

Economic and Social Research Council Council Protocol

This document sets out the respective roles and contributions from Council, the advisory committees and the Office. It serves as a protocol to support and complement Council's existing governance arrangements which are set out in the Royal Charter and the Management Statement. This protocol provides an on-going framework to guide the conduct and business of Council.

Council is most effective when:

- its forward business is planned and agreed with the Office
- there is clear and joint ownership (between Council and the Office) of relevant decisions and actions, or groups of decisions and actions
- its strategic direction and the associated messages are clear, to enable strong positioning and advocacy
- there is a clear understanding that the advisory committees are a key source of strategic advice
- its plans are clearly described and appropriately supported (eg with a communications plan)
- there is a mutual understanding (between Council and the Office) of what business is strategic, and what is operational
- the contextual relationship between Council's business and government policy and initiatives is clear.

Council's role is to:

- focus its attention on strategic thinking about what the ESRC does in order to achieve its mission as outlined in the Royal Charter
- decide high-level objectives and strategic direction for the organisation, giving due regard to the support of novel and contentious research where appropriate
- decide Delivery Plan priorities, including top-level budget apportionments
- decide on the creation of new funding schemes or termination of existing schemes
- decide funding on individual items above £10 million
- delegate the development and management of operational business and processes to the Office (through the Chief Executive), setting principles to guide implementation of plans, and supporting the Office
- monitor the performance of the Office, noting that Council is to be both consultative and to challenge where necessary
- monitor progress against strategic objectives, including financial progress (noting the role of the Chief Executive as Accounting Officer)
- achieve the appropriate balance between expert and generalist view, noting that members do not represent their organisation but bring a range of expertise from the social science community and its user-base.

The role of the advisory committees is to:

- advise on the development and delivery of strategic direction and the activity that supports this in the areas for which they have responsibility
- advise on the development of new priority areas, the recommended actions or interventions to be taken to address priorities, and when to cease or reduce investment in existing areas
- advise the Office and Council through recommendations on current policy and its development in all areas of activity
- advise Council on funding decisions above £10 million in the areas of business for which they have responsibility
- advise Council and the Office on key appointments - including, but not limited to the appointment and use of Co-ordinators, Directors of strategic initiatives and investments, strategic short term appointments and on membership of short term, ad hoc groups (including commissioning panels)
- guide the delivery of core business – including, but not limited to taking on roles such as chairing groups (for example Grants Delivery Group, commissioning panels or groups that oversee activity in priority areas), and overseeing and/or participating in activity such as Doctoral Training Partnership visits as appropriate.

The Office undertakes to:

- lead on the day-to-day operation of the organisation
- provide the on-going policy development input, drawing on, and engaging with, its stakeholder communities, including in particular strategic advice from the committees
- raise with Council when a clear decision is required, indicating potential actions, risks and consequences
- provide sufficient, complete, relevant and timely information to enable effective decision-making
- record and implement Council decisions
- report regularly on the progress of plans against objectives
- support Council's effectiveness both collectively and individually, including appropriate meeting support, induction, and briefings
- keep Council informed of developments between meetings in a timely and informative way.

Individual Council members agree to:

- attend meetings and actively engage with both the items of business under discussion, and the wider concerns of the organisation
- ensure a Board culture of accountability; being candid with peers and the Office, asking appropriate questions
- advocate on behalf of the social science community and of the ESRC itself.