Minutes of the 276th meeting of Council
15 July 2016
MRC, London

Present:
Dr Alan Gillespie (Chair)
Professor Dame Glynis Breakwell
Mr Martin Coleman (Audit Committee Chair)
Professor Jane Elliott (Chief Executive and Deputy Chair)
Professor Tara Fenwick (Capability Committee Chair)
Professor David Martin
Dr James Richardson
Mr Mark Robson
Ms Karin Woodley
Mr Martin Rosenbaum
Professor Alan Winters (Research Committee Chair)
Professor Linda Woodhead
Professor Judith Squires
Professor Simon Collinson (Research Committee Ex-Officio Member)

Representing the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills:
Ms Rebecca Endean

Apologies:
None

Office:
Dr Fiona Armstrong (Deputy Director – Capability)
Mrs Frances Burstow (Strategic Lead – Skills and Methods)
Ms Vanessa Cuthill (Deputy Director – Evidence, Impact and Strategic
Mr Phil Sooben (Director for Policy and Research)
Dr Paul Meller (Strategic Lead – Big Data)
Ms Susie Watts (Deputy Head of Communications)
Miss Josie McGregor (Policy Officer, Minutes)

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

Dr Gillespie left the meeting at 14.30 during discussion of item 8. Professor Collinson Chaired the meeting for the remainder of this item and Professor Elliott Chaired the meeting for all subsequent items.

I. Welcome and Introduction

1. The Chair welcomed Council members to the 276th meeting of Council.

1.2 The Chair welcomed Dr Meller, who will be taking up the role of Head of Strategy and will have responsibility for working with Council. The other attendees from the ESRC Office were also welcomed and
### 2. Minutes of the 275th meeting held on 29 April 2016

| 2.1 | The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the 275th meeting of Council. |

### 3. Matters arising

| 3.1 | The matters arising are not yet concluded and will be brought back to a future meeting. |

### 4. Chair's Business

| 4.1 | The Chair gave thanks to Professor Fenwick and Professor Woodhead for their contributions to Council meetings during their membership; it was their last meeting as they have both declined to have their terms extended. A recruitment exercise is underway to replace leaving members. Council noted that Professor Martin’s and Mr Coleman’s membership terms have been extended for approximately six months. The exact length of these extended terms is to be confirmed. |
| 4.2 | Thanks were also given to Ms Cuthill who will be leaving ESRC in September to take up her new role as Director of Research and Enterprise at the University of Essex |
| 4.3 | The Chair informed members that responsibility for the research councils will fall under the newly formed Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), which will replace the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Greg Clark MP has been appointed as the Secretary of State for the new department. |
| 4.4 | Dr Gillespie congratulated the ESRC on executing a well-organised and impressive Impact Prize Awards ceremony on 22 June 2016 in London. There were five award winners, and Dr Gillespie informed Council that the prize winners demonstrated an outstanding and impressive mixture of extraordinary scholarship and deeply applied research. It was noted that this mixed approach is increasingly important. All of the candidates who were considered for awards and prizes demonstrated strong advocacy for impactful research. The Office will circulate the awards booklet to Members with the minutes of the meeting. | **Action:** Office |
| 4.5 | It was highlighted that the number of candidates applying for the Impact Prize Awards was relatively low and that there are a number of individuals who have applied in multiple years, and a number of applications are from the same institutions. Professor Elliott acknowledged that whilst the number of candidates who applied to the last round was higher than previous years there is still work to do to |
| 4.6 | Professor Martin’s and Ms Cuthill’s conflicts of interest with item 8 were noted and no other conflicts were raised. |
5. **Chief Executive's Business**

5.1 Council noted the Chief Executive’s key activities since the last Council meeting on 29 April 2016.

5.2 Professor Elliott informed Council that the ESRC has received a number of queries and concerns from the community following the EU Referendum leave result. These concerns have been acknowledged; however, the Research Councils are maintaining a positive approach and continue to encourage collaboration between UK and other EU academics and research organisations, and global engagement more widely. The Research Councils remain sensitive to the political situation and acknowledge the uncertainty and complexity of the landscape and the challenges which may be presented, particularly with regards to EU funding programmes which UK academics and research organisations.

