Minutes of the Council business meeting held at One Kemble Street on 12 March 2014

Present:

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<th>Council</th>
<th>Head Office staff</th>
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<td>Mr Donald Brydon (Chairman)</td>
<td>Ms Sam Bartholomew</td>
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<td>Sir John Savill (CEO)</td>
<td>Mr Sandy Bulger</td>
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<td>Professor Jeffrey Almond</td>
<td>Mr Hugh Dunlop</td>
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<td>Professor Michael Arthur</td>
<td>Dr Wendy Ewart</td>
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<td>Professor Chris Day</td>
<td>Mr Bruce Minty</td>
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<td>Dr Ruth McKernan</td>
<td>Dr Declan Mulkeen</td>
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<td>Professor Paul Morgan</td>
<td>Ms Jacki Paton</td>
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<td>Baroness Onora O’Neill</td>
<td>Dr Tony Peatfield</td>
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<td>Mrs Vivienne Parry</td>
<td>Dr Frances Rawle</td>
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<td>Professor Michael Schneider</td>
<td>Mr Ted Smith</td>
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<td>Mrs Carole Walker (items 1 to 4B)</td>
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<td>Guest</td>
<td>Ms Pauline Mullin (items 5 and 8)</td>
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<td>Mr Iain Gray, CEO Technology</td>
<td>Ms Anne Dixon (item 7 only)</td>
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<td>Strategy Board (item 13)</td>
<td>Mr Adrian Penrose (item 8 only)</td>
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<td>Observers</td>
<td>Dr Ian Viney (item 9 only)</td>
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<td>Mr Jeremy Clayton</td>
<td>Ms Georgette Shearer (item 10 only)</td>
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<td>Dr Jim Smith</td>
<td>Dr Chris Watkins (item 13 only)</td>
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Apologies:
Mr Tony Caplin
Professor Dame Sally Davies
Dr Richard Henderson
Professor Dame Sally Macintyre
Dr Mene Pangalos

Council session

The meeting began at 2.00pm.

1. **Announcements and apologies**

   Mr Brydon welcomed members to the meeting and introduced Dr Jim Smith, who would take on the role of Deputy Chief Executive and Chief of Strategy from 1 April 2014.

   Mr Brydon informed Council that this would be Dr Ewart’s last Council meeting before she retired at the end of the month. He thanked Dr Ewart for the enormous contribution she had made to the MRC and noted that a dinner had been arranged that evening which
would give Council members the opportunity to show their appreciation and thanks to Dr Ewart.

Mr Brydon offered congratulations to Baroness O’Neill for her appointment as a member of the Order of Companions of Honour in the New Year’s Honours.

Lastly, Mr Brydon noted that apologies had been received from Mr Caplin, Professor Dame Sally Davies, Dr Henderson, Professor Dame Sally Macintyre and Dr Pangalos.

2. Register of declared interests

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

3. Minutes of the Council meeting held on 4 December 2013

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 4 December were approved as an accurate record.

4. Matters arising

4A. Laboratory of Molecular Biology (LMB) – update on lessons learned and benefits realised

Mr Bulger introduced this item and reminded members that the new LMB building project had been initiated to replace the old facilities and to enable the science to expand and improve. Project closure had been concluded in December 2013 following a successful Major Projects Authority (MPA) Gateway 5 Review. A project closure report had been produced which provided an overview of the project. A key part of the success of the project was the inclusion of key LMB staff on the project team (the Client Requirement Team (CRT)) from initiation to completion providing an important link between the users and the contractor. As they had previously been scientists in the LMB, they understood the requirements for working in the labs so they were able to help the contractors understand why the design had to be a certain way.

Members commended Mr Bulger and colleagues on the success of the project and noted that Cabinet Office guidelines “Government’s Soft Landings” followed the same principles used in the LMB.

