

MINUTES OF THE THIRD MEETING OF COUNCIL HELD ON 10 SEPTEMBER 2018 AT THE AMBA HOTEL, CHARING CROSS, LONDON

Present:	Professor Jennifer Rubin (<i>Executive Chair</i>)
	Professor Diane Coyle (<i>Senior Independent Member; Chair</i>)
	Mr Mike Emmerich
	Professor Matthew Flinders
	Professor Jane Falkingham
	Professor Nigel Gilbert
	Professor Rachel Griffith
	Professor Melinda Mills
	Professor James Smith
	Professor Anna Vignoles
	Sir Chris Wormald
Apologies:	Professor John Aston (<i>Chief Scientific Adviser, Home Office</i>)
Office:	Mr Andy Gibbs (<i>Head of Strategy; Secretary to Council</i>)
	Mr Simon Crine (<i>Interim Director of Strategy, Operations and Partnerships</i>)
	Ms Ruth Gibson (<i>Deputy Director for Capability and Data Infrastructure</i>)
	Mr Jeremy Neathey (<i>Deputy Director for Research and International</i>)
	Dr Hannah Collins (<i>Strategic Lead: Knowledge Mobilisation</i>)
	Dr Tom Roberts (<i>Assistant Secretary to Council</i>)
	Mr Doug German (<i>Strategy</i>)
	Mr Thomas Goodsir (<i>Strategy</i>)
	Dr Jacqui Karn (<i>Strategy</i>)
Guests:	Dr Alex Marsh (<i>Deputy Director UKRI Strategy Unit</i>)
	Professor Paul Nightingale

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

I.	Welcome and Apologies	Oral
I.1	Professor Diane Coyle, Chair and Senior Independent Member of Council, welcomed Council members to the third meeting of Council.	
I.2	Apologies were noted from Professor John Aston	
I.3	The Chair welcomed Professor Paul Nightingale who joins ESRC as a rotator from the University of Sussex, Dr Alex Marsh Deputy Director UKRI Strategy Unit; Dr Hannah Collins, Strategic Lead for Knowledge Mobilisation; Dr Jacqui Karn from the Strategy team and Tom Goodsir and Doug German who join as Private Secretaries to the Executive team	

2.	Minutes of the Previous Meeting	ESRC 11/18
2.1	<p>The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the previous meeting subject to the following changes:</p> <p>Item 4.1 should read Kings College activities not key activities</p> <p>Item 4.1 Prof Rubin thanked Prof Jane Falkingham rather than Prof James Smith for her role on the Transition Review funding panel</p> <p>Item 5.1 should make reference to pharmaceutical not tech companies</p>	
3.	Matters Arising	Oral
3.1	Members were updated on the status of matters arising from the previous meeting. Members noted all items were either complete or discussed elsewhere on the agenda.	
4.	Executive Chair's Business	
4.1	Professor Rubin outlined her thinking about the role for ESRC within UKRI and emphasised the opportunities for ESRC to be both ambitious and transformative.	
4.2	<p>Professor Rubin updated Council on progress with staff recruitment to the Executive team, ESRC engagement with cross cutting UKRI funds, and the commitment to UKRI transformation activity. She also updated Council on a number of international developments, including the potential for collaboration with the Norwegian Funding Council on assessing impact from research, for example through the potential to establish an international task force on outcome metrics. A senior UKRI delegation, including Professor Rubin, will be visiting China shortly for the launch of UKRI China and Professor Rubin has been asked to engage in events and activities around anti-microbial resistance and ED&I.</p> <p>Professor Rubin also provided an update on her role as ED&I Champion and invited members to contribute input on this key cross cutting agenda.</p> <p>Professor Rubin advised Council that she was reducing her role with Kings College, London to 0.25 day per week to release time for ESRC activity. She thanked Mr Simon Crine for his work as Interim Director of Strategy Operations and Partnerships as well as the office for their performance during a challenging period.</p>	

