social science research.
<b>10.</b>	<b>Papers for discussion by exception and any other business</b>
10.1	Council noted the plans for engagement around the infrastructure fund submissions in 2021.
<b>11.</b>	<b>Close of Meeting</b>