4B. Report from the Council Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the Council Finance Committee

In Mr Caplin’s absence, Mrs Walker introduced the report from the Council Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (CARAC) and the Council Finance Committee (CFC) meetings held on 4 February 2014. Council noted the report and the corporate risk register. There was some discussion about the risk of interruption to MRC business as a result of the actions of animal activists. Members highlighted that there had been recent media interest in religious slaughter methods for killing animals for food and suggested that this may lead to increased media focus on the methods of killing animals involved in research. It was noted that the risk register was regularly reviewed by CARAC and Management Board and the risk relating to animal rights activism would continue to be closely monitored by the MRC. Members also noted that the MRC had undertaken a lot of work to increase openness and to communicate the importance of the use of animals in research which could help to counter the animal activism risk.
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4C. Report from the Nominations Committee

Mr Brydon reported that Sir John Savill’s term as Chief Executive and Deputy Chairman of the MRC was expected to be extended until 31 March 2016. Council members welcomed the news and noted that this information should remain confidential until an official announcement had been made.

Mr Brydon informed members that the Nominations Committee had met on 9 January to shortlist candidates for the Council vacancies. Following subsequent agreement of the shortlist by the Appointments Panel, an impressive field of candidates had been interviewed on 11 and 18 February. The Panel’s interview report had been submitted to the Minister who would take the final decision regarding which candidates would be appointed to Council.

4D. EU Data Protection Regulation

Sir John informed Council that an email had recently been sent to all UK MEPs to highlight the threat to scientific research posed by the draft EU Data Protection Regulation in advance of the European Parliament’s vote on the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) Committee’s proposed amendments to the Regulation. The European Parliament had subsequently voted in favour of the amendments on 12 March which mandated the Parliament to enter into triilogue negotiations. Negotiations would convene when the Council of Ministers confirmed its position, and the MRC would continue to work with other organisations to influence negotiations around the proposed Regulation.

Members highlighted that if the Regulation went through as proposed, not only would it threaten research, but it was also ethically inadequate owing to an over-reliance on consent as the sole criterion for the re-use of data and lack of recognition of more effective mechanisms for ethical governance of data.

Members commented that the email to MEPs referred to the concerns of non-commercial organisations across Europe and highlighted that there were also a lot of valuable commercial uses for data, including for the public good. It was agreed that it would be useful to get some specific examples of positive commercial data use into public domain. Members noted that Dr McKernan had recently given an ABPI key note lecture which included examples of how industry used big data to help take medicines through ‘picking the right target, creating the right molecule and selecting the right patients’.

Action: Council secretariat to circulate Dr McKernan’s ABPI presentation to Council members for information.

Council discussed what more could be done to address the situation. It was suggested that it would be useful to try to identify the actual financial and scientific costs if the Regulation was adopted and Sir John informed members that Sir John Bell, Chair of the Office for Strategic Co-ordination of Health Research (OSCHR) Board planned to commission some work in this area. Members agreed that it would be important to target MEPs who would be voting on the issue with material regarding the threat and costs as well as evidence of why big data was important. Council noted that the Wellcome Trust would be taking the lead on this and meeting with MEPs to highlight the issue. Sir John also suggested that it should be included on the agenda for the next All Party Parliamentary breakfast as it would be an ideal forum to talk about how big data was beneficial.

4E. Minutes from the Strategy Board meetings held on 18 December 2013 and 5 February 2014

Sir John Savill introduced this item and thanked Dr Henderson, Professor Morgan, Mr Caplin and Mrs Parry for attending the December Strategy Board meeting, and Mr
Brydon, Professor Morgan, Mr Caplin, Mrs Parry, Professor Day and Baroness O’Neill for attending the February meeting.

Sir John reported that Dr Jim Smith had provided an update on developments with the Crick at the December Strategy Board meeting and generally things were progressing in the right direction. Strategy Board had also received an update on the outcome of the Infections and Immunity Board (IIB) led call on ‘Systems Immunology of the Human Life Course’. It had been a successful cross-Council initiative with BBSRC and two consortia had been funded. Strategy Board had also discussed the Medical Bioinformatics initiative at their meeting in December and ratified the award of five internationally competitive proposals. Strategy Board had also delegated authority for the review and approval of a refocused bid and a supplement to the office and the Medical Bioinformatics Steering Group.

