Minutes of the Council meeting held on 13 December 2017

Those attending:
Dr Neil Brewis
Dr B Clarke
Professor R Cogdell FRS
Professor M Dallman OBE
Professor C Goble CBE
Professor Sir Gordon Duff (Chair)
Dr M Goosey
Mr D Gregory
Professor S Gurr
Dr D Keith
Professor M Welham (BBSRC Chief Executive and Deputy Chair)

Also attending:
Mr S Axford (BEIS Representative, Items 1-7)
Mr P Boniface (Item 7)
Dr P Burrows
Dr A Collis (Item 1-7)
Mr P Gemmill
Ms J Juillerat (Items 4 – 13)
Dr K Lewis
Ms L Notton (Item 8)
Ms K Okonska (Secretary)
Mr D Parfrey
Dr P Reeves (Item 7)
Mrs S Southwood
Mr S Visscher CBE

ITEM 1: OPENING REMARKS (ORAL)

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. Apologies were received from Judith Petts, Helen Sang, Charlotte Watts and Ian Boyd.
3. Chair welcomed everyone to this penultimate meeting of Council. It was noted that the last Council meeting was scheduled on 13 and 14 March 2018. The Chair said that most Council members would continue their appointment as members of ‘legacy’ Council for six months and a new Council would be established as of 1 April 2018.

ITEM 2: MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 13 SEPTEMBER 2017 (BBSRC 35/2017)

4. The minutes were AGREED as a correct record of the meeting subject to one change on page 5: “there is positive progress on the pension scheme.”
ITEM 3: MATTERS ARISING (ORAL)

5. There were none.

ITEM 4: CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORT (BBSRC 36/2017)

6. The Chief Executive took Council through her report emphasising recent science highlights.

7. It was noted that The John Innes Centre and The Roslin Institute had been awarded Athena SWAN Gold awards in recognition of their efforts in supporting the careers of women in science.

8. The Chief Executive said that 66 applications were received for positions on new BBSRC Council. Applications had been sifted internally and recommendations were with the selection panel to decide who should be shortlisted for an interview. Final decisions on appointments would be made by the UK Research and Innovation Board as these would be UK Research and Innovation appointments. Sir Mark Walport had been engaged during the process.

ITEM 5: UPDATES FROM BEIS (ORAL)

9. Stephen Axford updated Council on the following:

- Publication of the Industrial Strategy –there were opportunities for biological sciences.
- It was noted that UK Research and Innovation was delivering the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) collectively. This was a different way of working for all involved.
- The importance of relationship with DEFRA in relation to the Industrial Strategy was raised.
- UKRI –BEIS and Research Councils’ relationship had been changing, and in the future it would be UKRI centre dealing with issues around programmes, not the sponsor team.
- ‘Legacy’ Council – Council members’ extensions for ‘legacy’ Council were in hand. BBSRC had not received confirmation and Stephen Axford would make sure Research Councils were made aware.

ITEM 6: RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT (BBSRC 37/2017)

10. Jan Juillerat introduced this item. At the previous meeting, members discussed the changing and challenging context of delivering BBSRC strategy and activities. The purpose of the paper was to provide information for Council about the current people resource, drawing on a range of data, and identify the proactive approach BBSRC
Executive had established to retain and motivate people and build organisational resilience.

11. Council was informed that there had been some pressures on head office complement. However, BBSRC had managed to maintain its workforce at a reasonable level (90%) in the context of pay constraints and the current labour market.

12. On talent management and succession planning, Council noted that this was a long-standing activity. BBSRC used a 9-box grid to aid understanding its capabilities and pressures.

13. BBSRC conducted a Work and Wellbeing Survey in June 2017 and the Civil Service People Survey (CSPS) in October 2017. BBSRC achieved very high response rates to both surveys with good results considering the changes BBSRC faces. Overall, the CSPS survey responses were above the scores for the top 20% of the Public Sector and above the sister Research Councils benchmark. There were areas that BBSRC needed to pay attention to; the BBSRC Employee Forum takes ownership of the Survey data and would review the data and propose an Action Plan for discussion by Executive Group. Council was informed that BBSRC had been sharing best practice with other Research Councils, however, there had been some challenges.

