Minutes of the Council meeting held on 29 June 2017

Those attending:
Professor R Cogdell FRS
Professor M Dallman OBE
Professor Sir Gordon Duff (Chair)
Professor C Goble CBE
Dr M Goosey
Mr D Gregory
Dr D Keith
Professor J Petts CBE
Professor H Sang
Professor M Welham (BBSRC Chief Executive and Deputy Chair)

Also attending:
Mr S Axford (BEIS Representative)
Dr M Apps (item 8 only)
Dr J Blair (item 8 only)
Dr F De Vries (item 8 only)
Dr P Burrows
Dr A Collis
Mr P Gemmill
Ms J Juillerat (items 7-11)
Dr K Lewis
Miss K Okonska (Secretary)
Mrs S Southwood

ITEM 1: OPENING REMARKS (ORAL)

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies were received from Neil Brewis, Sarah Gurr, Belinda Clarke, Ian Boyd, Charlotte Watts, Steve Visscher and David Parfrey.

3. The Chair welcomed Ksymena Okonska, who returned from her maternity leave.

4. The Chair congratulated members of the scientific and research community who had been awarded Queen’s Birthday Honours in 2017. Amongst those honoured were:

   • Professor Christopher Trevor Elliott, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences, Queen’s University, Belfast. Professor Elliott was awarded Officer of the Order of the British Empire, OBE, for services to the Agri-Food Supply Chain.

   • Charles Godfray, Hope Professor of Zoology, University of Oxford. Professor Godfray was knighted for services to scientific research and for scientific advice to the government. He has strong links with both BBSRC and NERC.

   • Professor Claire Alice Mary Domoney, Head of Department, Metabolic Biology, at the BBSRC strategically funded John Innes Centre was awarded
an MBE for services to crop science and improvement of the pea crop in the UK.

- Professor Laura Green, Head of the School of Life Sciences, The University of Warwick received an OBE for services to the Health and Welfare of Farmed Livestock.

- Roy Stephen, Assistant Peer Review Officer, Science Group, BBSRC received an BEM for services to the Malayalee Association, UK Knanaya Catholic Association and to the community in Swindon, Wiltshire.

5. The Chair and Council congratulated Roy Stephen from BBSRC Office in particular and asked the Office to convey their congratulations.

6. The Chair reminded Council members to check and update their conflicts register details as necessary and emphasised that decision-making should be guided by equality and diversity framework and unconscious bias recommendations.

**ITEM 2: MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 23 MARCH (BBSRC 15/2017)**

7. The minutes were AGREED as a correct record of the meeting subject to the following amendments:
   - In paragraph 9 on page 3 add – “…BBSRC funds the Software Sustainability Institute and is leading these activities across the Research Councils…”.

**ITEM 3: MATTERS ARISING (ORAL)**

8. There were none.

**ITEM 4: CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORT (BBSRC 16/2017)**

9. The Chair said that BBSRC, together with other Research Councils, continued to be in the transition period until the creation of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) in April 2018. Under the Higher Education and Research Act, BBSRC as part of UKRI would have its own Council chaired by BBSRC’s Executive Chair. The Executive Chair role would be a combination of the current Chief Executive and Chair of Council roles. Council was informed that BBSRC’s Executive Chair had not been appointed and the expectation was that this role would be filled later in the year.

10. *This paragraph was recorded separately as it is relating to policy making in progress.*

11. It was noted that the current Council or a part thereof, would be running in parallel with the new one until its formal business and legacy matters were completed.

12. The Chief Executive reflected on her report, providing a high-level overview across a range of BBSRC activities since the last Council meeting in March 2017.

13. The Chief Executive highlighted the following:
• Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) – the Chief Executive was co-leading (on behalf of RCUK) alongside Ruth McKernan (Innovate UK, Chief Executive) on coordination of ISCF wave 2 priorities, including the development of processes for proposing new challenge areas for development.

• Winners of the 2017 BBSRC Innovator of the Year competition had been announced at an event in May (and would be publicised post-purdah). Category winners were: Dr Shelby Temple (Commercial Impact), Professor Juliet Osbourne (Social Impact), Professor Sarah Cleaveland (International Impact), and Dr James Field (Early Career Impact). Dr Temple was named overall BBSRC Innovator of the Year 2017, for his work in tackling age-related macular degeneration.