Sir John informed Council that Strategy Board had received an update on the Clinical Research Capabilities and Technologies initiative at the February meeting. The initiative was progressing well within short time-frames and in addition to the £150m capital derived from the Department of Health for investment in England, BIS had approved £12.5m from MRC’s 2015/16 capital allocation to support bids elsewhere in the UK.

Strategy Board had also discussed the exceptional progress with the UK Dementias Research Platform (UKDP). It was anticipated that the second stage of the UKDP, a programme of experimental studies in partnership with industry, would be approved by Strategy Board in March. Proposals for stage three, a deep and frequent phenotyping study in partnership with NIHR, were expected in the autumn.

Strategy Board had had a lengthy discussion about MRC industry collaboration activities. These included a proposed MRC partnership with AstraZeneca which would provide UK scientists with an opportunity to access the company’s screening library and high throughput robotics. Two million compounds would be provided for use in projects selected and funded by the MRC, with AstraZeneca reserving the first right to discuss potentially interesting results arising from the screens. The MRC would invest around £1m per annum for 10-12 academic screens. There was an expectation that the running of the screens would be undertaken by a third party, potentially MRCT. Strategy Board had also supported plans for a new scheme to make available an ongoing library of assets from multiple biopharmaceutical companies to academic researchers via applications across the MRC’s funding streams.

Professor Mark Caulfield, Chief Scientist of Genomics England, had presented an interesting overview of Genomics England to Strategy Board. The project would generate 100,000 whole genome sequences from patients with rare inherited diseases, cancers and pathogens in the NHS to create a platform for genomic medicine research at a cost of £186m.

Lastly, Strategy Board had discussed the opportunities and challenges for the Molecular and Cellular Medicine Board in the areas of chemical biology/medicinal chemistry, microscopy/computation and chemistry for imaging, epigenetics, and toxicology.

Members welcomed the proposed MRC partnership with AstraZeneca regarding the use of the company’s compound library and highlighted the need to ensure that there could be no perception of AstraZeneca having an unfair advantage with regards to their having the first right to discuss potentially interesting results arising from the screens. Sir John confirmed that AstraZeneca would have no preferential rights other than first discussion over any emergent intellectual property which would be owned by the university. He explained that it was a good deal for the MRC as it was a relatively low investment that would provide substantial leverage of industry infrastructure, and potentially high gains in terms of training and new discoveries.

Finally, members discussed the opportunities provided by the 100,000 genome project noting that the whole genome approach would lead to better and earlier diagnosis and personalised care.
5. **CEO report to Council**

Sir John Savill introduced this item and discussed the following matters:

**Spending Review 2015/16**

Sir John informed members that the MRC’s allocations for 2015/16 had been announced on 10 February. The MRC would see a resource allocation of £580.3m for 2015/16 representing a small increase above that anticipated for flat cash and an increase in capital allocation to £36m. Additionally, the 2014/15 allocations would be delivered as planned. These allocations were good news and indicated that the case had been successfully made to the Treasury about the importance of investment in science to stimulate the economy.

**Animals in medical research – breaking the silence with patients**

Ms Mullin updated Council on the MRC, Genetic Alliance UK, Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) and Understanding Animal Research (UAR) project to directly engage patient groups about the role of animals in research on their own medical condition. The project would follow on from an MRC and Genetic Alliance UK pilot in 2013 where patients had visited animal research facilities. Although patients had found these ‘discovery days’ to be a positive experience, they did not want to be spokespeople regarding the use of animals in research into their condition. The follow-on project had been shortlisted for funding under the Wellcome Trust’s Society Awards grant scheme and would aim to engage with patient groups to increase understanding and awareness about the use of animals in research and enable them to participate in discussions about animal use in research on their own terms. The MRC had provided bridging funding for the project so the project team could undertake a scoping and consultation exercise to identify what material and engagement activities would be beneficial for individual patient groups to allow them to develop an informed opinion on the issue and to explore with patients how they would like to contribute to the discussion about the use of animals in research.