5.3 Council received a brief update on the White Paper plans for the creation of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), housing all seven Research Councils, Innovate UK and Research England (part of HEFCE). It was noted that whilst it is anticipated that these plans will be taken forward, in light of departmental changes from BIS to BEIS, there is some uncertainty. If taken forward, the Council’s role will change to become more of an advisory board and it is likely there will be a gradual transition to UKRI by April 2018.

5.4 Members noted that the second reading of the Higher Education and Research Bill is scheduled to take place on 19 July 2016. It will then go to a Commons Committee for intensive work for six to eight weeks. The initial practical steps for setting up UKRI will only commence once the second reading has taken place. In the meantime, RCUK are continuing to progress the RCUK Change Programme and cost reduction activities. The RCUK Change Programme will align with the.

5.5 Professor Elliott gave Council a brief update on the status of the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). A series of Town Hall meetings have been held to discuss the core themes and practicalities of the Fund and an online consultation has been launched. There are currently six cross-Council calls, approximately twenty five calls for proposals across all Councils, and a strategy for the collective fund has been commissioned and is due to be presented to the Official Development Assistance (ODA) Board meeting on 6 September. Members noted that the GCRF Strategic Advisory Group has suggested that more ambitious and interdisciplinary themes than those.

6. **Office Report**

6.1 Professor Elliott introduced this item and highlighted a selection of updates presented in the report.

6.2 Council noted the information provided regarding the RCUK Change Programme and cost reduction activities, and the success of the
Prize Awards event, as discussed under item 5.

### 6.3 Professor Elliott highlighted that the ESRC has already begun to release calls which have been constructed to execute the strategic priorities set out in the Delivery Plan for 2016-2020, such as the Housing Evidence Centre Call and the NSPCC/ESRC Children’s Mental Health research.

### 6.4 Council noted that the Future Research Leaders Scheme 2015-16 funding call, which closed on 29 September 2015, received 236 proposals. Following a Sift Panel meeting in January 2016, Peer Review and a Commissioning Panel meeting in May 2016, 46 proposals were agreed to be funded. This is in line with previous years.

### 6.5 Professor Elliott gave Council a brief update on the status of Life Study. Members noted that the ESRC Office has been progressing the Lessons Learned Action Plan. The financial audit of Life Study has been completed and all but one of the Scientific Deliverables have been reported. The Life Study outputs were due to be deposited on UCL Discovery and the Life Study legacy website by 26 April however, as of 23 June these have not been made publicly available. The final payment [redacted] is being withheld until the outputs had been deposited.

### 6.6 The remaining Life Study deliverable is the delivery of a piece of additional work on the representativeness of the achieved sample compared with the issued sample, using birth registration and other data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Virtual Microdata Laboratory (VML). A proposal from Professor Dezateux for funding of £100,000 to undertake this work was originally due to be submitted by 8 July 2016 however, due to delays with the application at UCL, it is now expected to be received in October 2016.

### 6.7 Council noted the update provided on the ESRC’s Biosocial portfolio and activity. It was noted that the ESRC’s current priority in this area is to build capability in the community for using rich interdisciplinary biosocial resources, such as the longitudinal studies.