14. In addition, over the last two years the Executive Group and the senior leaders have come together to begin to look at the changing environment in order to develop BBSRC’s capability in leadership and change.

15. Council noted that BBSRC is developing a Transition Programme to coordinate and lead the activities that will ensure BBSRC is best able to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future and manage a smooth transition to UKRI. A total of 150 people from BBSRC Office had been engaged with the transition programme.

16. In the context of eight years of pay restraint, BBSRC ensured other reward schemes had been utilised.

17. With increasing need for upskilling the workforce (e.g. ISCF, GCRF), BBSRC used its annual performance process to identify skills needed and address them. BBSRC was also looking at personal readiness.

18. BBSRC had been thinking about its future, in particular its organisational design and capability needs before any new structure was defined and post 1 April 2018, when UKRI comes to existence. It was noted that the UKRI Chief Financial Officer had been appointed to build the corporate services team, define modus operandi (enabling rather than controlling) and interfaces with UKRI and other Research Councils. However, this would require some time (three-year transition programme) and after 1 April 2018 Research Councils would become business partners before ways of working were finalised. As of 1 April 2018 it has been suggested that 90% of staff would not see much change.

19. The Chair, on behalf of Council, congratulated all of Executive Group on exceptional leadership during a difficult period for BBSRC. Council was pleased with the survey results which gave Council confidence about the present and future of BBSRC. Council recommended that this was something new Council should continue monitoring as part of its business.
ITEM 7: UPDATE ON STRATEGICALLY FUNDED INSTITUTES, CENTRES AND CAMPUSES (BBSRC 38/2017)

This item was classed as Official Sensitive Commercial and was therefore recorded separately in Annex 1.

ITEM 8: STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR UK BIOTECHNOLOGY AND BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES (BBSRC 39/2017)

20. The Chair welcomed Laura Notton (BBSRC Strategy Senior Programme Manager) to the meeting. Paul Burrows introduced the item. A near final version of the strategic framework was presented and Paul Burrows explained that this was not a strategy for BBSRC, but for UK Biotechnology and Biological Sciences. This high-level document spoke to different audiences and built upon significant consultation.

21. BBSRC had been having discussions with UKRI about the naming of the document. The plan was to publish the document was at the end of January/ beginning of February 2018. Sir Mark Walport would see the draft before it was published. Council was informed that there was more work needed on the design of the document.

22. Council made the following comments on the content of the document:

- Bioscience for lifelong health title should be differentiated from MRC. BBSRC would reconsider its title and use a different picture for this section.
- Animal side of health did not come through too strongly and BBSRC would reconsider the wording.
- Council noted that the strategy would be positioned as a forward look for UK bioscience and was pleased to see that it reaffirmed the direction of travel from the strategy document from 2010.
- Council suggested there should be something in the document about people who were not on scientific career paths (such as those in technical posts).
- In the infrastructure section in relation to capabilities access, there should be some wording about BBSRC’s role in the international landscape.
- Council felt it was important to refer to the Industrial Strategy in the document.

Council:

(i) **NOTED** recent progress on the development of a strategic framework for UK Biotechnology and Biological Sciences, including key points arising from stakeholder engagement activities

(ii) **DISCUSSED** and **COMMENTED** on the draft framework document, in particular:

- **COMMENTED** that key priorities highlighted in each section of the strategic framework were appropriate and balanced.
• COMMENTED that the document strikes an appropriate balance between
discovery research, that seeks to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and
challenge-led research that addresses societal and economic grand
challenges

• COMMENTED on Theme 3 in the document that provided sufficient
continuity with BBSRC’s current long term strategic challenges whilst also
reflecting the new priorities and opportunities in these areas.

(iii) APPROVED the draft subject to any amendments identified under (ii) above, and
final editing and design works.

(iv) AGREED that BBSRC should publish the strategy in early 2018, subject to final
sign-off by Chair’s Action

23. Council congratulated Paul Burrows and his team for great work on the strategic
framework.

ITEM 9: CONFIRMATION OF AUDIT COMMITTEE FOR ‘LEGACY’ BBSRC COUNCIL
(BBSRC 40/2017)

24. David Parfrey introduced this item. On 1 April 2018, it was expected that UK
Research and Innovation would come into existence as a legal entity with what was
currently BBSRC subsumed into UK Research and Innovation. There would still be
some aspects of the current BBSRC that would require a version of the current
BBSRC Audit Committee to continue beyond 31 March 2018 to deal with any legal
matters, including BBSRC accounts.

