Minutes of the 282nd meeting of Council
16 February 2018
MRC, London

Present: Dr Alan Gillespie (Chair)
Professor Jennifer Rubin (Chief Executive and Deputy Chair)
Professor Judith Squires (Capability Committee Chair)
Professor L Alan Winters (Research Committee Chair)
Professor Simon Collinson (Evaluation Champion)
Professor Dame Glynis Breakwell
Professor Jane Falkingham
Professor Melinda Mills
Professor Nigel Gilbert
Ms Susan Penwarden (Audit Committee Chair)
Mr Stephen Aldridge

Representing the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy:
Dr Stephen Axford

Apologies: Mr Martin Rosenbaum
Ms Karin Woodley

Office: Professor Tony McEnery
Dr Tom Roberts
Mr Andy Gibbs
Ms Ruth Gibson
Dr Bridget Taylor
Mr Gavin Mapstone
Ms Tahia Zaidi

Attending: Professor Anna Vignoles, University of Cambridge
Dr Paul Johnson, IFS

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

1. Welcome and apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed Council members to the 282nd meeting of Council.

Apologies were noted from Mr Martin Rosenbaum and Ms Karin Woodley.

1.2 The Chair welcomed and introduced Professor Jennifer Rubin as ESRC Chief Executive and Executive Chair Designate.
2. **Minutes of the 281st meeting held on 27 October 2017**  
   **CP 01/18**

2.1 The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

3. **Matters arising**

3.1 Members were updated on the status of matters arising from the previous meeting. The Chair noted that all matters were either complete or referred to in the Office Report (CP 05/18) with the exception of 11.7 where Council agreed that the office will be taking forward further thought in looking at the misalignment of incentive structures that preclude academics and civil servants from fully exploiting fellowship and reverse fellowship opportunities.

4. **Chair's Business**

4.1 The Chair informed Council that this was expected to be the last scheduled meeting of Council as constituted ahead of UKRI being established in April. To ensure an orderly transition of business, a harmonised approach to winding-up individual research council activities was being taken which required existing or ‘legacy’ councils to remain in being and quorate until the end of October 2018.

4.2 The Chair reminded members whose current terms matured prior to October 2018 that they would receive extension letters issued by the Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and that they would be required to sign and return these to BEIS and the ESRC Secretariat. The Chair thanked members for agreeing to extend their terms until October as part of legacy Council reminding them that honoraria payments would continue to be paid as normal.

4.3 The Chair confirmed minutes of this meeting would be circulated via email to members to provide an opportunity to make amendments before their approval by the Chair. **Action:** Secretariat to circulate minutes

4.4 The Chair thanked all members for their valuable and outstanding contributions to ESRC Council including: Professors Mills, Gilbert, and Falkingham, and Ms Penwarden and Mr Aldridge who had joined Council more recently and had rapidly got involved with ESRC activity.

The Chair thanked Mr Rosenbaum, *in absentia*, for his contributions to ESRC’s media activities; Ms Woodley *in absentia* for her work on Audit Committee, and for bringing a fresh perspective from the third sector. The chair thanked Professor Dame Glynis Breakwell for
The Chair also noted the many contributions of members to Council Meetings, ad hoc meetings and broader ambassadorial advocacy and representation for ESRC at events and within the community.

4.5 The Chair thanked Professor McEnery for his leadership as Interim Chief Executive during this transition period, and also expressed his thanks to Dr Fiona Armstrong, Ruth Gibson, and Jeremy Neathey. The Secretariat was also thanked for the support provided to Council.

4.7 Council thanked the Chair for his commitment and service to Council.

5. **Chief Executive’s Business**

5.1 Council noted the activities of Professor McEnery as interim Chief Executive since the last meeting of Council on 27 October 2017.

5.2 Professor McEnery noted how lessons on ADRN, a business critical investment, had been learnt and that since the last update to Council in January 2018 the office had been working with Sir Mark Walport and the Audit Committee to ensure that these insights informed the next phase of the investment. These insights were informing risk mitigation activities while ensuring the investment remained cutting edge. The next phase of the investment would be much shorter until 2021 and would be a significant evolution with clear outcomes from the outset. Professor McEnery thanked Council for their input into this initiative. Particular thanks were given to Mr Stephen Aldridge and Professor Falkingham for their input on ADRN.