5.	Strategic Planning Overview	ESRC 12/18
5.1	The Chair invited Council to note this paper for information and informed them it provides context for the subsequent discussion on strategic planning.	
6.	Strategic Delivery Plan	ESRC 13/18
6.1	<p>The Executive Chair introduced this item for discussion. Professor Rubin emphasised the imperative for the vision to be ambitious in how it positions social science and ESRC’s valuable data and infrastructure assets within the research and innovation landscape. ESRC will need to continue to develop its networks to provide the foundations for world leading social science and to foster a diverse research environment.</p> <p>ESRC must make a strong case for appropriate resourcing of the social sciences including the pivotal empirical role it can play in informing wider research expenditure for example by improving understanding of key drivers of societal challenges, behaviours and practices that shape them and the distributive impacts of changes and solutions in areas such as AI or AMR.</p>	
6.2	Mr Gibbs updated Council on the progress of the Strategic Delivery Plan and explained that the vision and mission statements would provide the framework for what we are looking to achieve and where we want to take the social sciences over the next 5-10 years.	
6.3	<p>Members discussed the draft mission and vision statements and made the following suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the mission statement should include clear reference to research being independent of political interference or other funder interests; • The mission and vision statements should not overlap and the latter should be rewritten positioning the social sciences at the heart of the research and innovation ecosystem. • Members favoured a bold approach to prioritising societal challenge areas and agreed they should be broadly aligned with those outlined in the SDP (prosperity, the generation gap, work, Brexit and the global political economy). • ESRC must clearly articulate how it is funding social science to tackle such societal challenges not only increasing understanding. These societal challenge priorities should demonstrate what the social sciences are and how social science contributes. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESRC should include mention of working in partnership with key stakeholders to deliver impact and achieve its objectives. • The vision and associated strategic objectives should be specific and measurable so that we know whether and when we have succeeded. <p>Council proposed the following revised mission statement: ‘As a Council of UKRI, ESRC’s mission is to promote the development and application of world leading independent social science research, training and knowledge exchange. We will do this in order to address societal challenges, advance knowledge, and enhance sustainable and inclusive prosperity, security and wellbeing. We uphold UKRI’s values of Collaboration, Excellence, Innovation, and Integrity, and embed equality, diversity and inclusion in everything we do.’</p>	
6.4	<p>Members suggested the Strategic Objectives should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be distinctive and ambitious making use of active language and complementing not duplicating UKRI language and messages. • Be couched in what ESRC is trying to achieve not the process of how we get there eg engaging with government on policy, promoting fundamental research, developing infrastructure, and enhancing capability. • Reflect a balance between knowledge creation through fundamental and strategic research and knowledge mobilisation of existing research. • Demonstrate ESRC’s critical knowledge brokerage and filtering roles as an independent part of the knowledge ecosystem. • Be SMART– success should be measurable. • Be sensitive to the budget. The budget, the language and the scale of the ambition need to be aligned. • Objective 1 should be about <i>driving</i> the position of international standing while objective 2 should reflect ESRC’s convening power and position at the heart of research investment to amplify and influence research objectives and partners in the UK and internationally. <p>The Chair thanked Council for their valuable contribution and noted that Prof Rubin is preparing a paper to outline the case for social science and will be circulating this to Council for further comment.</p>	<p>ACTION: JR to circulate her paper.</p>
6.5	Sir Chris Wormald left the meeting after this item.	
7.	Spending Review 2019	ESRC 14/18