• UKRI work was ongoing. Melanie Welham continued to attend regular UKRI planning meetings to discuss progress towards establishing UKRI, including organisational design and day 1 essentials. It was noted that there was still uncertainty, however, BBSRC was trying to influence where it could.

• It was noted that BBSRC was maintaining the level of Responsive Mode success rates at above 20% as previously agreed by Council. The current success rate was 21%.

14. The Chair, on behalf of Council, thanked the Chief Executive for her report and, on a personal note, congratulated the Chief Executive on her cycling achievements for charity.

ITEM 5: UPDATES FROM BEIS/DEFRA/DIFID

15. Stephen Axford updated Council on the following:
• On the Industrial Strategy – the green paper consultation was closed in April 2017 and the feedback was being analysed. The plan for investment in science to reach 2.4% GDP was nearly double the current level and was very ambitious.
  
  This paragraph was recorded separately as it is relating to policy making in progress.
• Other top-level policies that BEIS was working on included a new ventures fund for spin-out companies at universities, new international talent and the adoption of innovation incentives for smaller businesses.
• Council discussed ways in which researchers and research organisations could access innovation expertise and advice. Council suggested that there was a potential opportunity for UKRI to create an innovation portal/framework where such expertise could be accessed (noting that HEFCE had developed a Knowledge Exchange (KE) portal as part of the KE Framework). A new commercialisation fund could also be helpful. It was noted that companies emerging from the science base often struggled to secure the necessary investment to grow, once early stage / seed funding ran out. This is vital as getting a product to market could take ten years. The importance of specialist and patient investors was highlighted.
• Ministers were considering UKRI Board appointments and the Chief Financial Officer appointment.

ITEM 6: FORWARD STRATEGY AND BUDGET (ORAL)
16. Paul Burrows introduced this item and reflected on the Council Strategic Workshop held on 28 June 2018, which formed part of BBSRC’s stakeholder engagement and consultation activities in support of the development of a strategy for UK biotechnology and biological sciences. His comments were as follows:

- There had been a lot of enthusiasm and engagement in the room. BBSRC collated 11 or 12 ambition statements, which would be refined.
- Skills and careers was one area that came through strongly, especially lifelong learning aspects and the importance of skills to enable multidisciplinary approaches.
- Big data, predictive and digital biology were areas that were highlighted along with tools and technologies in driving advances in bioscience.
- There was a theme relating to ensuring that the value and power of bioscience was recognised and valued by the government, UKRI and wider society.

17. Council commented that the workshop was organised well and was very productive. Council members made the following points:

- The transformative power of biology was understood by the community, but this issue was wider and related to the valuing of biology by society and the acceptance of new technologies, e.g. genome editing.
- BBSRC strategy from ten years ago based on three pillars: agriculture, industrial biotechnology and health was still relevant and BBSRC would be building on its success. These three pillars were at the core of what BBSRC does.

18. **ACTION:** An update on the progress would be provided in September 2017 (Paul Burrows).

**ITEM 7: ENABLING IMPACT – (ANNUAL DISCUSSION THEME) (BBSRC 17/2017)**

19. Karen Lewis introduced this item, which was on Council’s annual agenda cycle for the second quarter meeting in the calendar year.

20. This paper, and session at the meeting explored the achievements in delivering innovation and impact from bioscience over the last year, and summarised revisions to approaches taken by BBSRC to reflect the change context, primarily to accommodate budget constraints in light of decisions about resource allocation over the Spending Review period. It also sought Council’s input on forward thinking, particularly in relation to the Industrial Strategy, and in the context of delivering impact through Research and Innovation Campuses.

In discussion, Council raised the following points:

- Council was pleased to see the continuing success of the Industrial Biotechnology and Bioenergy (IBBE) networks, particularly in relation to engaging with small businesses.
- Council commented that within the Industrial Strategy, it was not clear how SMEs should be reached and the point was made that existing networks such as the UK BioIndustry Association (BIA) may be helpful in this context. Although noting that the
focus of the BIA membership was pharma and health. CropLife International was also highlighted as an industrial association operating in the agricultural sector, which had the potential to help BBSRC connect with business. The importance of BBSRC engagement with the Industrial Biotechnology Leadership Forum was also recognised.

