



## MINUTES OF THE TWELFTH MEETING OF COUNCIL HELD ON 05 NOVEMBER 2020 VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM

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<b>Present:</b>	Professor Jennifer Rubin ( <i>Executive Chair</i> )
	Professor Diane Coyle ( <i>Chair, Senior Independent Member</i> )
	Mr Mike Emmerich
	Professor Jane Falkingham
	Professor Rachel Griffith
	Dr Lasana Harris
	Professor Melinda Mills
	Professor Sir Bernard Silverman
	Professor Anna Vignoles
	Professor Sir Simon Wessely
	Sir Chris Wormald
<b>Apologies:</b>	Professor John Aston
<b>Office:</b>	Dr Claire Graves ( <i>Chief Operating Office</i> )
	Professor Alison Park ( <i>Director of Research</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> )
	Ms Frances Burstow ( <i>Deputy Director of Skills and Methods</i> )
	Dr James Canton ( <i>Deputy Director of Public Policy Engagement</i> )
	Ms Melanie Knetsch ( <i>Deputy Director of Innovation and Impact</i> )
	Mr Damien Smith ( <i>Deputy Director of Research Economics</i> )
	Ms Joy Todd ( <i>Deputy Director of Research Portfolio</i> )
	Dr Emma Gordon ( <i>Director of ADR UK</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> )
	Mr Harry Cavey ( <i>Secretariat</i> )
	Bridget Taylor ( <i>Head of Data Strategy</i> ) ( <i>item 8</i> )
	Sarah Honeybone ( <i>Data Strategy Senior Manager</i> ) ( <i>item 8</i> )
	Lucy Thorne ( <i>Head of Leadership and Skills</i> ) ( <i>item 9</i> )
<b>Guests:</b>	Sir John Kingman ( <i>Chair of UKRI Board</i> )
	Ms Siobhan Peters ( <i>UKRI CFO</i> )
	Professor John Van Reenen ( <i>Ronald Coase Chair in Economics and School Professor, LSE</i> ) ( <i>item 7</i> )

	Ms Joanne Allison ( <i>Nominated UKRI observer and Deputy Director of Corporate Strategy, Governance &amp; Performance</i> )
	Professor Paul Wakeling ( <i>University of York</i> ) (item 9)
	Dr Sarah Tazzyman ( <i>Associate Director, CFE Research</i> ) (item 9)

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 twelfth meeting of ESRC Council took place online due to COVID-19 restrictions.
1.2	Professor Diane Coyle, Chair, welcomed Sir John Kingman, Chair of UKRI Board and Dr James Canton, incoming ESRC Deputy Director of Public Policy Engagement. The Chair also welcomed Siobhan Peters, UKRI CFO, who observed the latter part of the meeting
<b>2.</b>	<b>Minutes of the Previous Meeting</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>Executive Chair's business</b>
4.1	Professor Rubin informed Council she had been invited to take-up a new role from January 2021 as Chief Scientific Adviser and Director General for Science, Technology, Analysis, Research and Strategy at the Home Office. Professor Rubin thanked Council for all their work and support. She also thanked Professor Vignoles for her invaluable contribution to ESRC and noted that this would also be her last meeting before she took up the role of Director of the Leverhulme Trust from January 2021. It was explained that four new high calibre Council member appointees had been secured and would supplement ESRC Council from January 2021.
4.2	Council congratulated Professor Rubin on her appointment and welcomed Professor Park as Interim Executive Chair. Council offered their assistance with this process and requested that Professor Coyle, as SIM and Chair of Council play a central role in reflecting the views of Council in the job description as well as the broader process of securing Professor Rubin's permanent successor.
4.3	Council were informed of forthcoming activities including: the ESRC Festival of Social Science digital-first event 7-15 November 2020 (with events across 18 partners 'Society from your Sofa'); the ESRC Celebrating Impact Prize Awards ceremony on 12 November, and the annual UKRI Board and Councils meeting scheduled for 30 November.