### 7. Financial Report

#### 7.1 Council noted the financial update provided.

### 8. Business Critical Investments: Administrative Data Research Network

#### 8.1 Professor Martin and Ms Cuthill left the room for the discussion of this item.

#### 8.2 Dr Meller introduced this item with a presentation which gave Council an overview of the background to the Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN) and the issues it has experienced in accessing data from UK Government Departments.
| 8.3 | Dr Meller explained that the ADRN Governing Board identified data access issues as a risk in November 2015 and a mitigation plan was put in place. A midterm review is underway and a Gateway 0 Review was undertaken from 4 to 6 July 2016 which focused on data access and relationships with Government Departments. The review had a delivery confidence assessment of an amber/red rating; although the review team found evidence that creation of the ADRN infrastructure had been successfully achieved, they found evidence of significant cultural and other barriers to achieving ADRN’s objectives relating to securing UK-wide data. The review team concluded that the ADRN is a complex, ambitious and valuable investment and successful delivery of the project is feasible and highly desirable, but requires true partnership between the academic community and government to be successful. The review report recommends that a more focused action plan be put in place, that work is undertaken to inform future infrastructure investments and that a financial plan for the long term sustainability of the Council noted actions that were underway in response to the Gateway 0 Review. A more focused action plan is currently being developed through meetings with BEIS, ESRC and the ADRN Directors Group which includes specific success criteria and milestones, and builds on the current Mitigation Plan. Also underway are activities to strengthen the leadership within the ADRN and build advocacy for the ADRN across government. Short term mitigations which are currently underway include the creation of a task team to action and monitor the action plan and the submission of the draft report for the mid-term review which is due in September. Medium term mitigations which are planned include a lessons learned in relation to establishing the business case which will be undertaken to inform business cases for future infrastructure investments and a financial plan which will be developed. Council was asked to provide its views and support on the leadership issues within the ADRN, the championing of ADRN in government and what level of Council involvement is appropriate and necessary in the proposed task team. Overall, the majority of members of Council agreed with the Gateway 0 Review report that successful delivery of the investment is still feasible and desirable, particularly given that the funding for the investment has already been spent on the creation of an asset. Council agreed that whilst the responsibility for mitigating the data access issues does not lie directly with the ESRC, the ESRC and BIS/BEIS have a responsibility to support and help the ADRN Governing Board where concerns were raised by the Audit Committee Chair that despite discussion at the Audit committee previously, a plan for reducing recurrent spend on the ADRN had not been drafted in time for this meeting. Many members of Council, agreed with the Audit Committee Chair, expressing their concerns and noting the general absence of information available for discussion which evidenced precisely what the
that more detailed information was required, as a priority, to address the issues raised.

8.8 Council agreed that the Office should provide a report for the next Council meeting on 21 October 2016 which gives a breakdown of what has been spent on the investment to date, what it has been spent on, what successes have been achieved so far, what potential successes are in the pipeline, where there may be scope for cutting costs and what funding has already been committed.  
**Action:** Office

8.9 Council agreed that Professor Elliott and Ms Endean should work together in discussions with the Vice Chancellor of the University of Essex and with Government Departments to galvanise support and unlock quicker resolution of access to data and the retention of some key datasets. Sponsorship of the ADRN is required from high levels within the relevant government departments however appropriate steps and risk mitigation should take place before ministers are approached so it can be demonstrated that all necessary actions have been taken to successfully achieve the desired outcomes.  
**Action:** Professor Elliott and Ms Endean

8.10 Council agreed that it was imperative for an individual within the ADRN to take full leadership and responsibility for the investment and the issue mitigation. The ESRC should be empowered to assist the ADRN in establishing this leadership role.  
**Action:** Office

8.11 Ms Woodley asked that her frustrations at the process be noted. Ms Woodley felt that it is not acceptable for discussions to continue over multiple meetings with insufficient information provided whilst public funds are being spent on an investment which is experiencing such significant issues. The ESRC Office should have the authority, in consultation with the Chair of Council, to take steps to enable savings to be made without having to wait for the next Council meeting.

9. **Committee Reports**  
**CP 31/16**

9.1 Council noted the summaries of the joint Capability Committee and Research Committee workshop which took place on 30 June 2016, provided by Professor Squires and Professor Winters.

9.2 Professor Squires informed Council that the Committees considered various scenarios of how UKRI might look and how social sciences could be positioned in the future landscape. It was noted that the workshop enabled positive discussions which produced practical

9.3 Council noted that Professor Squires will be taking over from Professor Fenwick as Chair of the Capability Committee from 1 August

9.4 Professor Squires informed Council that the Capability Committee has been working to create clear, robust criteria for the accreditation of landmark investments and the process for reviewing and accrediting the
The Capability Committee has also been contributing to the review work around provision for Early Career Researchers to inform the content of items 11 and 12.