7.1	Mr Gibbs introduced this item for discussion before handing over to Dr Alex Marsh from the UKRI Strategy team.	
7.2	<p>Dr Marsh explained that research council budgets for 2020 onward had not yet been agreed and although timeframes were not yet known, a Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) was expected for next year. He suggested this may be a difficult public spending context given economic and fiscal headwinds.</p> <p>Dr Marsh said that UKRI is doing well in building its standing within government circles despite being new, and that this was demonstrated by the successful bid for separate inclusion of R&D spend in the Industrial Strategy. The CSR represents an opportunity for UKRI to build on this success through a collaborative exercise and for councils to make compelling cases for generating knowledge and demonstrating the economic and societal impacts and benefits of that knowledge. The 2.4% GDP goal is a proxy for economic impact but UKRI need to be building the arguments demonstrating spill-over societal benefits.</p> <p>The submission will be an iterative process of co-development across UKRI. It will need to tell a strong story through sets of convincing cross-cutting case studies and evidence about how UKRI is enabling the advancement of knowledge and why it should continue. The submission will need to articulate what different elements of funding can buy through cross-UKRI funds and bottom up funding. Thematic priorities such as obesity and an ageing population demographic were indicative examples of where multiple councils can collaborate effectively to address societal challenges.</p>	
7.3	In anticipation of the CSR, UKRI councils were being asked to prepare three scenarios: 1) where budgets remain the same in real terms – no change in headline spend 2) what must be prioritised in the event of a 20% reduction and what would be lost; 3) priorities for the longer term (out to 2027- aiming at the 2.4% goal) and the case to be made for an uplift. This would also need to convey how councils would work with government departments in a joined-up way.	
7.4	<p>Council discussed the CSR and its implications for ESRC.</p> <p>There was discussion about how best to balance making the case for short term gain versus long term impact, and the foundational importance of investment in researchers and their tools (capability and infrastructure investment) so that the social sciences can continue to address high profile issues such as big data and AI now and in the future.</p>	

	<p>One response was for research priorities within the SDP to be around broader trends and domains that resonate eg UKRI priorities on talent recognise that realising this ambition will entail a long term approach to building structures and capacity.</p> <p>ESRC will need to consider how and to what extent distributive effects will be considered in making the case for economic impact. Dr Marsh suggested that this approach was currently reflected within the ISCF (eg regarding the productivity gap) but it would be helpful to continue to gauge this by talking to influencers. Overall it would be wise to try to ensure that there was currency with other policy domains.</p>	
7.5	<p>Members agreed that the flat real cash scenario would still be a tough position. It was noted that some councils, including ESRC, had experienced real terms cuts in recent years while others had experienced increases, and that therefore ESRC was starting from a weaker position. This position was further compounded by significant recent increases in FEC which must also be factored in.</p>	
7.6	<p>Members noted that the 20% reduction scenario warranted a candid assessment of the implications of reduced social science capacity or output as well as inputs so that the full implications of cuts to specific areas can be better understood. It was noted that this proposal would need creative thinking.</p>	
7.7	<p>The uplift scenario should be ambitious and illustrate how ESRC is rising to the key challenges of our time for instance by going even further in addressing areas such as populism, models in practical applications, productivity.</p>	
8.	<p>UKRI Infrastructure Roadmap – Interim Report</p>	<p>ESRC 15/18</p>
8.1	<p>Ms Gibson introduced this item informing Council that the UKRI infrastructure roadmap is due to be published around April 2019, and is anticipated to be refreshed every 3-5 years.</p> <p>Council noted the role of the roadmap in informing future strategic funding decisions, and how it is comprised of two strands: (1) mapping current research and innovation infrastructures in the UK; and (2) identifying the capabilities required over the next 5-10 years. It was agreed that there needs to be alignment between the relevant chapters of the roadmap and ESRC's SDP and current data infrastructure strategy.</p> <p>It was explained that two recent UKRI surveys had been used to help map the current infrastructures, with approximately 15% of</p>	

	<p>responses from the Social Sciences Arts and Humanities. It was noted that the survey data should not be relied upon too heavily, given that it was based on self-reporting and there appears to be quite a high level of inconsistency in the responses.</p> <p>Council expressed some concern over the UKRI survey design and the lack of clarity of the questions and definitions used. For example, the surveys weren't as clear as they could have been in the definition of research infrastructure and members who had participated in the surveys had found it difficult to use. It was also acknowledged that the definition of social science and humanities research resources as 'infrastructure' is partly driven by research council definitions, as those resources may not be considered to be within more usual concepts of infrastructure. This may have made it more confusing for the social science and humanities communities to respond to the surveys.</p>	
8.2	<p>It was agreed that ESRC's input to the interim report should reflect the current data infrastructure portfolio and strategy, including the recommendations from the recent Longitudinal Studies Review, and clearly articulate the key contribution of social science infrastructure and what has been achieved through the use of it.</p>	
8.3	<p>Ms Gibson explained that the forthcoming interim report will be used to stimulate further discussion and engagement over the autumn and winter before the roadmap is finalised. Planned next steps include further engagement with the community by working with other organisations and networks including the British Academy and IRO network.</p>	<p>ACTION Ms Gibson to share a copy of the interim report with Council via DocNet for information before it is published.</p>
9.	What Works Network Review	ESRC 16/18
9.1	<p>The Executive Chair declared a conflict of interest and recused herself for this item only.</p> <p>Dr Collins introduced this item for discussion and explained the nature of this conflict and how Professor Rubin would act in an advisory capacity on What Works going forward, with executive power falling to the responsible Director to safeguard the independence of decision making.</p> <p>Dr Collins provided members with an overview of the status of existing What Works Centres and how ESRC is a major partner in</p>	