5.3 Council were notified that considerable progress had been made to resolve the capital funding shortfall for 18/19 and that there were positive indications from BEIS to fund research infrastructure subject to final approvals.

5.4 It was noted that the Audit Committee review had highlighted a need for a different, service oriented contracting model for infrastructure investments.

5.5 Professor McEnery noted his attendance at the UK Research and Innovation Executive Committee meetings and highlighted the scale
and ambition of the work underway for a smooth transition to UK Research and Innovation by April 2018.

5.6 Professor Rubin introduced herself and explained how delighted she was to join the ESRC at this exciting time. She explained how she was aware of the challenges that the changes to UKRI will place on the research community and how to mitigate these. She emphasised the opportunities including increased resource, and noted how her recent involvement at the UKRI ExCo awayday with UKRI Board members had highlighted the crucial role for the social sciences to engage and shape questions and proposals as they emerge.

She reflected positively on her interactions with the UKRI Board and executive, noting the goodwill on both sides to work as a team to surface challenges. She also noted that there were several members of the Board who are keenly aware of the role for the social sciences as a key constituent of UKRI’s collective endeavour.

5.7 Professor Rubin thanked Professor McEnery for his services as Interim Chief Executive and Dr Gillespie for his service as Chair of Council for the past 9 years.

6. **Role of Existing Council and UKRI Transition**

6.1 Mr Gibbs introduced this item and informed Council members of their role in remaining quorate as a legacy council to ensure the winding up of the existing structure after the launch of UK Research and Innovation in April.

6.2 Council noted that this was anticipated to be the last physical meeting, the process for winding up existing ESRC business and the requirement to remain quorate until October 2018.

6.3 Council agreed to formally delegate responsibility for approval of the 2017/18 Annual Report and Accounts to the ESRC Audit Committee. It was agreed that Council members would be sighted on these documents and could raise any points via the Secretariat.

6.4 Mr Gibbs informed the Council this is the last meeting of the existing Council. Council will remain legally constituted until the Royal Charter is formally revoked but it will not undertake any operational activity as this will be carried out by UKRI and the new Council from 1 April 2018.

Members were notified they may release the dates they are currently holding in their diaries for future meetings.

7. **Financial Report**
Mr Mapstone provided an overview of the ESRC’s outturn position for the financial year 2017-18 with regard to commitments for future years, and informed Council that ESRC was on track to deliver to budget. He pointed out that the 2019/20 forecasted over commitment is expected to reduce with time and reiterated that ESRC can expect confirmation of additional capital funding from BEIS shortly.

He noted that that there had also been some re-profiling of ADRN funding with BEIS so that £2.6 million would not be lost, and would be reallocated for 2018/19.

Mr Mapstone noted that since the last meeting of Council on 27 October 2017, ESRC had successfully bid for an additional £2 million of funding to enable four centres to deliver synthetic reviews supporting delivery of the Industrial Strategy.

Members noted ESRC’s financial position, and that ESRC’s budget was on track and asked about future longer term forecasting arrangements. Professor McEnery noted that he was optimistic about the forecasting arrangements for capital for 2018/19 but that for 19/20 and beyond this would be a UKRI responsibility. This was currently under review, but it will be important for ESRC’s new Council to monitor these forecasts.

Mr Mapstone and Ms Penwarden provided an overview of the progress made on the implementation of open audit recommendations made by the Government Internal Audit Agency – (GIAA) and the proposals on the treatment of open audit recommendations as part of the transition to UKRI.

Council noted the positive progress made in closing off open recommendations. It was noted that ESRC was well positioned for the handover to UKRI and that any actions beyond March 2018 would need to be reviewed by UKRI and the new UKRI Audit body (ARAPC). Four items relating to the management information strategy would be paused to ensure they aligned with the future UKRI strategy and avoid the risk of nugatory effort. There was one item relating to information management training which had been unduly delayed but was expected to be resolved by 31 March 2018.

Council agreed the proposal on the treatment of open audit recommendations.

Professor Collinson raised a separate concern over changes to the TRAC margin for sustainability resulting in a 27% increase to the overheads or indirect costs on grants. These changes risked a...
significant reduction to the availability of funds for core research activity within capped schemes as universities allocate these funds to indirect costs. It was noted that HEFCE have changed the process and that resources would likely flow differently across different ROs.

Mr Mapstone noted that this issue would be debated across-council and financial consequences reviewed. There was a suggestion that a general communication on this matter would be welcome.