- The opportunity to facilitate innovation through people moving between academia and industry was emphasised, particularly in terms of seconding people from business who are then embedded within academia. This would be in line with the talent section of the Industrial Strategy.
- It was noted that DEFRA’s 25 year Food and Farming Plan was unlikely to be published as originally planned, and this needed to be taken into account in the context of the Industrial Strategy.
- The Catalyst mechanism was identified as a good way to support translation. BBSRC was encouraged to seek further funding to support this type of activity, noting that some support has been secured through wave 1 of the ISCF.
- Recognised the opportunity presented by precision agriculture, with potential interest from large corporates, in integrating different technologies and enabling sustainability.
- It was noted that big data companies, e.g. Google, had not been included in the Industrial Strategy, but this type of company was now part of the research landscape.
- There was continued support for campuses with the goal to accelerate impact from bioscience to benefit the UK. The campus strategy has focused on major capital investment to develop innovation infrastructure. With the transition to UKRI BBSRC would continue to develop the vision and strategy in collaboration with STFC, who had campuses too.
- The opportunity of the campuses to support and encourage interdisciplinarity was highlighted. Particularly through people exchange and short-term secondments / joint appointments. The opportunities for campuses to engage with University science parks was highlighted, and thinking in relation to Pirbright and University of Surrey Science Park supported.
- Many new tools can support and enable collaboration, on the campuses e.g. teleconferencing, live streaming and accessing facilities remotely. It would be helpful to consider how these could be made widely available for scientists.
- Council considered the variable quality of technology transfer and considered how campuses could help address this by enabling the sharing of best practice.
- There was a range of different organisations on campuses and diversity should be maintained after the move to UKRI.
- It was noted there was a gap at the Chief Executive Officer level in bioscience companies and an MBA qualification in bioscience could help to close that gap.
- Campuses could also be used as a vehicle to continue to strengthen international collaboration post Brexit.
- Campus governance could be challenging in the future with the transition to UKRI, e.g. the level of influence BBSRC would have, and this should be recognised as a risk to the strategy going forwards.

**ACTION:** Council asked that the future strategy for Aberystwyth, including consideration of the campus perspective be discussed later in the year *(Karen Lewis).*

21. Council thanked Karen Lewis and her team and reiterated that this was a very positive story.

**ITEM 8: SCIENCE SESSION (ORAL)**
22. Karen Lewis introduced this item. Council had requested a regular science session to include an external speaker to talk about BBSRC supported research. At this meeting, Council received presentations from three BBSRC Fellows, Dr Matthew Apps (University of Oxford), Dr Jessica Blair (University of Birmingham) and Dr Franciska De Vries (University of Manchester) who talked about their research and the impact of the fellowships on their careers.

23. Council noted their presentations and was impressed with their outstanding research and career development. Council asked Fellows what else BBSRC could do to help them in becoming future leaders. In response, Fellows agreed that promoting permanent positions and funding would be beneficial for them to develop their careers. Council also asked how Fellows could support BBSRC and they responded that contributing to funding decisions as e.g. Pool/Panel members and working on developing strategy would be something they would be keen to do.

24. In addition, Fellows commented that multidisciplinary research could be encouraged by more bottom – up calls and that cross-communication between awarding committees would ensure multidisciplinary grants do not fall in between the remits of committees.

25. Fellows said that identifying appropriate collaboration partners was not usually difficult, but obtaining funding for these collaborations, in particular international ones, proved complex and therefore sources of funding for this purpose would enable establishing them.


ITEM 9: APPOINTMENTS BOARD MINUTES (BBSRC 18/2017, BBSRC 19/2017, BBSRC 20/2017)

27. Carole Goble, Chair of Appointments Board, introduced this item. Council was informed that the Appointments Board met twice a year, in October when appointments to panels and committees were agreed and in April to discuss strategy. The volume of appointments needed approval was increasing and in addition to business dealt at meetings, the Appointments Board oversaw appointments to 49 panels via correspondence. This meant there was a lot of work for the Office and the Board. A review of the entire application process was ongoing. The Office and the Board was commended for that.