Members highlighted that although social media offered many advantages, it also had the disadvantage that individuals could be subjected to abuse on it and this may be one of the reasons why patients and their families were reluctant to stand up and speak about the use of animals in research. It was noted that the AMRC would be involved in the new project and the focus would be on engaging with patient groups rather than individuals with the aim of them to undertaking advocacy work on their own terms.

**University unit update**

Dr Ewart reported that she had recently visited 15 out of 16 of the university units and had met the directors informally to gain some insight into the directors’ perspectives in the first six to nine months post transfer. She had also visited the two de novo units in Bristol and Cambridge. An informal report of the visits had been circulated to Council members.

Sir John informed members that Mr Minty would take over as Chair of the University Units Programme Board following the retirement of Dr Ewart. Sir John also noted that he planned to write to the Vice Chancellors at the host institutions of each of the university units and invite them to accompany him on a joint visit to the units in 2015.

**Management Initiated Review**

Mr Minty informed Council that the final report of the management initiated review (MIR) of the Corporate Affairs Group (CAG) and the Business Information Centre (BIC) had been received on 29 January. He thanked those Council members who had contributed to the review. The review had been led by Dr Megan Davies, Head of the MRC Centre,
Cambridge, who had done an exceptionally thorough job. It had been initiated as part of a wider review designed to ensure that head office structures continued to meet the changing needs of the organisation. Potential drivers for change included the university unit programme, the transfer of NIMR to the Crick and the Triennial Review of the Research Councils. The report concluded that these factors would not lead to any reduction in the resource requirements for the overall work of either section. One of the key recommendations for CAG in the report was the creation of a new Director of Public Affairs position to lead in the area of public affairs and related activity. A key recommendation for BIC was for part of the role of the Director of BIC to be backfilled, with the appointment of an interim Director of BIC for as long as was necessary to allow the permanent Director of BIC (Ms Victoria Cassely) to concentrate on cross-council work. Mr Minty informed Council that Dr Ian Viney had since been seconded to the role of interim Director on a part-time basis. Dr Viney’s time commitment to BIC would be flexible and it was expected that he would spend two to three days a week on BIC work with the remainder of his time focused on his current role as Director of Strategic Evaluation and Impact. The other recommendations from the report mainly related to styles of working and team structures. Mr Minty would work with Dr Peatfield and Ms Cassely to agree how these recommendations would be taken forward.

Council members welcomed the appointment of Dr Viney to the role of interim Director of BIC and queried how this might impact on his other work. It was noted that Dr Viney would focus on strategic direction and leadership and the more operational aspects of his evaluation role would be backfilled if necessary.

The Francis Crick Institute

Council noted that the Health and Safety Executive’s investigation into the fatality at the Crick was still ongoing and the outcome was not yet known.

6. Finance report

Mr Dunlop introduced this item and informed Council that given the favourable spending review settlement the commitment budget for 2014/15 would be set at £310m rather than the provisional £290m agreed at the December Council meeting.

Mr Dunlop updated Council on the 2014/15 operating budget which had been discussed by the Council Finance Committee (CFC). The programme near cash resource budget of £574.6m was 2.7 per cent higher than the 2013/14 budget and the administration budget of £28.7m was 4.1 per cent lower than the 2013/14 budget reflecting the ongoing reduction to the administration baseline. The capital budget was £125.6m. There were a number of high level budget risks including a royalty dispute with Alexion, the timing and outcome of which could not be controlled. Following legal advice and in depth discussion by CFC at their meeting in February, the dispute had been resolved.