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<th>Office Report</th>
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<td>9.1</td>
<td>Professor McEnery highlighted key activities that have taken place since the last meeting on 27 October including:</td>
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<td>- International interest in administrative data</td>
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<td>- An additional £2 million allocated by BEIS to provide evidence for the Industrial Strategy;</td>
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<td>- A developing strategically beneficial engagement opportunity with Japan on AI and Society and the prospect of future trilateral activity with the United States;</td>
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<td>- ESRC panel activity in January 2018 on Urban Transformations in India designed to improve training and local research capability as part of a collaborative programme;</td>
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<td>- GCRF activity which continues to be a positive media story for ESRC;</td>
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<td>- The success and reach of ESRC’s Festival of Social Science;</td>
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<td>- An update on ESRC’s strategic priorities and overview of the latest from the GAPs.</td>
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| 9.2 | Council noted the updates. On administrative data, Professor Rubin noted that there had been keen international interest in linking administrative data, and that there may be opportunities for creating an international network that could learn from the ADRN experience to positively boost the UK profile. |
| | Professor Falkingham requested further detail on the breakdown of the events held in collaboration with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. |
| | Council acknowledged the successes to date of the Festival of Social Science, the Celebrating Impact Awards and Impact Acceleration Accounts and expressed a desire for this activity to continue to raise the profile of the social sciences. |
| | Dr Gillespie and Ms Penwarden commented on the importance of media training for researchers, and asked the office to ensure that training places were available to meet demand. |

**Action:** Secretariat to send detail of these events.
Professor Rubin confirmed her commitment to safeguarding these activities and suggested that they would be continued and enhanced with the transition to UKRI. It was also noted that there was activity underway to recommission IAAs.

9.3 Council noted the latest Grant Assessment Panel outcomes and how developing the store of knowledge remained a core component of ESRC activity. It was acknowledged that there would be a need to tension UKRI priorities around value for money and impact against the ongoing social science requirements for blue skies research. It was suggested that Professor Rubin and members of new ESRC Council may benefit from attending future review panels in order to become familiar with this key activity.

It was noted that demand for standard responsive grants is steady. Council noted and discussed the reasons behind a clustering of social science research activity in the South East. It was suggested that this may be attributed to factors such as research organisations in the South East having better access to policymaking and that larger organisations may have more capacity to bid for research funding. Council agreed that funding academic excellence must continue to be the key criterion and noted that innovation was locality based. Council noted the work being undertaken by the office on the place agenda to better understand the dynamics of geographical differentiation and to ensure that the best social scientists continue to lead on pressing social science issues wherever they are manifest.

10. Committee Reports

10.1 Council were notified that the Capability and Research Committees met on 20th and 24th November, respectively.

10.2 Professor Squires updated Council on Capability Committee activity and thanked members of the committee for their service and contribution to ESRC.

10.3 Council noted that the focus was on completing open activity and the development of reviews and roadmaps on research talent, data and infrastructure and methodological innovation to inform future decisionmaking. It was noted that ESRC-supported methodological innovations would have wider applications across UKRI.

10.3 Professor Winters updated Council on Research Committee activity and thanked members for their service and contribution to ESRC.

10.4 Council noted the progress made on the assessment of peer review, and its importance to ESRC. It was suggested the office and new
Council continue with activity that reviews best practice and considers discipline based reviews. 

**10.5** Council agreed with the proposal to commission thinkpieces in areas of possible future research activity such as the state of play in public services; education; crime and biosocial and intergenerational inequalities and the potential role for ESRC’s longitudinal data and infrastructure as a part of this.

**10.6** Council noted the three pronged approach to international strategy around consolidating partnerships in Europe, strengthening those in ODA countries and extending relationships with select countries (Canada, US, Japan).

**10.7** There was a suggestion for the office to think carefully about how it plans horizon scanning activity for the medium to longer term as a part of UKRI.

**10.8** Ms Susan Penwarden, Chair of the Audit Committee, updated Council on the committee’s activity.

**10.9** The Committee had considered issues arising from international partnership working, and had recommended the office examine alternative contracting models for infrastructure services. Council noted that there would be a new single audit committee for UKRI that would replace the individual Council audit committees. Ms Penwarden suggested that there needed to be a review of the approach to risk management to identify risks are significant and require managing. The new structure should not remove risk review as a management tool in ESRC.