9.5 The minutes of the last Audit Committee meeting on 2 June 2016 were provided. Members were asked to note the information at section 6 of the minutes regarding the ESRC Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 and section 12 which provided an update on the Funding Assurance Programme. Mr Coleman highlighted that the Audit Committee had discussed the issues relating to the transition period to the UKRI. The multiplicity of different management bodies may result in difficulty establishing where responsibility lies. A plan on the wider transitional programme to UKRI has been requested for the next Audit Committee meeting in October 2016.

9.6 It was noted that the provision of records of Audit Committee deliberations within the Council papers was useful and provided context for the oral updates which were provided.

10. ESRC Portfolio Allocations CP 32/16

10.1 Professor Elliott introduced this item and presentation which gave Council an overview of the ESRC’s Strategic Plan commitments, budget allocation from BIS and proposed portfolio allocations from 2016/17 to 2020/21. Council was asked to note the information regarding the ESRC’s current portfolio of major investments and the information on committed and uncommitted funds for the rest of the spending review period. Council was also asked to note that these proposals were based on the assumption that Council would support the recommendations in the subsequent agenda items on Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs), early career researcher funding and What Works.

10.2 Council noted that the presentation showed that the ESRC’s budget over the next two years is fully committed and is therefore constrained. It was noted that there will be flexibility in later years to allow for the ESRC to respond to changes in the landscape as necessary and appropriate, however Council was reminded that the Spending Review allocations from 2018/19 onwards are provisional.

10.3 Members questioned the rationale for the funding allocation for strategic research, Doctoral Training Partnerships, and responsive mode for 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 that was outlined in the presentation and questioned whether there was any scope for revisiting the balance between these areas. Members commented that the ESRC must carefully consider the optimum balance between strategic and responsive mode funding, as well as the overall influence of the funding, to ensure the most impactful portfolio. Council requested that evidence is provided to justify and demonstrate the value of the proposed levels of investment outlined in the presentation. Council noted the work underway to identify ESRC ‘landmark’ investments and that this would be presented at a future meeting. Further information
allocations within the context of the wider landscape is required in order for Council to give its approval.

10.4 Council agreed to the proposed portfolio allocations for 2017/18 and 2018/19, and that the direction of travel is broadly acceptable. It was agreed that the Office would provide further justification and evidence for the proposed allocations for the years following this.

Action: Office

10.5 It was noted that some members felt that on a number of occasions they had not been provided with sufficient information at the meeting about the decisions they were being asked to make and the context within which they were being asked to make them. These concerns were acknowledged by the ESRC Office and it was agreed that whilst there is much uncertainty in the landscape after 2018/19, further analysis

11. Postgraduate Training – Commissioning of Doctoral Training Partnerships and Centres for Doctoral Training CP 33/16

11.1 Professor Fenwick provided Council with an update on the commissioning of the Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) and Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs), and Ms Burstow gave Council an overview of the commissioning process and modelling used for this call. Council noted that all of its academic members were associated with an institution being recommended for funding but that this would only constitute a conflict of interest if specific recommendations were

11.2 Council was asked to note the process for and outcomes of the DTP and CDT commissioning, to note the analysis of the implications of a 15 per cent reduction in the postgraduate training budget, and to note the three options for how this should be managed. Council was asked to endorse the Committees’ view that option 3, as outlined in the paper provided, would be the best way to manage the reduction.

11.3 Ms Burstow informed Council of the quality criteria which the proposals had been measured against and Council noted the Doctoral Training Partnerships which met these criteria and were being recommended for support.

11.4 Council agreed to support the proposed Doctoral Training Partnerships and endorsed the Capability Committee’s recommendation that the ESRC should progress with option 3.

11.5 The Chair highlighted that the DTP and CDT commissioning had been a strong, robust and rigorous process and thanks were given to the Capability Committee for their work on this.

12. Early-Career Researcher Support CP 34/16

12.1 Ms Burstow introduced this item and the accompanying paper which presented a set of proposals to enhance and improve the ESRC's
for early career research. Council noted that a review of the current provision for early career researchers had been undertaken. Ms Burstow asked members to note the review activities undertaken and evidence that had been collected as part of the review, and the constraints which were taken into account when developing the proposal for the ESRC’s support for early career researchers.