There was some discussion about the risk of future royalty disputes and whether there was anything the MRC could do to prevent this. It was noted that the contracts in question had been drawn up many years ago and the MRC would ensure that future contracts defined territories carefully. Members also highlighted that the draft EU Data Protection Regulation placed restrictions on sending data from jurisdiction to jurisdiction to prevent data made in the EU from being made available to people outside the EU.

Mr Dunlop then updated members on the 2013/14 forecast outturn noting that there had been a delay in issuing Grant of Licence to alter for Cyclotron demolition works meaning that the £5m expenditure would move into 2014/15. The impact of the slippage on forecast would be mitigated by bringing forward other funding schemes from 2014/15.

Finally, Mr Dunlop informed members that the year-to-date results were on track.

Members discussed the £4.6m Crick transition costs in the 2014/15 operating budget noting that an estimate of the costs of the transfer of NIMR operations from the Mill Hill
site to the Crick had been included in the medium term plans for some time.
Management Board would be asked to approve the NIMR transition programme budget
for the next three years at their meeting in March and to give delegated authority to Dr
Smith to manage the budget.

7. The 2014/15 science commitment budget

Dr Mulkeen introduced this item and informed Council that, as reported by Mr Dunlop,
the commitment budget for 2014/15 would be £310m and a further £14m to £15m may
be available for rapid spend. This was an 8.8 per cent drop from the previous year and
around the level the MRC had had in 2010. Dr Mulkeen then set out the proposals for
2014/15 commitment budget noting that Council had advised in December that the
allocations should:

- protect early-career awards such as intermediate fellowships with potential to
  reduce or freeze senior fellowship awards;
- recognise the importance of unit and strategic partnership initiatives; and
- avoid award rates falling below 20 per cent.

Dr Mulkeen then set out the proposals for 2014/15 commitment budget for Council’s
approval. The Strategy Board budget would be reduced to £20m from £36.5m in the
current year as a number of strategic initiatives were still rolling out, such as stratified
medicine and the experimental medicine challenge. It was proposed that £149m be
allocated across the four research boards representing a five per cent reduction on the
current year. The balance of the allocation between the boards had been determined in
part by the demand from unit renewals, which would substantially increase the demand
on Boards. £15m was proposed for stratified medicine and £61m for training and
careers. A budget of £40m for the managed translational programmes was proposed
plus £14m to £15m in rapid spend to support continuation of the Confidence in Concept
translational scheme, and new support for industry collaboration through ‘Proximity to
Discovery’.

Members discussed the proposed budget allocations and noted with interest that the
Molecular and Cellular Medicine Board received one of the biggest budget allocations of
the research boards. Members commented that there was a perception in the scientific
community that recently the MRC focused more on translational research when in fact
the majority of its funding continued to support discovery science.

It was noted that there was likely to be an upturn in the number of grant applications as
a result of the completion of the REF cycle. Members agreed that the MRC should
consider whether it would be possible to stagger the timing of unit reviews so they did
not coincide with the upturn in demand resulting from the REF in the future. Council
noted that most universities now had internal peer review systems in place to ensure
only good quality grant applications were submitted to the Councils and as a rule could
be relied upon to manage demand in a mature way. The success rates of research
organisations in applying for MRC grants and fellowships were published on the MRC
website which also helped to manage demand.

There was some discussion about the plans to reduce or freeze senior fellowship awards.
Although some members raised concerns, given the visibility and prestige of these
awards, it was agreed that allocations had to be reduced somewhere and intermediate
fellowships had to be given priority as these made a more important and distinct
contribution to the national scene. The high quality research supported through senior
awards could compete effectively for funding at the Boards and elsewhere.

Mr Clayton informed members about the Newton Fund which had recently been
launched. He reported that there was a chance that there could be an under spend in the
first year of the scheme (2014/15) and requested that the MRC identify suitable rapid
spend proposals in the field of overseas development that the funds could be awarded to
if necessary.
Overall, Council members were supportive of the proposals and agreed the allocations, as set out in the paper, for the 2014/15 science commitment budget.