**11. Update from BEIS**

**11.1** Dr Stephen Axford provided an update from BEIS on the future relationship between BEIS and UKRI and its constituent parts.

**11.2** He noted that the new Minister, Sam Gyimah MP had a broad portfolio including the Department of Education and Universities, and he was keen to engage with the research community and attend relevant events.

He noted that the government had significant interest in understanding loneliness, and that ESRC may wish to think how to engage here.

It was explained that with UKRI becoming operational from April 2018, BEIS would no longer act as sponsors to individual councils. BEIS would however, maintain a high level sponsorship team that would work closely with UKRI. He noted that in effect BEIS would
be devolving decisions to UKRI and that it was envisaged that UKRI’s proximity to the research base would ensure informed and coherent decision making. Sir Mark Walport as CEO would still be accountable to BEIS. The precise details and clarity of roles and appointments to these teams still needed to be firmed up.

11.3 Council thanked Dr Axford and wished him well for his new role as Director of Research Translation at Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge.

Council discussed the changes and the opportunities for UKRI to better engage with other government depts in connecting research and policy. Given the changes to governance it was also suggested that ESRC would need to focus on the unique distinctiveness of the social science contribution.

11.4 There was acknowledgment of the significant achievements undertaken by the ESRC press office in continuing to raise the profile of the social sciences to date. Council asked what communications within UKRI would mean for ESRC’s brand and for it maintaining its voice.

12. Implementation of Centres Policy

12.1 Professors McEnery and Winters provided an update on the delivery and implementation of the Centres Policy.

12.2 Council welcomed the news that the strategic goals of the change in Centres policy had been achieved and that universities involved had responded positively demonstrating that they are happy to collaborate with ESRC to support high quality research. Every university involved pledged above the targeted 25%. It was agreed that this validated the plan for a longer engagement with Centres.

To embed the learning across the sector and propagate success it was suggested that ESRC look at what has worked well and build further capacity within Centres so that they could leverage additional funding. It was also suggested that there may be opportunities to use in-house expertise from UKRI eg on communications to provide high quality media training thereby further enhancing the capacity of Centres. Media training has been key to the level of reach that the IFS has achieved.

12.3 Council were informed that three Centres had bid for institute status and following interviews on 15 February 2018, the Centre for the Microeconomic Analysis of Public Policy (CPP) at the IFS and the Centre for Macroeconomics at LSE had been successful.
**12.4** Council noted the successes. It was suggested that it would be important to remain clear about the leadership and engagement expectations of these flagship institutes. Council agreed brand recognition remains a key issue and should continue to be considered especially given the emphasis on the branding phase.

**Action:**
Office and Comms team to look at brand value of ESRC and its Centres as part of UKRI

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**13. Establishing ESRC Strategic Advisory Network**

| 13.1 | Professor McEnery updated Council on establishing the ESRC Strategic Advisory Network (SAN) as a successor entity to the advisory committees under UK Research and Innovation. |
| 13.2 | Council endorsed the approach and agreed that it would better fit the changed governance and advisory requirements of ESRC as a constituent of UKRI. |
| 13.3 | Council agreed that the SAN should remain grounded with the academic community as part of a broader body of expertise that ESRC could work with. Council noted the transfer of existing Committee membership into the SAN and the plans to hold a number of events within the first year and how this would help to mitigate the risk of loss of institutional memory. Where possible the SAN should strive to emulate the depth and intensity of the current Committees. |
| 13.4 | Council noted the need to reach outside of academia and engage with industry stakeholders and users of research in the work of the SAN. It was suggested there may be scope for involving the What Works Networks in their dissemination roles to help to identify research gaps. |
| 13.5 | Council suggested that the role of the SAN and relevant operational detail be clearly communicated internally and externally. |

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**14. Longitudinal Studies Review**

| 14.1 | The Chief Executive welcomed and introduced Professor Anna Vignoles who had chaired the Steering Group for the review. It was noted that the review panel chair Professor Pamela Davis-Kean and all other members were international to ensure independence in their review. |
| 14.2 | Professor Vignoles presented findings of the report noting that ESRC had a strong and unique portfolio of longitudinal data and that the
survey data remains indispensable for addressing key research and policy questions. She outlined that the household panels and cohort studies complement each other and that their combination provides a base for state-of-the-art social science research. She noted that ensuring innovation in enhancing the data, including linkage and harmonization, was critical so that the value of the data could be maximised.

