

Minutes of the Council meeting held on 13 March 2013

Those attending:

Professor Sir Tom Blundell FRS (BBSRC Chair)
Professor D Kell FSB (BBSRC Chief Executive and Deputy Chair)
Professor Sir David Baulcombe FRS
Professor J Coggins FRSE
Professor A Dell CBE FRS
Professor R Foster FRS
Mr J Godfrey OBE
Dr M Goosey
Mr D Gregory
Professor P Grindrod
Professor K Lindsey
Dr A Richards
Professor D Richardson
Dr J Stageman OBE
Dr W West
Professor T Wheeler

Also attending:

Mr Jeremy Clayton (BIS representative)
Mr S Visscher CBE
Dr P Burrows
Dr C Caulcott
Mr P Gemmill
Ms J Juillerat
Mr D Parfrey
Professor M Welham
Miss J Rutherford (Secretary)
Miss K Okonska

COURTESIES

1. Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. Council was informed that Professor Peter Grindrod's appointment to Council was to end on 31 March 2013 as so this was his last meeting. On behalf of Council Chair thanked Professor Grindrod for his contribution to Council.
3. Council congratulated Mr Steve Visscher who had been made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the Queen's New Year's Honours. Mr Visscher had been recognised for his services to the support of scientific research.
4. Council also congratulated Dr Andy Richards who had been awarded a lifetime achievement award by The BiIndustry Association.
5. Council was informed that Professor Ian Boyd, the newly appointed Chief Scientific Adviser at Defra, would attend BBSRC Council as an observer. Professor Boyd had sent his apologies for this meeting. Council was pleased that he would attend in future and further develop the links between BBSRC and Defra.

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6. Apologies were received from Professor Ian Boyd, Professor Sarah Gurr, Dr David Lawrence and Professor Chris Pollock.
7. Members were reminded to check their details currently held on the conflicts register, available at the meeting, and update as necessary. Members were also asked to raise any conflicts arising during the course of the meeting.

ITEM 1: MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2012 (BBSRC 01/2013)

8. The minutes were **AGREED** as a correct record of the meeting.

ITEM 2: MATTERS ARISING (ORAL)

Industrial Biotechnology and Bioenergy (paragraph 26 of the Council minutes from 11 December 2012)

9. At its last meeting Council asked for further consideration on which areas should be included within the IBBE Strategy. It particularly asked that consideration be given to the inclusion of biopharmaceuticals.
10. Council was informed that biopharmaceuticals would be included and that the community had been made aware and it was expected that they would apply for funding.

ITEM 3: CHAIR'S BUSINESS AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT (BBSRC 03/2013)

Chair's Business

11. Chair informed Council that his reappointment as Chair of BBSRC until 30 May 2015 had been formally announced by BIS.
12. Council received an update on the appointment of a new BBSRC Chief Executive when Professor Kell's term came to an end in September 2013. A shortlisting meeting was arranged for the week commencing 18 March and interviews were due to be held on 4 April 2013. After this recommendations would be made to the Minister for final approval. It was agreed by the interview panel that there were some impressive candidates.
13. Chair provided an oral report on a number of meetings and visits made since Council had last met. This included the Chairs of BIS Partners Meeting, a meeting with the new Director General for Knowledge and Exchange, Sir John O'Reilly and the BioIndustry Dinner where Mr David Willetts MP had joined the BBSRC hosted table. Chair had also visited Swansea University where, due to the new campus build, there were translation opportunities.

Chief Executive's Report

Triennial Review

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14. Council received an update on the Triennial Review (TR) of the Research Councils. The Review was part of the Cabinet Office Public Sector Reform process. Mr Paul Gemmill, BBSRC Director for Communications and Information Management, was on part time secondment in BIS leading on the TR for all of the Research Councils as well as the BIS Research Base. The Review would consider whether there were other models for Research Councils to successfully deliver their Charters, this could include reducing the number of Councils. It was also an opportunity for Councils to demonstrate their effectiveness and impact and highlight any barriers to working as efficiently as possible. Barriers could include, the non-ability for Councils to fund industry directly; the inflexibility to work across government and be agile in co-funding; the lack of combined communication strategies; and interactions with the academic community.
15. It was agreed that the Review was also an opportunity for BBSRC to raise its relationship with BIS and the subject of earned autonomy. BBSRC had received an extremely positive assurance from the Deloitte Audit on its Financial Management. This Audit provided evidence to BIS that some of its control, as far as BBSRC was concerned, could be lessened. Council considered that each Research Council should be treated with more or less central BIS control depending on its ability to demonstrate earned autonomy.
16. A call for evidence had been made and Research Councils had requested feedback from their communities and stakeholders to feed into the Review. The BBSRC Chair and Chief Executive had also been interviewed. All the information gained would be reviewed and initial findings would be gathered.
17. So far the feedback from the BIS TR team had been positive and the current view was that the structure of seven Research Councils did work although there was a need for an improvement in the way that Councils interacted and communicated with their communities.
18. Phase 1 of the review was to produce a report of the conclusions of the evidence gathering, Phase 2 would be to look at the governance of the Councils with final conclusions and recommendations published in September 2013.