28. The Appointments Board had considered the Pool and Core structure, in light of the fact that there were many members and around ¼ of them were not being used within their term of office. This was too complex to resolve within the time allowed so a sub-group had been set up to look at the purpose of the Pool of Experts and the principles of membership. This would inform the Board as to how the Pool should be structured to perform its purpose. The 2017 Appointments call to the Pool was very small and focussed on areas where expertise was lacking.

29. Deborah Keith, Deputy Chair of the Appointments Board, said that the system was good, but it needed streamlining to reduce the workload. BBSRC would share the best practice with UKRI.
30. The Chair of the Appointments Board said that there was ongoing work to gather and analyse evidence on expertise reporting (metrics demonstrating how pool members were selected and their expertise used).

31. The Chief Executive suggested that the Pool of Experts could also be used as a pool of reviewers as in some other Research Councils.

32. The Chair of Appointments Board said that currently 25% of appointments were women. It was noted that applications had been modified to simplify the process and encourage different groups to apply.

33. Council was informed that the Appointments Board together with the BBSRC were thinking strategically to define what skills and expertise would be needed in the future.

34. Council noted the Appointments Board minutes of 19 April 2016, 3 October 2016 and 5 April 2017.

**Update on Responsive Mode Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs (BBSRC 21/2017)**

35. Carole Goble said that Research Committees had one Chair and two Deputy Chairs at request of Chairs in 2015 to allow for more balanced workload and better succession planning. To allow for evidence based appointments, a role profile had been defined by Office and Appointments Board in April 2016. It was also noted that gender diversity was considered across the whole chairing cohort (not for each committee) and was well balanced at the present time.

36. Council commended the Appointments Board and the Office staff for all hard work on appointments.

**ITEM 10: FINANCE REPORT (INCLUDING BBSRC RISK REGISTER AND DASHBOARD PLUS CORPORATE DASHBOARD USED FOR QUARTERLY MEETINGS WITH BEIS) (BBSRC 22/2017)**

37. Paul Gemmill introduced this item, which provided an update to Council on BBSRC’s financial position for 2016-17, the status of the audits for both BBSRC and the Research Councils Pension Schemes (RCPS), together with a general update on other Finance & Campus Operations Group activities.

38. Council noted that financial outturn was good and that BBSRC continued to maintain a strong position in cash flow management (BBSRC had the best result in BEIS) and BBSRC remained top of the league for BACS payments.

39. It was noted that the current workload in BBSRC Office was challenging and there had been some difficulties in attracting new employees.

40. Paul Gemmill handed over to David Gregory, Chair of BBSRC Audit Committee, who updated the Council on new Audit Committee members (Ian Carter and Donal Keane) and said that he continued to have confidence in the Committee to deal with complex matters. Research Councils Audit Committee members undertook training
organised and hosted by BBSRC and thanked BBSRC staff, in particular Jess Guppy (Head of Governance), for organising it.

41. After each Audit Committee meeting, the Committee met with the National Audit Office for feedback, and from the last meeting the feedback was very positive. Accounts process went very well thanks to BBSRC Finance team members, in particular Angela Stead, who stepped up following Victoria McMyn’s departure (Associate Director, Finance) to UKRI. The NAO audit went very well too with no errors found. The NAO was very complimentary about BBSRC and said that BBSRC was a high performing organisation. Council was also informed that assurance mapping was excellent, but not all Research Councils had that in place and this could be a challenge for UKRI.

42. The Chair of Audit Committee also highlighted the following:

- the outcomes of The Pirbright Gate 5 review were exceptional
- On funding assurance, it was noted that more work would be done and that funding management in some universities was poor
- the level of assurance for UK Shared Business Centre (UKSBS) went from red to green
- with the move to UKRI, Institute governance would need to be addressed and work on this was ongoing
- General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and data management would be discussed by Audit Board at the next meeting
- This paragraph was recorded separately as it is relating to policy making in progress.

43. The Chair of Council thanked the Audit Committee, Finance Executive Director and Finance team for all their work

**ITEM 11: AOB (ORAL)**

44. There was none. Council noted that the next Council meeting would be held on 12 and 13 September at The Pirbright Institute.

Council Secretariat
July 2017