| 14.3 | Council welcomed the report and noted the requirement for careful prioritisation within the context of budgetary uncertainty to support the appropriate modality of data resources. Council noted the urgency of funding decisions to be made this year. | **Action:** ESRC Directors |
| 14.4 | The value of the administrative data spine was discussed and recognised as a way to better understand the composition of datasets. It was noted that the ONS was looking at something similar bringing data together for the 2021 census. Council noted that the UK is viewed as an international leader has all the prerequisite components skills and assets and that there is an opportunity to take a strategic lead on this agenda. It will however, be important to ensure the UK continues to have the capacity to interpret data and not just collect and curate it, to reflect the increased availability of other data resources which may be available for research use. |
| 14.5 | Professor Mills flagged the importance of ensuring that usage and attribution from biomedical and other researchers of longitudinal data sets was reflected in the review (the 1958 birth cohort study had been used over 200 times by the Wellcome Trust, and Understanding Society had been used extensively within molecular genetics). It was agreed that the report would be revised to better reflect this broader audience and that efforts to capture this usage and attribution would be made. Professor Mills agreed to add a paragraph and heat map as an Annex and to share her embargoed “Nature” paper. | **Action:** Office Dr Taylor and Professor Mills |
| 14.6 | Council discussed the challenges associated with capturing and demonstrating impact and how open access can result in data not always being recorded and that this lack of evidence for usage can be problematic. It was suggested that more could be done to extol the value of these datasets and shore up connections with industry. There was agreement that social scientists’ stories on impact reporting also needed to be more assertive. It was suggested that the office might review mechanisms for reporting usage of data resources to improve identification and attribution of impact. | **Action:** Office Insights Team |
| 14.7 | Council discussed hypothesis testing versus research infrastructure approaches to longitudinal studies, and agreed that broad and robust |
datasets were better at addressing research questions that were not anticipated at the outset. By contrast only funding data collection for small and narrow perspectives was higher risk and not supported by the usage data for existing resources. Clarity over the details of sample collection processes would be paramount to understand the risks in data collection.

| 14.8 | Council passed on their thanks to Professor Vignoles and the steering group and Professor Pamela Davis-Kean and the other report authors for all their efforts. It was agreed that the office would write to thank the report authors. | Action: Office |
| 16. | **How the IFS engages with the different arms of government and how social sciences makes a difference** | CP 11/18 |
| 16.1 | The Chair introduced Dr Paul Johnson of the IFS and commended the work of the institute, its academic excellence, reach and engagement with the media and policymakers. |
| 16.2 | Dr Johnson explained that the IFS is an educational charity and company limited by guarantee with a board of trustees. ESRC Centre funding remains core as a source of independent funding for an independent organization. The IFS is entirely grant funded. | Redacted |
| 16.3 | Council discussed the high level of engagement between staff at IFS and the civil service, with senior and junior civil servants sharing research and attending networking events and seminars. IFS cross party engagement with parliamentarians via Select Committees at both Westminster and Holyrood was noted as a key activity of the institute with key political figures in attendance at all IFS events. |
| 16.4 | Council noted the unique media profile of the institute and how the team gives equal weighting to outputs in economic journals and blogs and media outlets. Media training is a crucial component of life at the institute with younger members being encouraged and supported. The institute has worked hard to forge strong relationships with media organisations such as the BBC. |
| 16.5 | Council discussed the elements of the IFS that it may be worth other Centres looking to learn from:  
- protecting research organisations from university pressures;  
- including one or more senior and internationally renowned academics – as the IFS experience shows they can be based formally at other universities;  
- incorporating a dual structure that ensures the division of labour and complementarity between research and engagement roles  
- establishing the right culture to support the objectives of the Institute |
- creating a neutral space that provides facts that both political extremes can agree on via intermediaries, expert pieces on websites;
- ensuring a gender balance and no gender pay gap
- developing a valuable alumni network by working closely with them throughout their career (Alumni have gone onto become BBC correspondents, editors of the Economist and Prospect.)
- recruiting talented undergraduate and masters graduates and encourage them to pursue PhD programmes at UCL on topics aligned with IFS’s areas of interest while working full time for the IFS.
- Ensuring researchers receive regular media training

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<td>15.1</td>
<td>No other business was raised.</td>
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Meeting Concluded