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20. It was highlighted that there was a need to review the compliance by BBSRC grant holders in relation to the Data Sharing policy. This was a condition of grant and so dipstick testing would be carried out to identify any non-compliance and a way forward would then be agreed by the BBSRC Executive.

Basic Bioscience Underpinning Health

21. Council **ASKED** that it be made clear that the BBSRC and US National Institute on Ageing co-funding scheme for collaborative projects was part of a larger programme of funding and so receiving only one application was not a matter for concern.

Global Food Security

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22. The Report into the Evaluation of BBSRC Crop Science Investment would be published by the end of March/beginning of April. A first draft would be shared with a number of Council members that were in this field.

The Pirbright Institute

Mr Paul Gemmill declared a conflict of interest as a member of The Pirbright Institute Corporate Trustee Team. However he remained in the room for discussion of this item.

23. Council received an update on the development of the Pirbright Campus. BBSRC was meeting with all interested parties, including Defra and AHVLA. BBSRC had not yet agreed anything with these parties as Defra had particular aspirations for AHVLA Weybridge. It therefore wanted to see how these aspirations aligned with its own thinking before agreeing a way forward. It was acknowledged however that there was a real opportunity at Pirbright for partnerships and to build laboratory facilities for use by businesses and visiting scientists.
24. Council **NOTED** the report and oral update from the Chief Executive.

ITEM 4: BOARD APPOINTMENTS (BBSRC 04/2013)

25. Council:
- (i) **AGREED** the appointment of Professor Keith Lindsey as Chair of the Appointments Board from 1 April 2013 until 31 March 2014.
 - (ii) Offered its thanks to the outgoing Chair of Appointments Board, Professor John Coggins.
 - (iii) **AGREED** the appointment of Professor David Richardson as a Deputy Chair of the Appointments Board from 1 April 2013 until 31 March 2016.
 - (iv) **AGREED** that Professor Sarah Gurr should be appointed as a member of the Remuneration Board from 1 April 2013 until 31 March 2016.

ITEM 5: ANNUAL THEME: FORWARD STRATEGY AND BUDGET (BBSRC 05/2013)

26. Professor Kell introduced this item and presented to Council on the BBSRC strategy forward look. This covered:
- Reflection on previous year and examples of BBSRC's achievements during 2012/13.
 - Forward look covering budget headlines for 2013/14, major objectives for 2013/14 and uncertainties facing BBSRC
27. Professor Melanie Welham went on to update Council on the development of the BBSRC Strategy in Basic Bioscience Underpinning Health (BBUH). A portfolio review had been completed which had identified key priorities. The next steps were to develop longer term visions for these areas, which would go to the BBUH Strategy Advisory Panel and would include strategies in the following areas:

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- (i) Understanding lifelong health across the life course
 - (ii) How human and animal diseases can inform each other and the “one health” concept.
 - (iii) Nutrition and Health
 - (iv) Biotechnology for Health.
28. In the area of Nutrition and Health, the BBUH and Food Security Strategy Advisory Panels, through a joint working group, would work together to inform the development of BBSRC's strategy.
29. Professor Welham and Professor Kell had been invited to attend the MRC Strategy Board to discuss the development of the BBUH Strategy and to identify areas where BBSRC and MRC could work together.
30. With regard to budget headlines, Council **SUGGESTED** that when BBSRC published its studentship figures it used the total number of students receiving BBSRC funding i.e. to include part-funded students, if this were possible. Council believed that BBSRC should consider funding taught Master courses in particular subjects (such as e-Science/bioinformatics), however, it was informed that it was a BIS Policy that Research Councils should not provide this type of funding. A possibility was that European Union Structural Funds could be used for this purpose. BBSRC was providing input to the use of this Fund and would argue that skills training was a part of the infrastructure of a country.
31. Council received an update on the refreshment of the Strategic Plan. An open consultation had taken place and the views of BBSRC Strategy Advisory Panel members had been sought. The aim was to get the final refreshed Plan signed-off by Council at its meeting in June 2013. Public dialogue had shown that it was happy with the funding of basic bioscience that could lead to breakthroughs in health and quality of life. This would be pushed within the Plan.
32. Council would host the annual Strategic Meeting in June 2013. Chairs of the Strategy Panels, Research Committees and representatives from BBSRC Strategically Funded Institutes would be invited to attend and contribute to the day. It was proposed that the theme of the day would be “*The next big technological and science developments in Biology*”. This would involve horizon scanning looking up to 10 years ahead with the aim of drafting responses to the next Spending Review. An invitation would be sent to Council members to be involved in the planning of the day.
33. Regarding the uncertainties facing BBSRC, it had recently been confirmed that the headline figures for the 2015/16 Spending Review would be announced on 26 June 2013. BBSRC would need to make the case for investing in the biosciences. This would include an evidence base and case studies, strong relationships and collaborations leading to leverage and how this contributes to economic growth and industrial strategy.
34. With regard to BBSRC Strategically Funded Institutes Council **ASKED** for a slide set that demonstrated BBSRC's relationship with Institutes and the strategy for this relationship in the next five years. The relationship should be developed into a partnership similar to that built with the Strategic Partnership Universities.

