



Minutes of the 14th Meeting of Council Held on 20 MAY 2021 virtually via Zoom

Present:	Professor Diane Coyle (Chair, Senior Independent Member)
	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
Apologies:	None
Office:	Professor Alison Park (Interim Executive Chair)
	Dr Claire Graves (Chief Operating Officer)
	Mr Jeremy Neathey (Director of Strategy)
	Professor Paul Nightingale (Director of Special Projects)
	Dr Catherine Bromley (Deputy Director Data Strategy and Infrastructure)
	Ms Frances Burstow (Deputy Director of Skills and Methods)
	Dr James Canton (Deputy Director of Public Policy Engagement)
	Ms Teresa Griffiths (Deputy Director of Planning, Operations and Governance)
	Ms Melanie Knetsch (Deputy Director of Innovation and Impact)
	Mr Damien Smith (Deputy Director of Research Economics)
	Dr Emily Swaine (Deputy Director of Strategy and Partnerships)
	Ms Joy Todd (Deputy Director of Research Portfolio)
	Ms Sara Slade (Head of Governance and Policy)
	Dr Tom Roberts (Secretary to Council, Minutes)
	Mr Doug German (Private Secretary to Executive Chair)
	Ms Gillian Bartoszewska (Secretariat)
Guests:	Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser (UKRI CEO)
	Ms Joanne Allison (Nominated UKRI observer and Deputy Director of Corporate Strategy, Governance & Performance)
	Mr Paul Gemmill (Reforming our Business Programme Director)
	Ms Anne Sofield (UKRI Simpler Better Funding Programme Director)

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

1.	Welcome and Apologies
1.1	The 14th meeting of ESRC Council took place online due to COVID-19 restrictions.
1.2	Professor Diane Coyle, ESRC Council Chair, welcomed members to the 14th meeting of Council. The Chair and Executive Chair thanked Professor Paul Nightingale for his energy, insight and commitment to ESRC over the duration of his secondment which is due to end in June 2021.
2.	Minutes of the Previous Meeting
2.1	The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.
3.	Matters Arising
3.1	Members were updated on the status of matters arising from the previous meeting.
4.	Interim Executive Chair's Business
4.1	Professor Park updated Council on progress with key investments. She noted that ADR UK had received long term funding approval, subject to confirmation by HMT. It was explained that the team had also recently hosted a high profile and successful event on the power of admin data in the age of COVID-19 and that ESRC were recruiting four 'ADR UK No.10 Data Science Fellows' who will spend a year collaborating with 10 Downing Street's data science team and the ONS.
4.2	Professor Park also highlighted significant progress with the SPF funded Productivity Institute and Council were informed that Dame Kate Barker had been appointed Chair of the Productivity Institute Governing Board. Elsewhere, but also via SPF, ESRC (with the Health Foundation) had recently funded a £15 million UK Centre for Evidence Implementation in Adult Social Care led by Professor Jon Glasby.
4.3	Council were also informed that ESRC had added a £4.6 million COVID-19 Social Mobility and Opportunities study to its sizeable COVID-19 research portfolio and held its first joint call with the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) in response to the pandemic. A key focus of the office has been to maximise the impact of research evidence from COVID-19 investments amongst leading policymakers and ESRC are holding a lunchtime seminar series with HMT, Government Social Research and Government Economic Service.
5.	UKRI Chief Executive
5.1	Professor Leyser acknowledged planning challenges around the constrained settlement and lack of budgetary certainty but noted government remained supportive of a knowledge based economy and that disruption caused by the pandemic posed an opportunity for research and innovation to build back better.

	She welcomed efforts to put aside disciplinary self-interest and invited colleagues to marshal their respective communities to help formulate a coherent argument about how to invest successfully in a joined-up research and innovation system in ways that would drive virtuous circles of long term public and private research investment.
5.2	Council thanked Professor Leyser and discussed the tremendous potential of the social sciences in responding to this challenge. Council noted the importance of social science to growth and the recovery and the opportunities for private sector interactions and collaboration. There was acknowledgement of the strength of relationships with the policy community and their ongoing demand for behavioural and economic science. It was agreed that there was also huge scope for the social sciences to add great value by shaping and contributing toward interdisciplinary research activities, and that concrete examples of this (such as the COVID-19 response) are helpful in communicating the contribution of different constituencies and encouraging further interdisciplinary endeavour.
6	ESRC's Future Vision
6.1	Professor Nightingale led a discussion on ESRC's review of its vision and ambitions to lay the foundation for its 2022/23 Delivery Plan.
6.2	Council welcomed the opportunity to discuss the vision and made several suggestions. There was an opportunity to communicate headline areas with corresponding slogans that gave prominence to existing areas of strength (for example on data science and big data). ESRC should not spread itself too thinly, and should play a constructive role in stewarding social science research funded by other councils (and learning from mapping work done for COVID-19 research activities).
6.3	It was agreed that more background detail would be forthcoming, and that Council would return to this item and hold a more detailed discussion about the balance of funding priorities within the vision.
7.	Spending review and strategic planning
7.1	Mr Neathey provided Council with an update on ESRC's current Spending Review position and explained the process for ensuring Council continue to play a vital role with the ongoing SR process ahead.
7.2	Ms Allison noted the challenging SR context, and thanked the team for all the planning activity and emphasised the alignment and collaborative working between ESRC and the UKRI strategy team.
7.3	Council noted the current SR position and budgetary challenges and the progress on the development of phase 1 strategic initiatives.

8.	Knowledge mobilisation and impact
8.1	Ms Knetsch outlined ESRC's vision for the UK to be a global leader in business and social science partnerships and updated on ESRC's progress with business engagement activities and the proposed 'Transforming Business with Social Science' pilot initiative.
8.2	Council endorsed the engagement vision and ambitions and welcomed the collaboration with Innovate UK and the re-positioning of ESRC as a key industry funding partner.
8.3	Dr Canton led a discussion on ESRC's ambitions for a public policy engagement and impact strategy and outlined a set of activities which act as a first step towards the vision, including a policy focused people exchange framework that was under development.
8.4	Council expressed great enthusiasm for the timeliness of this strategy and made a number of suggestions for its improvement including the role for interlocutor bodies, the importance of synthesis activity and the need to consider how to facilitate two-way career enhancing secondments.
9.	PhD review update
9.1	Ms Burstow updated Council on progress with the PhD review and outlined next steps.
9.2	Professors' Griffith and Falkingham, who had chaired senior stakeholder workshops, complimented the team and shared their reflections on the points coming from sessions including: the role that ESRC could play in terms of cohort building within disciplines, and the need to look at and build upon areas of existing good practice such as that found within smaller disciplines such as demography.
9.3	Council noted progress with the review, acknowledged the challenges ahead and thanked Ms Burstow for the update and asked to be kept updated on progress.
10.	Reforming our business
10.1	Mr Gemmill and Ms Sofield led a discussion on UKRI's Reforming our Business Portfolio with a focus on the Simpler and Better Funding Programme.
10.2	Council welcomed the update and objectives of the SBF programme; to reduce burdensome bureaucracy, its emphasis upon evidence and the efforts of the team to improve interoperability and automation of data entry.
11.	Close of Meeting