

MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL



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Council: October 2017
Author: Sam Bartholomew

Trade Union Side access: In part

Minutes of the Council business meeting held at One Kemble Street on 5 July 2017

Present:

Council	Head Office staff
Mr Donald Brydon (Chairman)	Ms Sam Bartholomew
Sir John Savill (CEO)	Dr Rob Buckle
Dr John Brown	Mr Hugh Dunlop
Professor Doreen Cantrell	Mr Bruce Minty
Professor Chris Day	Dr Declan Mulkeen
Professor John Iredale	Ms Sharmila Nebhrajani
Mr Richard Murley	Dr Tony Peatfield
Baroness Onora O'Neill	Dr Frances Rawle
Dr Mene Pangalos	Dr Heike Weber (item 7)
Professor Irene Tracey	Ms Gina Nason (item 10)
Dr Pauline Williams	
Guest	Observer
Professor Sir Mark Walport (item 7)	Dr Helen Bodmer (BEIS)

Apologies:

Professor Dame Janet Finch

1. Announcements and apologies

Mr Brydon welcomed members to the meeting and noted that Sir Mark Walport would be attending the meeting later to discuss his vision for UKRI and the role of MRC Council within it. Council members paused to reflect on the loss of Council member Professor Paddy Johnston and HR Director Sally Louise Smith, both of whom had sadly died in June.

Mr Brydon noted that apologies had been received from Dame Janet Finch.

2. Register of declared interests

The Chairman requested that members inform the secretariat of any updates to their declarations of interest.

3. Minutes from the May Council meeting

The minutes of the Council meeting which had been held on 9 May were approved as an accurate record.

4. Matters arising

4A. Report from the Council Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (CARAC)

Dr Brown, Deputy Chair of CARAC, introduced this item in Dame Janet's absence. He updated members on discussions at the CARAC meeting which had been held on 22 June. The committee had reviewed the results of the gateway audit on the National Innovation Centre for Ageing (NICA) in Newcastle.

Dr Brown noted that cyber security would be discussed by Council later in the meeting.

4B. Report from the Ethics, Regulation and Public Involvement Committee (ERPIC)

Baroness O'Neill updated Council on discussions at the ERPIC meeting which had been held on 30 June. She reported that use of personal information had been discussed at some length. This was particularly topical given the introduction of the UK Data Protection Bill in the Queen's speech, the aim of which was to implement the EU General Data Protection Regulation and a new Directive which applied to law enforcement data processing.

ERPIC had also discussed the MRC Industry Charter which would be considered later in the meeting by Council.

ERPIC had supported plans to review the principles and specific considerations for the MRC Ethics Series publication *Research Involving Human Participants in Developing Societies* which had first been published in 2004 and had not been revised since.

It had also been noted that Management Board had approved the renewal of funding for the Nuffield Council on Bioethics (NCoB) for the next five years as recommended by ERPIC. A new Governing Board was being established.

Council discussed succession planning for ethics governance under UKRI and agreed that it would be beneficial for the MRC to retain a committee such as ERPIC to advise on ethical and regulatory issues relating to medical research.

4C. Minutes from the Strategy Board meeting held on 9 May

Sir John introduced this item and noted that a record eight Council members had attended the Strategy Board meeting on 9 May; the meeting had been held on the same day as the Council meeting to make it easier for Council members to attend.

Dr Mulkeen had provided an update on the government's industrial strategy. So far the MRC had been allocated £11m for Biomedical Catalyst – Confidence in Concept from wave one of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF). Additionally, through the National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) the MRC had received sufficient funding for 118 PhD studentships; though support for fellowships to commence in 2017 was still to be confirmed. Sir John and Professor Philip Nelson (CEO, EPSRC) had been tasked by Sir Mark Walport to develop UKRI policy for future NPIF talent funding. Council noted that

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their proposals would be discussed by the UKRI Shadow Executive Committee the following day.