<b>5.</b>	<b>Remarks from Sir John Kingman</b>
5.1	Sir John paid tribute to Professor Rubin's leadership as ESRC Executive Chair. He welcomed her achievement in bolstering ESRC's Senior Leadership Team and its Council through the appointment of eminent social science scholars and thanked her for her bold ambition in driving forward delivery of large scale national priority research investments such as ESRC's flagship Administrative Data Research initiative and Productivity Institute. He also praised Professor Rubin for overseeing a step-change in ESRC's relationship with the policy community by raising the profile and value of social science research and its role in addressing wide-ranging societal and policy issues.
5.2	Council echoed these tributes. It was suggested ESRC should continue to build on the success of these relationships with the policy community and look to exploit new opportunities for social science research afforded by the pandemic. For example, there was considerable appetite within policy circles for social science answers to better understand the spread of the disease within different communities, the behavioural response to testing and vaccine take up, and the impact of the pandemic upon productivity and the economy.
5.3	There also remained appetite for more interdisciplinary research in response to the COVID challenge and recognition of the pivotal role that the social sciences can play in enabling this. <b>[Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000]</b> . There was agreement that ESRC and UKRI were well placed to lead on this agenda by building on recent successes around the COVID-19 urgency response call.
<b>6</b>	<b>Spending Review Update</b>
6.1	Mr Neathey reported on ongoing SR planning activities ahead of the outcome being known. He thanked Council for their invaluable ongoing input in shaping ESRC's thinking and priorities and asked whether Council was happy with the current package of activities given where we are at this key staging post. It was explained that further detail would come back to Council in the new year once the allocation was clear.
6.2	Council welcomed the long term proactive approach to planning and the emphasis upon scalable core projects that could be flexed to future-proof different settlement outcomes. There was agreement further work was required to determine which research priorities to showcase and how best to phase investment once the allocation was known. It was also suggested that ESRC consider its risk tolerance particularly when considering longer term investment decisions.
<b>7.</b>	<b>Delivering on national priorities: The role of ESRC investments in bringing data and research together.</b>
7.1	Professor Nightingale reflected on recent successes with regard to ESRC's COVID-19 response and outlined ESRC's approach toward supporting research that addressed national challenges and priorities. Key features include: building upon extensive engagement with research users to articulate their research needs, making strategic investments in data, and considering the role of large investments

	at scale that provide ESRC with the profile and depth of capability. It was explained that a UKRI wide monitoring of awards was being put in place alongside an evaluation of UKRI's research response to the pandemic.
7.2	Council endorsed the approach and welcomed the proposed evaluation. It was suggested the evaluation of the COVID-19 urgency call should seek to include comments from panel members on the process so that lessons could be learnt about commissioning activity at speed. There was also a request that research outputs from investments were tracked and impacts upon policy were captured.
7.3	Professor Nightingale introduced Professor Van Reenen who updated Council on the ESRC's Programme on Innovation and Diffusion (POID) – a key stream of activity within ESRC's landmark Productivity Institute Programme which sits alongside the activities being led by Professor Bart van Ark and his team.
7.4	Professor Van Reenen explained a key motivation for POID was to better understand why UK productivity growth had been particularly poor since the financial crash. He outlined the breadth of the research themes from entrepreneurship, innovation and green growth, to industrial policy, labour markets and healthcare in tackling the productivity puzzle and suggested that a key output would be to generate a framework for policymakers seeking to increase innovation and diffusion.
7.5	Council thanked Professor Van Reenen and underscored their support for this flagship investment. Professor Vignoles suggested that POID's ambitions around data infrastructure may benefit from data linkage with the ADR UK initiative as well as exploring connections with NERC data sets.
<b>8.</b>	<b>ESRC Data Strategy Development</b>
8.1	Professor Park outlined the vision and work plan for the emerging ESRC strategy for data and infrastructure and how it was anticipated to grow in value, innovation and responsiveness. It was explained that greater budgetary flexibility, a common assessment framework and the establishment of a pipeline of investment opportunities would assist the office in being able to more readily exploit new initiatives without making cuts to the portfolio.
8.2	Council welcomed the approach to data collection, curation and training and agreed there was a need for a more strategic approach to funding long term data infrastructure investments. There was support for the adoption of a common assessment framework to be used to judge the performance of data infrastructure investments over time and Council encouraged the office to look at risk appetite when considering long term data infrastructure investments. <b>[Minute not included as contains exempt material, at the time of publication, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000].</b>

<b>9.</b>	<b>PhD Review</b>
9.1	Ms Burstow updated Council on progress with the review of the structure and content of the PhD in the social sciences before inviting Dr Tazzyman and Professor Wakeling to outline emergent findings.
9.2	It was noted that the vast majority of students were satisfied with their decision to pursue a doctorate but that the review provided an important opportunity to reflect upon what are the key attributes of an ESRC PhD, for instance in terms of optimum length, degree of flexible provision, and extent to which students were developing the necessary employability skills (especially for those seeking careers outside academia).
9.3	Council thanked the team and welcomed progress on the PhD review. Amongst the discussion, Council made a number of key observations and suggestions. It was pointed out that the good practice 'required' by ESRC through its Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) has been of benefit to postgraduates and that it would be important for the analysis in the review to distinguish findings between Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) with DTPs and elsewhere.
9.4	As a part of reviewing the key attributes of an ESRC PhD, it was suggested there was a need to more formally acknowledge non-academic PhD career pathways and to compile more data on them, as well as considering employability, the role of placements and the transferability of skills training. There was also a need to ensure mandatory skills training continued to be of high quality and that this be tailored appropriately toward student requirements. Council members welcomed efforts to raise the vital issue of awareness of student mental health, but clarified that this required a broad suite of measures and should not rest solely upon supervisors.
<b>10.</b>	<b>Papers for discussion by exception and any other business</b>
10.1	<b>Update on Risk Management</b>
	Professor Silverman requested further clarity on the role of Council with regard to risk oversight.
<b>11.</b>	<b>Close of Meeting</b>