

**MINUTES OF THE SEVENTH MEETING OF COUNCIL
HELD ON 24 JULY 2019 AT THE MRC, 1 KEMBLE STREET, LONDON**

Present:	Professor Jennifer Rubin (<i>Executive Chair</i>)
	Professor Anna Vignoles (<i>acting Chair</i>)
	Professor Jane Falkingham
	Professor Matthew Flinders
	Professor Nigel Gilbert
	Professor Rachel Griffith
	Professor Melinda Mills
Apologies:	Professor Diane Coyle (<i>Senior Independent Member</i>)
	Professor John Aston
	Mr Mike Emmerich
	Sir Chris Wormald
Office:	Mr Simon Crine (<i>Chief Operating Officer</i>)
	Professor Paul Nightingale (<i>Director of Strategy and Partnerships</i>)
	Mr Jeremy Neathey (<i>Deputy Director of Policy and International</i>)
	Dr Lewis Preece (<i>Head of International Strategy, ESRC</i>)
	Ms Joy Todd (<i>Deputy Director of Research Portfolio</i>)
	Dr Tom Roberts (<i>Assistant Secretary to Council</i>)
	Ms Gillian Bartoszewska (<i>Secretariat</i>)
	Mr Doug German (<i>Private Secretary to Executive Chair</i>)
Guests:	Ms Ruth Elliot (<i>UKRI Finance and Commercial Director</i>)
	Professor Andrew Thompson (<i>Executive Chair, AHRC</i>)
	Professor Tim Wheeler (<i>Director of International, UKRI</i>)

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

1.	Welcome and Apologies	Oral
1.1	Professor Anna Vignoles, Chair, welcomed Council members to the seventh meeting of Council.	
1.2	Apologies were noted from Professor Diane Coyle, Sir Chris Wormald, Professor John Aston and Mr. Mike Emmerich.	
2.	Minutes of the Previous Meeting	ESRC 2019-17
2.1	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the previous meeting.	

3.	Matters Arising	Oral
3.1	Members were updated on the status of matters arising from the previous meeting.	
3.2	Members noted all actions had been completed and thanked the office for their helpful responses.	
4.	Update on EU Exit from UKRI International Champion and Executive Chair AHRC	Oral
4.1	Professor Thompson provided Council with an update on UKRI's EU exit preparations.	
4.2	Council noted the update and thanked Professor Thompson.	
5.	Executive Chair's Business	Oral
5.1	Professor Rubin updated Council on ongoing change and uncertainty in the wider environment with a new incoming administration, the date of EU Exit approaching, and policy review related to the HE sector.	
5.2	Professor Rubin also noted a forthcoming consultation on Open Access.	
5.3	Council noted that in light of these changes and uncertainties, there was a need for the ESRC to be agile, flexible and responsive, working closely with UKRI and other stakeholders.	
6.	ESRC in context	ESRC 2019-18
6.1	Professor Rubin framed the context for later discussions noting that demand for social science to address significant societal challenges within UKRI and across Whitehall continued to grow. This is an important opportunity for social science to make a contribution, but is also a challenge, as the supply of high quality social science that required funding was already exceeding ESRC's budgetary capacity.	
6.2	Council agreed that it will be important to seek ways to grow the budgetary pot and for ESRC to be nimble and collaborative in working across fields flexibly and imaginatively to fund social science input across UKRI.	
6.3	Professor Griffith suggested the office seek to identify information on the proportion and availability of other Councils' budgets that cross over into social science remit and that the Council offer key players from the social science community to serve on other Council's panels were welcome and appropriate. Professor Flinders further suggested Council members proactively engage and attend other research council meetings to identify shared funding opportunities, thereby improving the referring process between funders and ensuring restricted funds go further.	Action: <i>Office to seek to identify information on the proportion and availability of other Councils' budgets that cross over into</i>

		<i>social science remit</i>
6.4	Professor Flinders suggested that greater work was needed to maximize the community's engagement with translational research opportunities that exist through the cross cutting funds such as ISCF and via the UKRI Future Leaders fund. Professor Vignoles proposed that practical case studies on where social scientists have successfully engaged would also help provide assurance and encouragement to others from the community to become more actively involved.	
6.5	There was agreement on the importance of signaling activities to encourage good behaviours in the research landscape. Professor Rubin suggested examples might include relatively small investments such as ESRC's continuing support for prizes, Celebrating Impact awards and the intelligent use of strategic small funds such as the ARI fellowships and the forthcoming Heywood Fellowship Programmes. Such initiatives may significantly raise ESRC's profile amongst key stakeholders.	
7.	Strategic Allocation of ESRC core budget: further analysis	ESRC 2019-19
7.1	Mr Neathey responded to Council's request from the previous meeting for more detail on the strategic allocation of the ESRC core budget. He noted that while the £360m over the next several years from cross-cutting funds was a welcome, significant additional uplift, this would not alleviate acute pressures on ESRC's core budget.	
7.2	Mr Neathey set out the requirements outlined in his paper, including maintaining funding for the responsive mode grants scheme, real terms and directing uncommitted headroom from our core research budget to support the ESRC Delivery Plan priorities (including challenge-led research priorities, translational activities and support for a social science leadership programme as well as digital). Mr Neathey also recommended ESRC maintain funding for core data and infrastructure investments through capital budget expenditure and restricted ODA-related investment from ESRC's core budget in light of the success of the ESRC in GCRF. This approach was to be coupled with targeting of both broader UKRI and partnership funding.	
7.3	Council thanked Mr Neathey for his comprehensive report and noted the high level of already committed spend (and the timeframes involved in support for existing Centres and Institutes).	
7.4	Council agreed the package of measures including meeting the inflation-related costs on standard grants at a cost of £3m a year. Council suggested ESRC develop a clear strategy to maximise the benefits from FIC and GCRF especially given other councils were going to do likewise.	Action: <i>Professor Nightingale to develop flexible strategy to exploit cross council and other funds</i>