25. Council therefore:

• APPROVED the variation of the Terms of Reference of BBSRC Audit Committee

• CONFIRMED the membership of BBSRC Audit Committee for the period 1 April
2018 – 31 October 2018 as per the paper.

ITEM 10: APPOINTMENTS BOARD MINUTES 6 OCTOBER 2017 (BBSRC 41/2017)

26. Carole Goble, Chair of the Appointments Board, introduced the paper. At the last
meeting, the Appointments Board approved a number of appointments and
discussed the management of the Pool of Experts with a view to improve its usage.
It was noted that there had been a specific call identifying vacancies on the Pool of
Experts to ensure expertise gaps were filled.

27. In addition, Carole Goble reported on the following items that had been discussed at
the last Appointments Board meeting:

• Quality of Chairs
• Succession planning on Research Committees
• Streamlining appointments approvals outside of the meetings

28. Carole Goble said that the Board would be discussing its future after the transition to
UK Research and Innovation in March 2018
29. Council NOTED the minutes and asked Carole Goble to pass on thanks to the Board.

ITEM 11: AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES 15 JUNE 2017 (BBSRC 42/2017)

30. David Gregory, Chair of the Audit Committee, introduced this item and provided an update from UK Research Innovation Assurance Board meetings, which he was a member of, and said that programme leaders of the transition programme would be asked by the Board about the delivery of UKRI on 1 April.

31. He also reported on the meeting he had with Fiona Driscoll (Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee of UKRI) to discuss handing over, good management practices, relationships with the National Audit Office (NAO), risks management and covering whistleblowing after 1 April 2018 with the establishment of UK Research and Innovation.

32. In his update, David Gregory highlighted emerging risks and the risk appetite for UK Research and Innovation and said that within the ICSF we would need to take risks to have exciting scientific and economic outcomes.

33. David Gregory said that this was his last Council meeting as he would attend dinner only in March 2018 and thanked fellow Audit Committee members for their hard work and support in his role as the Chair of the Committee.

34. The Chair, on behalf on Council and BBSRC, thanked David Gregory for his contributions to BBSRC over years and commended him on his superb work for BBSRC. The Chair also asked David Gregory to pass on Council's thanks to other members of the Audit Committee not present at the meeting.

35. On the Research Councils’ Pension Schemes status, Council noted that it would continue for at least one more year as of 1 April 2018 and that there were no immediate issues.

36. Council NOTED the minutes.

ITEM 12: FINANCE REPORT (INCLUDING BBSRC RISK REGISTER AND DASH BOARD PLUS CORPORATE DASHBOARD USED FOR QUARTERLY MEETINGS WITH BEIS) (BBSRC 44/2017)

37. David Parfrey introduced this paper and reported on the current financial status, in particular, he highlighted that sickness absence had doubled as a result of an increase in long-term absences relating to personal issues. Current situation and uncertainty was not helpful and therefore Executive Directors monitored the situation.

38. Council commented that it was good to see young and eager people joining BBSRC.
39. Council was also informed that the Audit Committee reviewed all risks at its last meeting in November 2017.

40. Council thanked David Parfrey personally and thanked the Finance and Campus Operations Group for their efforts.

41. Council:
   - **NOTED** the financial position for Q2 2017-18;
   - **NOTED** the finance dashboard
   - **NOTED** the general update on the other current Group activities.

**ITEM 13: ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND POTENTIAL FUTURE ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION (ORAL)**

42. The future of the National Yeast Collection at Quadram Institute was raised and it was noted that it was no longer a national capability. Quadram Institute was considering its future.

43. The Chair thanked the Executive Directors for their efforts in preparing the paperwork for the meeting and thanked the secretariat for their support.

44. Council noted that the next meeting is on 13 and 14 March 2018 in London.

Council Secretariat
January 2018