Professor Peter Piot, Chair of the Global Health Group (GHG), had updated Strategy Board on the activities of the GHG. The group's focus had been on how to spend Official Development Assistance (ODA) funds intelligently to match the MRC's strategy.

Professor Debbie Lawlor, Chair of the Population Health Sciences Group, had summarised the annual review of the MRC's population health sciences spend which had remained fairly stable over the past five years. There appeared to have been limited interest in MRC funding from the communities in cancer and infectious disease epidemiology.

Professor Anna Dominiczak, Chair of the Translational Research Group (TRG) had reported that a key theme discussed at the TRG meeting had been innovation in healthcare technology. The group had discussed diagnosis-led health systems which was an emerging priority for the Office for Life Sciences as it developed the new Life Sciences Industrial Strategy. Sir John reported that he was working on a paper with Patrick Vallance on the subject.

Strategy Board had also discussed the need for the MRC to consider and refresh its strategy road map for the next few years; there would be further discussions at the residential Strategy Board meeting in July. Current MRC priority areas had been defined ahead of the 2015 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR); the Government had not yet given an idea when the next CSR might be although it was not expected imminently.

Strategy Board had commended the MRC's review of PET (positron emission tomography) research within the UK medical imaging landscape. Members had suggested the MRC's future role should be the promotion of novel tracers in cutting-edge research and facilitating their use in clinical studies.

Council discussed Jo Johnson's announcement on 4 July that the government would be investing £100m in a Global Talent Research fund to be named after Ernest Rutherford. Members noted that the £100m was part of the £4.7bn increase in public research and development spending that had already been announced in the 2016 Autumn Statement.

4D. Imanova update

Professor Lomas is Imanova shareholder representative for University College London (UCL) and left the room for the discussion.

Dr Mulkeen introduced this item and reminded Council that Imanova had been established in 2011 as a joint venture between the MRC, Imperial College London, King's College London and University College London. It had transitioned from partial block grant funding to a model based entirely on individual business contracts and project/programme grant funding.

Council noted that Mr Dunlop would draft a paper on governance of the MRC's shareholdings for discussion at the October Council meeting.

5. **CEO's report**

The Crick

Mr Bulger informed Council that a certificate had been received from the Environment Agency (EA) for the Mill Hill site. The sale of the property could not take place however until planning consent had been obtained by Barratt Homes, the developers. The Greater London Authority (GLA) would consider the application in the autumn at a meeting with the London Mayor present.

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The technical report regarding the potential impact of Crossrail 2 (CR2) on the Crick was currently on hold but the feedback so far was that interference from CR2 should be manageable for the Crick.

Council noted that the Crick had been successful at the UK National Royal Town Planning Awards in June. The Crick had won in its category of 'Creating Economically Successful Places' and was awarded the Silver Jubilee Cup. Sir John had circulated an email to Council on 20 June with details of the award.

Council noted that there was a risk of building work at the British Library impacting on the Crick due to vibration and noise, although as the shaft would be created inside the building this would limit the construction impact.

Professor Cantrell provided an update in her capacity as MRC representative on the Crick Board. She reported that generally everyone was continuing to settle in well to the building and the internal scientific reviews were ongoing.

UKRI

Sir John noted that Sir Mark Walport would be attending the Council meeting later to discuss his vision for UKRI. He reported that the UKRI Shadow Executive Committee was working well and there were expected to be announcements regarding appointments to the UKRI Board and Chief Finance Officer in September.

Funding renewal for the Nuffield Council on Bioethics (NCoB)

Sir John informed Council that, as reported by Baroness O'Neill, Management Board had approved the funding renewal for the Nuffield Council on Bioethics for a further five years.

6. Finance report

Council noted the finance report, which included an update on the 2016/17 Annual Report and Accounts and the year-to-date results to the end of May 2017. The audit had gone well and the report was expected to be signed by the Comptroller and Auditor General that day and laid before Parliament on 13 July. Mr Dunlop outlined some of the key significant movements from the previous year.