	<p>the Cabinet Office-led What Works Network. It was explained how the move to UKRI provided an opportunity for ESRC to demonstrate leadership for UKRI in the What Works agenda, delivering to new strategic priorities and leveraging sources of potential new funding. It was also made clear that to achieve this there was a need to take a critical look at the existing portfolio to work out what really is working, for ESRC, as a part of What Works.</p> <p>Dr Collins explained that the review would be led by a management consultancy with a budget of up to £50k. They would be tasked with carrying out a stock take of where we are with our What Works investments which would look at elements including the efficacy of different models used, how they were commissioned with more sophisticated elements coming later as part of an embedded evaluative approach to ESRC's What Works investment going forward.</p>	
9.2	<p>Council supported the refreshed vision and objectives for What Works and endorsed ESRC's leadership role as a bold partner harnessing the strengths of the social sciences to improve public policy. Council were supportive of the proposed criteria for participation going forward, and endorsed the proposed approach for how these would be used to shape ESRC's strategic investment in What Works (WW) going forward.</p> <p>Council noted the not insignificant challenges uniquely experienced by What Works Centres (WWC) with regard to the volume of papers they have to review in order to provide evidence based syntheses and alignment problems all too commonly experienced between what WWC have been tasked with and their respective user communities.</p>	
9.3	<p>It was suggested that ESRC should look beyond the WW brand and consider the WW network as a broader pilot to better understand and situate ESRC's approach to knowledge mobilisation activities more generally. This would help to shape ESRC's broader strategic approach to knowledge mobilisation going forward.</p>	
9.4	<p>Council noted the nuance needed to capture impact meaningfully within this context especially in relation to policy. Council highlighted the clear need for strong impact stories to tell about ESRC's investment in WW. There were also instances of where models had arguably inspired or spawned similar approaches in other areas most notably with recent activity within higher education and also in relation to the legal system which was seen as a marker of success. Council highlighted the need for WWCs to engage within the wider research community, opening up to these stakeholders to widen influence and support the building of the</p>	

	<p>profile of knowledge mobilisation as a strategically important endeavour. It was also important to think about the impact of our WW investment in terms of capacity building both for the research community, and policy practitioners. For example, can WWCs act as knowledge brokers to show and tell both social scientists and policy analysts what is needed and what is available?</p> <p>Prof Vignoles suggested that there are already academic experts working on knowledge mobilisation whom it would be advantageous to get involved, for instance perhaps as Co-Is.</p>	
9.5	<p>It was suggested that the scope of the review should also include a bottom-up element that accurately reflects the absorptive capacity of those institutions that centres work with on the ground. Council noted that the review may also wish to consider interdisciplinarity and the value of cross fertilisation and interlinkages across the portfolio. Some members expressed concern over the use of management consultants to carry out this complex and nuanced task and suggested calling upon academic expertise for elements of this review process. Council also made a strong recommendation to consider increasing the budget for this review process to reflect the considerable investment being made by ESRC in WW.</p>	
10.	Any Other Business	Oral
10.1	The Chair invited members to raise any other business.	
10.2	No other business was raised.	
11.	Private discussion of ESRC strategy	Oral
11.1	Members convened for a private discussion.	
12.	Close of Meeting	Oral
12.1	The Chair thanked members for attending and reminded members that the fourth meeting of Council is scheduled for 30 November at the MRC, One Kemble Street, London.	