8. **Evaluation of the MRC Centenary Programme**

*Mrs Vivienne Parry and Dame Sally Macintyre had been members of the Centenary Project Board. Dame Sally had sent her apologies for the meeting and was not present but Mrs Parry remained in the room and participated in the discussion at the Chairman’s invitation.*

Mr Penrose introduced this item and updated Council on the MRC’s Centenary programme of activities which had been carried out during 2013 and how these met the agreed communications objectives. He explained that the Centenary programme had been guided by a project board which had included two members of Council (Dame Sally Macintyre and Mrs Parry). A number of annual work programme activities had been enhanced for the Centenary in addition to specific Centenary projects and three centenary messages had been promoted with a focus on the public, external stakeholders and the MRC community. Examples of activities included:

- the royal opening of the new LMB building
- the use of social media to tap into new audiences
- two Medical Research Live mass public online participation projects supported by media coverage (*WormWatchLab* and *A Century of Amplified Music*)
- MRC Open Week whereby MRC establishments created their own opportunities to engage with public and stakeholder audiences
- the use of Centenary branding across the MRC
- John Savill’s tour of MRC units - from Dundee to Entebbe

Overall the activities had been a great success, instilling a sense of pride in staff and opening the MRC up to new audiences. The Centenary legacy included MRC-funded staff trained in communications and public engagement; increased interest and awareness of the importance of public engagement; and a library of online resources chronicling MRC achievements and showing the diversity and importance of the MRC research portfolio.

Council members congratulated the project team on the successful delivery of the Centenary programme and queried whether there were any activities that had not gone as well as planned. Mr Penrose responded that having a clear vision of what the Centenary was about and realistic expectations about what could and could not be achieved meant that only activities with a reasonable chance of success were pursued. Although some of the more ambitious activities had not materialised (such as a commemorative stamp and coin and a ‘Google Doodle’ logo), this had not detract from the overall accomplishments of the programme. However, more thought should have been given to the touring aspect of the Strictly Science exhibit. The exhibition had been visited by 5000 visitors, but disappointingly it had not been possible to find a home for the exhibit after it had served its time at Imperial College.

Council noted that a version of the evaluation report would be published on the Council’s website and suggested that the MRC should annually review which activities had taken place as a result of the Centenary so record could be kept of its legacy. It was agreed that the MRC should aim to undertake impactful and cost-effective public engagement activities such as Open Week and the mass public participation events on an annual basis. It was suggested that a different region could do Open Week once a year. The mass public participation events had been hugely popular, involving people in research in an active way, and would be worth repeating on a regular basis if the right ideas could be found.

Dr Peatfield informed members that Dame Sally Macintyre had sent in comments on the evaluation of the Centenary programme. She had considered the evaluation to be very fair and noted that the risks that been identified at the start of the programme had not come to pass. She had highlighted that a lot of credit should go to the professionalism of the working groups and also to Dr Amanda Fisher (Director of the Clinical Sciences
Centre) who she considered to be a great asset to the MRC in relation to public engagement.

Council thanked Mr Penrose, the MRC communications team and staff throughout the MRC noting that the Centenary programme could not have been delivered without their hard work, support and enthusiasm.

9. MRC strategic evaluation update

Dr Viney introduced this item and informed members that 95 per cent of researchers had submitted returns for the 2013 Researchfish data gathering exercise. The MRC dataset now contained over 175,000 reports of outcomes realised since 2006 and preliminary analysis of the MRC dataset had been included in the paper to Council. Sixty-nine UK research funders and 15 research organisations now subscribed to Researchfish and more than £10bn of research funding was being tracked in the system. It was estimated that with the current list of subscribers a further £3bn would be added each year.