7. Discussion with Professor Sir Mark Walport

Mr Brydon welcomed Sir Mark to the meeting. Sir Mark informed Council that he had launched his vision for UK Research and Innovation at the Institution of Civil Engineers on 4 July. His vision was for UK Research and Innovation to be the best research and innovation agency in the world. Building on existing strengths it would push the frontiers of human knowledge, deliver economic impact and create better jobs and create social impact by supporting society to become stronger and healthier. He provided an overview of his presentation for members and highlighted some of the opportunities presented by UKRI such as the additional £4.7bn funding for science and research by 2021 announced in the 2016 Autumn Statement. Other opportunities included the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, the Newton Fund and the Global Challenges Research Fund.

He also explained that there were two phases in the near-term development of UK Research and Innovation. First was the transition phase, which involved the creation of a fully-functioning organisation by 1 April 2018. The second phase would be transformation which would take longer although it had already started with the creation of the Shadow Executive Board, and in the progress which was now being made towards new ways of working together. Sir Mark concluded by highlighting that it was a very

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exciting venture which would need to attract and retain the best people. The job of funding research and innovation well required creativity and it would be necessary to have the brightest minds helping inside the organisation, as well as attracting and keeping the best people in the UK to participate in the global research and innovation endeavour.

Mr Brydon thanked Sir Mark and invited questions from Council. Members discussed a range of topics with Sir Mark including the importance of translation/innovation to UKRI; the unique ethical and regulatory issues facing the MRC and the need to retain an MRC specific ethics committee; the balance between cross-Council grand challenges and response-mode funding within each Council; the impact of Brexit on research and the importance of European partnerships; and how UKRI would balance the “Excellence” agenda with the renewed emphasis on place.

Sir Mark informed Council that the process of appointing members to the UKRI Board was at an advanced stage and recommendations were with Ministers for decision. Members discussed how the governance of Councils would change under UKRI. Sir Mark explained that Councils would not be governing boards in the same way as they were now but would instead be advisory to the Executive Chairs. Membership would also include a senior independent member who could be asked to act as the chair of the Council from time to time. The new Councils would focus on the research responsibilities and strategy of the Council. OSCHR would remain the main mechanism for the MRC to engage with the other public funders of health research.

Mr Brydon highlighted that Sir Paul Nurse has noted in his report that the balance of funding between the research councils had remained proportionally static for many years, and asked whether this might change under UKRI. Sir Mark confirmed that this would be something that the UKRI Board would consider, noting that it would be a difficult question to address. The UKRI Board would make recommendations to Ministers regarding allocations between the Councils.

There was some discussion regarding measures of success for UKRI. Sir Mark explained that all current efforts were focused on day one transition to UKRI, but a bespoke set of measures across all nine councils would be developed during the transformation phase. In the next five years Sir Mark said he wanted to achieve the creation of an organisation that would be seen internationally as a leading exemplar of how to fund research and innovation in a dramatically changing world.

Mr Brydon thanked Sir Mark for coming to talk to Council and emphasised that the MRC was 100 per cent behind ensuring that UKRI was a spectacular success.

8. Data access/sharing and open science

Dr Rawle introduced this item and explained that the paper provided background information to inform a discussion of MRC priorities in promoting data access and open science following publication of the UK Concordat on Open Research Data. As suggested by Council in March, a survey of members of MRC boards and panels and the directors of MRC units, institutes and centres had been carried out to get broader input from the MRC community; there had been a 20 per cent response rate. She noted her thanks to Helen Page for setting the questionnaire up online and Sarah Dickson for assisting with the analysis of the results. Overall, there had been considerable support for doing more to promote data access, tempered with concerns about the opportunity cost (financial and time) and the usefulness of some of the data. Suggestions such as promoting better access to large databases, animal data, study protocols and methodological detail had received significant support. There had also been a consensus that providing incentives would be the best way to lead people in to the new culture. Additionally, Dr Rawle informed Council that Management Board had agreed, at their meeting in March, to fund

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a two-year pilot to create an additional academic node of the Clinical Study Data Request web site as a platform for sharing data from clinical trials.

