



**MINUTES OF THE 15th MEETING OF COUNCIL  
HELD ON 15 JULY 2021 VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM**

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<b>Present:</b>	Professor Diane Coyle ( <i>Chair, Senior Independent Member</i> )
	Professor Jane Duckett
	Mr Mike Emmerich
	Professor Jane Falkingham
	Professor Lasana Harris
	Professor Todd Landman
	Ms Desirée Lopez
	Professor Melinda Mills
	Professor Sir Bernard Silverman
	Professor Sir Simon Wessely
	Sir Chris Wormald
<b>Apologies:</b>	Mr Ben Page
	Professor Dame Rachel Griffith
<b>Office:</b>	Professor Alison Park ( <i>Interim Executive Chair</i> )
	Dr Claire Graves ( <i>Chief Operating Officer</i> )
	Mr Jeremy Neathey ( <i>Director of Strategy</i> )
	Dr Catherine Bromley ( <i>Deputy Director Data Strategy and Infrastructure</i> )
	Ms Frances Burstow ( <i>Deputy Director of Skills and Methods</i> )
	Dr James Canton ( <i>Deputy Director of Public Policy Engagement</i> )
	Ms Rosie French ( <i>Deputy Director of Operations and Governance, ADR UK</i> )
	Dr Emma Gordon ( <i>Director ADR UK</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> )
	Ms Sara Slade ( <i>Head of Governance and Policy</i> )
	Dr Tom Roberts ( <i>Secretary to Council, Minutes</i> )
	Mr Doug German ( <i>Private Secretary to Executive Chair</i> )
	Ms Gillian Bartoszewska ( <i>Secretariat</i> )
<b>Guests:</b>	Ms Joanne Allison ( <i>Nominated UKRI observer and Deputy Director of Corporate Strategy, Governance &amp; Performance</i> )
	Ms Emma Lindsell ( <i>UKRI Executive Director Strategy</i> )
	Rachel Dubourg ( <i>Chief Social Researcher &amp; DASD Deputy Director, MoJ</i> )
	Neil McIvor ( <i>Chief Data Officer &amp; Chief Statistician, DfE</i> )

	Dr Natalie Gold ( <i>Deputy Head of Behavioural Insights and Lead Behavioural Scientist, Public Health England</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 15th meeting of ESRC Council took place online due to COVID-19 restrictions.
1.2	Professor Diane Coyle, Chair, welcomed members to the 15th meeting of Council.
1.3	Professor Diane Coyle noted the apologies from Mr Ben Page and Professor Dame Rachel Griffith.
<b>2.</b>	<b>Minutes of the Previous Meeting (ESRC 2020-13)</b>
2.1	The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed 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 and Update on Context</b>
4.1	Professor Park notified Council on the appointment of Sir Andrew Mackenzie, incoming Chair of UKRI. Following the most recent Board & Council conference it was explained that conversations were continuing about how to build effective connections across the different constituencies of UKRI.
4.2	Professor Park noted HMT had approved the remaining £90.12 million of funding for ADR UK (2022-26) and that Treasury would be leading on an announcement.
4.3	Other highlights mentioned by Professor Park included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Productivity Institute had held well attended academic and business national conferences in June, and that a Productivity Thematic call of £10 million is due to open in July that would fund 4-6 projects.</li> <li>• The first ESRC COVID-19 seminar, which focused on the pandemic's impact and implications for business, was held in July, followed by a second seminar on mental health. These seminars bring together Whitehall and the Devolved Administrations with ESRC-funded researchers.</li> <li>• ESRC's International Public Policy Observatory (IPPO) hosted an Action on Inequalities roundtable, aimed at better understanding policy makers' needs. The Observatory is also in discussion with Bloomberg Philanthropies to secure additional funding to expand work at a city level.</li> <li>• ESRC's pilot <a href="#">policy fellowships scheme</a> (discussed by Council in May) has to date secured 11 government partners and conversations to agree co-</li> </ul>

	funding and thematic agendas (with a lot of commonality across departments around for instance Net Zero and Levelling Up) were ongoing ahead of the call closing on 14 September.
<b>5.</b>	<b>ADR UK Update</b>
5.1	Dr Gordon updated Council on recent successes with ADR UK. She noted the importance of data sharing during the pandemic, and ADR's role in facilitating data sharing and linkage for research across all Whitehall departments. Collaboration with MRC's sister HDR investment is opening up a wide range of secure data to researchers.
5.2	Dr Gordon introduced Ms Dubourg (Chief Social Researcher & DASD Deputy Director, MoJ) and Mr Mclvor (Chief Data Officer & Chief Statistician, DfE) who underscored the value of the ADR UK partnership to government depts and provided concrete illustrations of how it was directly improving the MoJ use of data, and driving forward the DoE evidence base and with it helping to reveal powerful policy insights.
5.3	Council thanked Ms Dubourg and Mr Mclvor and commended Dr Gordon and the ADR UK team for their leadership in promoting the initiative across government.
5.4	Council encouraged the team to capture both the direct and indirect impacts and benefits of the investment across departments and beyond and discussed how to best promote the linked administrative data research assets now available to researchers. Key suggestions included: a relaunched communications piece summarizing the benefits of the new model and the available opportunities; and exploring avenues for promotion of the opportunities for ADR UK research (for example, at Doctoral Training Partnerships training workshops). The need for an improved catalogue on the ONS Secure Research Service (SRS) site was noted.
<b>6.</b>	<b>Executive Director of Strategy, Communications, Analysis &amp; Governance</b>
6.1	Ms Lindsell updated Council on the Spending Review (SR) 21 plans and timescales and invited thoughts and comments on helping to ensure a compelling case for R&D.
6.2	Council thanked Ms Lindsell, welcomed the update and made several suggestions. <b>[Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000]</b>