7.5	Professor Gilbert suggested Council should revisit and re-examine ESRC's training provision and the role in managing demand. It was agreed that Council should have an opportunity to discuss the future of PhDs at a future meeting.	Action: <i>Frances Burstow to bring paper on future of PhD training to a future meeting</i>
8.	ESRC and UKRI International Partnership Strategy	ESRC 2019-21
8.1	Dr Preece outlined the methodology behind ESRC's international partnership strategy. The approach to identifying and prioritising international funders around high quality, shared interest research opportunities that could be taken forward. He pointed out that the growth of the Fund for International Collaboration in conjunction with ODA funds meant that the breadth of opportunity was broader than ESRC has the capacity to pursue.	
8.2	The Chair thanked Dr Preece and invited Prof Tim Wheeler, UKRI Director International, to provide a response to Dr Preece's presentation.	
8.3	Professor Wheeler commented how he and UKRI colleagues had been impressed by the prioritisation approach used by ESRC's international team as it was both evidence-based and investment-focussed and brought rigour to investment decisions. He observed that the real value was in helping to separate areas where we want to be proactive with long term relationship-building activities, from countries where we needed to be able to exploit emergent responsive opportunities from budget cycles, high profile visits at pace etc. He pointed out that the ESRC international strategy needed to be forward-looking (being at least 1-2 years ahead of where joint proposals can be formed). He noted that the inception of UKRI and with it a shared international capability function has helped to streamline overseas offices and activities ensuring delegations provide a more coherent offer.	
8.4	Council thanked Dr Preece and Professor Wheeler for their presentation and response and endorsed the pragmatism and rigour underpinning the approach to international partnership working. It was noted that South Korea received the biggest R&D funding and represented a particular opportunity for future partnership activity. There was also discussion of the importance of co-locating research and innovation and talent agendas at the highest levels of UKRI international partnership activity.	
9.	Update on UKRI cross-cutting funds and discussion of ESRC bids	ESRC 2019-20
9.1	Professor Nightingale presented an update on strategic plans for engagement with UKRI cross-cutting funds, and the status of current bids. He informed Council that the cross-cutting funds amounted to approximately £5 billion to date, and were driving strategic research	

	outcomes. He pointed out how the success of the social sciences and cross-cutting funds were interlinked: the former being contingent upon engagement with the latter, while delivery of the latter may be dependent upon behavioural and policy changes (themselves reliant upon high quality social science input).	
9.2	Professor Nightingale noted the extent of the opportunity for ESRC engagement with the funds and how, as the second smallest council potentially relevant for a large number of bids, ESRC would need to balance ambition to engage against resource and opportunity implications of doing so. Despite the challenges of meeting upfront costs, this upstream strategic approach in which social science experts were brought in early to shape and inform bids across UKRI was worth pursuing as it would likely help to improve downstream outcomes of bids or improvements to the public good and enhance social science research.	
9.3	Council agreed and welcomed the approach to the cross-cutting funds and recognised the importance and the challenges of successful engagement.	
9.4	Council discussed the paper and made the following suggestions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to clarify whether there are sufficient resources to make high stakes bids. 2. to clarify how to make the best use of existing expertise in the ESRC Ideas Pipeline (e.g. Council members, SAN members and rotators), and to develop a strategy to engage with other top social scientists, industry and other partners who may fall outside existing networks. 3. to be clear about how we target each cross-cutting fund effectively e.g. directly or indirectly, and at the appropriate stage. 4. to develop several oven-ready ESRC bids with help from Council, SAN and our community. 5. to prepare social science and business communities by managing expectations about the effort and success rates and developing templates and frameworks into practical guides that would ensure a common approach and minimum viable product when scoping and developing bids. 6. to make full use of existing institutes and centres both to prepare ideas, but also as social science labs best placed to tackle particular research questions. 7. to learn from other councils about how they address the challenges of transparency and peer review when writing bids at speed and prior to funding 8. to play to ESRC strengths by including a focus on upstream drivers of downstream costs. 9. to anticipate and help address societal challenges and policy, for instance by supporting departmental access to high quality social science analysis and research. 	
9.5	Given this fruitful discussion it was suggested that the office bring a paper to the next meeting on project development and the ideas pipeline for investable propositions.	Action: <i>Professor Nightingale to bring paper on</i>

		<i>Project Development Pipeline</i>
10.	Forward Look	Oral
10.1	Professor Rubin invited Council to suggest items for forthcoming Council meetings.	
10.2	Council suggested that Innovate UK be invited to a subsequent meeting that would focus on relevant opportunities and synergies for collaborative working around the shaping of common research and innovation agendas and cross cutting funds.	Action: <i>Office to invite UK Innovate lead to next meeting</i>
10.3	Looking further ahead, Professor Rubin offered to provide an update on her UKRI shared capability function on Equality Diversity and Inclusion, and noted how the team was currently being recruited and that the scope of the initiative included bullying and harassment and research integrity.	
12.	Any Other Business	Oral
12.1	There was no other business.	
13.	Close of Meeting	Oral
13.1	Professor Rubin thanked members for attending and reminded members that the eighth meeting of Council is scheduled for 7 November 2019.	