12.2 Council noted that the review had identified three stages of early career researcher which required support, these are doctoral, immediately postdoctoral, and transition to independent researcher. The review identified that each of these stages required different levels and forms of support. Council was asked to discuss the needs identified and outlined in the paper and the recommendations which had been made for improving provision for early career research and the support required of each of the stages.

12.3 Ms Burstow highlighted that recommendations 2 and 4 had budgetary implications; recommendation 2 for the support of immediately postdoctoral researchers who were within a year of having completed their PhD, and recommendation 4 proposed the introduction of a new investigator strand of the standard grants scheme. Council noted that the new investigator scheme is intended to replace the ESRC’s current Future Research Leaders Scheme.

12.4 It was noted that the Capability Committee and Research Committee strongly endorsed all of the recommendations outlined in the paper. Council agreed with this endorsement and the framework that had been proposed.

13. What Works Investment Framework

13.1 Mr Sooben gave Council an overview of the review of the ESRC’s What Works investment. A paper was provided and slides were presented which demonstrated the review process and the proposed What Works Investment Framework and funding proposal.

13.2 Council noted that changes in the political landscape have, if anything increased the need to make the case for evidence based research therefore making the review even more timely. The recommended framework had been reviewed, developed and endorsed by a subgroup of Council. Council noted that the proposed framework had three main areas of focus: effectiveness, better use of evidence and sustained commitment. The new framework also outlined nine guiding principles and a set of more specific recommendations.

13.3 Council agreed to the proposed What Works Investment Framework and approved the planning assumption of a minimum of £2.5m per annum for the What Works package. It also agreed that the Research Committee would have the governance and oversight of what works within that envelope but that Council would need to agree any proposal to increase the level of funding.

Action: Research Committee
### 14. Constitutional Change

**14.1** Professor Squires introduced this item. Council was informed that, following the EU Referendum and investment in the UK in a Changing Europe programme, it was widely agreed that additional work was required on constitutional change and other activities. Professor Squires provided Council with a presentation which gave an overview of activities proposed by an ad hoc advisory group, as outlined in the

**14.2** Council was asked to discuss the proposed activities and agree that further development and scoping activity should be undertaken over the summer and early autumn of 2016, with a proposal to be presented to Council in October 2016.

**14.3** Members agreed that the further work was required on the programme of activities and that immediate activities should be prioritised. Members commented that the focus on constitutional change was too narrow therefore the scope should be extended to include, for example, governance. It was highlighted that the programme should utilise quick wins and that evaluation and review should be built in to all activities.

**14.4** Council agreed that scoping for a programme of immediate, mid-term and long term activities should be undertaken and a proposal should be presented at the meeting in October. Members highlighted that this exceptional political and social landscape presents a unique opportunity for social science and that the programme of activities should be ambitious and innovative. Members also highlighted that it is imperative for the Research Councils to work closely with research organisations and government departments on any activities.

### 15. ESRC Communications and Public Engagement Strategy 2016-

**15.1** This item was not discussed in full due to time constraints. Ms Cuthill thanked Ms Woodley and Mr Rosenbaum for their input to the strategy to date. Members were asked to consider the Strategy and send any feedback by correspondence. Ms Woodley highlighted that the Strategy only covers business as usual activities and events, and that there is no provision within the strategy for crisis events, such as the EU Referendum coverage and the unexpected discontinuation of

**15.2** Council agreed that the Office should take into account any feedback received by members and apply the strategy to crisis scenarios. This item will be brought forward to the next meeting and will include these scenarios.

### 16. RCUK Change Programme

**16.1** The item was covered in part in other items however not in full due to time constraints and will therefore be brought forward to the next
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<th>Corporate Risk Register 2016-17</th>
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<td>17.1</td>
<td>The item was not covered due to time constraints.</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Any Other Business</td>
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<td>18.1</td>
<td>No other business was raised.</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Date of Next Meeting – 21 October 2016 at Polaris House,</td>
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<td>19.1</td>
<td>The Chair thanked members for attending. Council meets for its 277th meeting on Friday 21 October 2016 at Polaris House, Swindon.</td>
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