6.3	Ms Lindsell thanked Council and explained that she welcomed ongoing engagement and suggestions.
<b>7.</b>	<b>Overview of ESRC's portfolio and key facts</b>
7.1	Dr Graves provided an overview of ESRC's funding, portfolio, grants policy, risk management, and operations activities. It was explained that this was designed to apprise members of key corporate information to Council so that they could effectively carry out their valuable role in supporting strategic decision making. Council were invited to comment on any additional information that might be missing from this document.
7.2	Council thanked Dr Graves and the office for this comprehensive overview and agreed that an annual update would prove helpful and informative. Council also welcomed the approach undertaken by the office on risk management and risk appetite.
7.3	Council made some additional suggestions to consider for future iterations such as: weighting the portfolio by the volume of active social science researchers within disciplines and research organisations; considering the use of contextualised time series to show trends in investment in a given area over time; providing an indication of the sources of other social science funding and ensuring there is a clear view of ESRC's impact.
<b>8.</b>	<b>ESRC Future Vision</b>
8.1	Dr Swaine noted that all UKRI councils were entering a new phase of strategic planning brought about by the impact of the pandemic and changes to the funding landscape. She explained that it was appropriate to appraise the wider context that ESRC are operating within, and invited Council to review the current vision as its primary purpose sets out the long-term ambition and direction of travel to ESRC's wider community.
8.2	Council discussed the vision and unique selling point of ESRC and made a number of suggestions for the office to consider, including being clear on its primary audience, ensuring the language is bold, ambitious, exciting and that it connects to real life problems in the here and now.
8.3	Dr Swaine thanked Council and invited colleagues to continue their engagement with the process for revising the vision. It was explained that the office would continue to welcome ongoing input from colleagues over the Vision and Delivery Plan refresh and that this would be discussed in greater detail at a future Extraordinary Meeting scheduled for 23 September.
<b>9.</b>	<b>Strategic Initiatives</b>
9.1	Mr Neathey situated the strategic initiatives covered by the paper within the wider strategic planning process and noted their number, range and size was contingent upon the outcome of the Spending Review and ESRC's allocation. He explained

	that they should be scalable and aligned in ways that optimize opportunities for leverage funding.
9.2	Dr Canton presented an emergent strategic initiative on Prosperous Places and updated Council on scoping work undertaken to explore a response to the Levelling Up, place-based and local innovation agendas. He outlined 'four foundations' of place to guide future investment and suggested associated investment options and research themes.
9.3	Council endorsed the initiative and welcomed the proposal of a Local Acceleration Fund. It was suggested the office give careful thought to the process of identifying and shaping relevant research questions, are mindful of challenges and critiques of the existing policy making framework and be responsive to demand-led local requirements. The importance of differences within place as well as between places was noted.
9.4	Ms Todd outlined ESRC's ambitious programme on behavioural change that would both address key research needs on behaviour change and deliver evidence into the heart of decision making, as well as build capacity and capability within the community. It was explained that Public Health England (PHE) had been awarded a tender to undertake a short scoping exercise on behalf of ESRC.
9.5	Dr Natalie Gold (PHE) explained that the scoping activity was considering: the current state of capacity and capability within the UK, how data was being used and what improvements could maximize its future potential; and what key thematic areas of focus might provide the best opportunity for innovative research that would align with the demands and interest of policymakers.
9.6	Council welcomed the development of this strategic initiative. The pandemic, it was suggested, had raised the prominence of thematic areas including the relationship between health and behavioural change and public trust. There were also questions about the quality and reliability of self-reporting and limitations of rapid opinion polls for decision making. Council supported the emphasis upon data driven behavioural science and recommended that future activity exploit the gamut of types of data available and ensures access to existing data sets and initiatives. There was agreement too about the need for the office to think carefully about definition and how the terminology spoke to different audiences.
9.7	Ms Todd outlined ESRC's ambitions on climate change and Net Zero as a strategic priority noting the pressing demand for social science research and leadership. She explained ESRC was renewing its focus and developing an ambitious social science led programme of activity that began with an investment in interdisciplinary environmental social science leadership and would be followed by programmes on Net Zero, climate change economics and adaptation.
9.8	Council endorsed this strategic initiative, and noted the plans to embed this activity within the developing UKRI Net Zero theme and its relevance to other key ESRC initiatives such as prosperous places and behaviour change. It was agreed that understanding, engaging and coordinating cross-cutting interdisciplinary research activity would be essential. It was suggested that there were important considerations here too around the green transition and incentives, the role of legislation, R&D and green jobs, and building back better.

<b>10.</b>	<b>Papers for discussion by exception and any other business</b>
10.1	Council noted two information updates on Research Leadership and Official Development Assistance review.
<b>11.</b>	<b>Close of Meeting</b>