Mr Brydon thanked Dr Rawle and reported that Dame Janet had sent in written comments on the paper. She felt that the sentiment reflected amongst the scientists who had been surveyed was too conservative and that the MRC should take a strong lead (with other medical research funders if appropriate) in developing a high-quality process and facility for deposit, access and secondary analysis of data from research that it had funded. Members agreed that it was not only about making data accessible and useful but how it could be curated in a format so that it could be used systematically.

Members cautioned that the issue of what types of data could be put in the public domain still needed to be dealt with. Disclosure could work in many ways so it would be difficult to legislate. Sir John acknowledged these concerns but highlighted the importance of the MRC taking the lead in this area. Council agreed that the MRC should look into creating a platform and that it should be piloted in an MRC institute.

It was highlighted that there was no need to start from scratch; it would make sense to explore what systems already existed and to bring communities together to build on these. Members highlighted existing examples such as the platform used in the imaging community which was very well established and could be built on both nationally and internationally.

Professor Lomas suggested that the MRC Harwell Institute be asked to participate in a pilot. Council agreed that this was an excellent idea and Sir John asked Professor Lomas to lead on the work.

9. MRC Industry Charter

Dr Rawle introduced the MRC Industry Charter in Dr Watkins' absence, and explained that the aim of the charter was to set a high-level framework under which various MRC policies and guidance documents could be prepared or reviewed, targeted at specific issues such as staff conduct, conflicts of interest, funding agreements, etc. The charter had been discussed at ERPIC the previous week. Members had been supportive of the principles in the draft charter, but had suggested some improvements to ensure public benefit was central, and for the document to have a more positive tone, particularly in the integrity section, so there was less focus on what could not be done. Mr Brydon informed members that Dame Janet had also suggested that the document would benefit from a more positive tone.

Council discussed the charter. Members agreed they were happy with the principles as outlined subject to some minor changes to the wording to make tone more positive and the language more accessible. Council also agreed that it would be prudent for the MRC to hold an annual review of industry collaborations at Council including any evidence of concerns about undue influence. This would enable Council to ensure the collaborations complied with the principles in the charter and would also demonstrate to industry how seriously the MRC took the matter. Sir John confirmed he would ask Dr Watkins to take the work forward. Council asked to see a revised draft of the Charter for approval.

Post meeting note: The revised MRC Industry Charter was circulated to Council members on 3 August and approved.

10. Cyber security

Ms Nason, the MRC's Head of IT, introduced the cyber security update. A report had been included in the papers to Council. She highlighted that cyber security was not just an IT issue but a business issue and it was the responsibility of everyone. She explained

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that due to the nature of cyber attacks, the precise details of measures being undertaken were not included in the report. She then outlined the information security framework and controls in place within the MRC.

Mr Brydon thanked Miss Nason for the update and Council discussed issues surrounding cyber security such as the MRC's personal use policy for the internet and the extent of penetration testing that the MRC had undertaken. Members also shared examples of some of the measures that were undertaken within their own organisations.

Ms Nason agreed to share her report on cyber security in a laboratory environment with the industry members on Council for their input.

Mr Brydon invited Ms Nason to provide a further update at the December or March Council meeting. He suggested coordinating with CARAC to ensure there was effective oversight going forward but without duplication of reports.

11A. University unit update

Mr Dunlop reported that the MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit had transferred to become a university unit at the University of Cambridge on 1 July. The transfer of the MRC Toxicology Unit, currently located in Leicester, to the University of Cambridge was scheduled for 1 March 2018, with the physical relocation planned for late 2019.

12. Draft programme and agenda for October Council

Council noted the draft programme and agenda for the October Council meeting which would include the annual open meeting and take place at the University of Bristol.

13. Any other business and close

None raised.