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Consideration would be given as to whether the funding models for the Institutes and the Partnership Universities could be similar e.g. both use the Strategic LoLa model. It was acknowledged though that facilities at Institutes must be maintained and so the National Capability Grant was still critical. How these facilities and equipment could be utilised by other organisations would be considered by Council during its Institute discussion at its September meeting.

35. Council **NOTED** the presentation and **ASKED** that in future the slides showed the achievements of BBSRC and were not just process driven. Council said it found the discussion useful and was content that BBSRC was making impact on government thinking and was going in the right direction.

ITEM 6: ANNUAL APPRAISAL OF COUNCIL (BBSRC 06/2013)

36. Chair introduced this paper which provided a report of members' comments on the performance of Council over the past year. In discussion Council:
- **AGREED** that Council had reached a position of stability and that it now worked considerably better with the BBSRC Executive. **NOTED** that the increase in communication with the Executive outside of Council meetings had probably contributed to this e.g. the "buddy" scheme.
 - Highlighted the comments regarding the late arrival of papers for meetings and asked that this be improved.
 - **ASKED** that a follow up paper was provided responding to the major comments within the paper, especially those in sections 5 ii and iii.
 - **NOTED** the Report and **AGREED** that it was positive.

ITEM 7: BBSRC FINANCE REPORT (BBSRC 07/2013)

37. Mr Parfrey introduced this item which provided an update to Council on BBSRC's financial position at the end of the third quarter of the 2012-13 financial year, and other finance activities. Mr Parfrey informed Council that, unlike the last two financial years, he had received written confirmation from NAO that the 2012-13 Annual Accounts would not be qualified.
38. With regard to the Strategic Opportunities Fund commitment table Council was informed that this included projects that had not yet been approved by the Executive but that the availability of funds had been sought from Finance Group prior to a case being made for approval. Council agreed that this information was helpful in determining the level of future commitment from the Fund if everything was approved.
39. Council was provided with the Finance Dashboard. On this occasion the Dashboard provided benchmark figures compared with similar organisations, i.e. other Research Councils with Institutes or Centres. The number of staff in the BBSRC Finance Group as a percentage of FTEs was particularly highlighted as this was considerably lower than the other Councils. Although Council agreed that this showed great efficiency it was concerned on the pressure this placed on staff in this Group. It was

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given assurances that this was manageable at present but queried its resilience against unplanned absences or a further increase in the number of requests for information from BIS. BBSRC needed to ensure there was not additional pressure placed on staff and that they were not expected to work long hours.

40. Council:
- (i) **NOTED** the financial position at the end of the third quarter of the 2012-13 financial year;
 - (ii) **NOTED** the update on the BBSRC Annual Report and Accounts for 2012-13;
 - (iii) **NOTED** the update on the current finance activities;
 - (iv) **NOTED** the report at Annex A on commitment to date for the 2012-13 financial year on the Strategic Opportunities Fund; and
 - (v) **NOTED** the finance dashboard at Annex B.
 - (vi) **ASKED** that the staffing levels and resilience of the Finance Group be looked at.

ITEM 8: MINUTES OF THE AUDIT BOARD MEETING HELD ON 29 JANUARY 2013 (BBSRC 08/2013)

Mr Paul Gemmill declared a conflict of interest as a member of the Pirbright Corporate Trustee Team, however, he remained in the room for discussion of this item.

41. *This item relates to information deemed PROTECT: POLICY and is therefore recorded separately from the main body of the minutes.*

ITEM 9: UPDATE ON THE PILOT PROJECT ON DIVERSITY (BBSRC 09/2013)

42. Council was presented with the progress to date and the actions that would be taken forward by the Research Councils following the end of the initial project phase which had been led by BIS.
43. Mr Clayton said that he was grateful to BBSRC, and the other Councils, that had been involved in the Pilot. Other Councils had now joined the project, following the pilot stage, and Mr Clayton offered assistance from BIS in its implementation as and when required.
44. In discussion Council
- (i) **ASKED** that it received annually diversity statistics on all BBSRC external high-level boards e.g. Council, its Boards, the Strategy Panels and Research Committees.
 - (ii) **ASKED** that it received annually diversity statistics for the Swindon Office.

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(iii) **AGREED** that BBSRC needed to aim for an increased number of females applying to BBSRC Council and **NOTED** the work done already, and especially by Dr Charly Cureton, on encouraging applications to BBSRC Strategy Panels and Research Committees in underrepresented fields. It **ASKED** that this work be continued and extended to include Council and wider diversity.

(iv) **ASKED** that the office compile lists of those it considered would be suitable for Council appointments with a view to target them to apply at the appropriate time. It **NOTED** that they would be considered alongside other applicants and in open competition

45. Council **NOTED** the Update.

ITEM 10: BBSRC SCORECARD (BBSRC 10/2013)

46. This item was removed from the agenda as it went to the Council meeting in October 2012. The BBSRC Scorecard would now go to the Council meetings in June and December to reflect the six-monthly returns to BIS.

ITEM 11: ANY OTHER BUSINESS (ORAL)

47. There was none.

Council Secretariat
March 2013