Researchers could easily link MRC funding to journal articles using Researchfish, and these linkages were automatically added to Europe PubMed Central. Details about outputs, outcomes and impacts arising from MRC funded research were displayed on the publicly available RCUK Gateway to Research website.

Dr Viney summarised the various ways in which the MRC made use of Researchfish data. This included providing evidence submitted to spending reviews and contributing outcomes to a number of MRC publications. Researchfish data were also increasingly being used to support the evaluation of new funding schemes and would be used to assist in the capture of benefits from university units and quinquennial reviews of units, institutes and centres.

Dr Viney informed members that work was underway to harmonise output collection approaches across all the research councils in response to a recommendation in the Triennial Review, and it was anticipated that a single system would be used across RCUK by September 2014.

Additionally, Dr Viney reported that it was planned to explore the feasibility of exchanging research output information with universities so researchers would not have to enter similar information into multiple databases. Ensuring that this process worked well would not be straightforward and would require that research councils, funding councils, research information management system suppliers and universities worked together. This was likely to take one to two years of further work and the MRC’s priority would be to provide Researchfish data back to HEIs in a way that would be useful to them.

In response to queries regarding the planned amendment to the Freedom of Information Act regarding pre-publication research, Dr Viney confirmed that Researchfish captured the links between MRC funded research and evidenced outcomes such as papers published and documented links to influences in policy. The MRC did not seek information about pre-publication research, in confidence developments, or preliminary findings. This information would help the MRC to determine how many projects produced datasets, and whether these had been made accessible, the elapsed time between funding trials and results being published and the proportion of projects complying with the RCUK policy on open access. Members noted that Researchfish did not hold personally identifiable data and so was unlikely to be impacted by the proposed EU Data Protection Regulation.

Wherever possible, Researchfish would be linked to existing datasets, so that high quality output data could be added to the Researchfish dataset without the need for researchers to provide these details. This had already been achieved with the Europe PMC database, with CrossRef for digital object identifiers, and linkage to patent office and clinical trial registries was being tested. Members noted that the information was
stored across at least two sites and that Researchfish Ltd. had back-up and disaster recovery processes in place.

Members discussed the future of Researchfish. They considered that the approach had the potential to provide an efficient way of collecting structured information about impact on a national level that may be helpful for the next funding council REF exercise in at least six years, if all relevant information could be captured on the system (or downloaded to university data management systems). They agreed that while it was important to retain the dual funding system, there was the opportunity for significant efficiencies in the way that research quality and impact was assessed by the funding councils. Members asked how applicable the approach was to disciplines outside of medicine, and Dr Viney explained that the system had been used by the Science and Technology Facilities Council for the last three years, and that agreement had now been reached across all seven research councils concerning a harmonised set of outputs to collect, so was ready to be applied across the UK research base.

Finally Dr Viney informed members that following two rounds of funding, four evaluation studies to investigate the link between research and impact had been funded that would generate interim or final results by the end 2014/15. A third call for proposals under this initiative was currently live.

10. MRC – university engagement

Dr Mulkeen introduced this item and provided Council with an overview of the MRC’s university engagement activity. The MRC concentrated its resources on engagement with 12 key university partners which were the top recipients of MRC funding. These partnerships were managed through a high level strategic visits programme supported by a named link programme manager in the MRC’s Research Programmes Group. The main focus of the MRC’s strategic discussions with universities over the last few years had been on translation and working with industry. The MRC’s Confidence in Concept scheme aimed to accelerate the transition from discovery science to the early stages of therapeutic/diagnostic development by providing locally-administered, responsive and flexible funding to universities to support preliminary translational work. It was expected that delivering the ‘Proximity to Discovery’ plans would involve an extension and evolution of the Confidence in Concept model and Council would be kept updated on plans in this area. In the coming year the MRC would also explore whether flexible funds could also be used more to help develop areas of basic research important for the MRC’s strategy.

Dr Mulkeen informed Council that areas that would need to be addressed in the MRC’s university engagement included cross-funder working and MRC university units. The MRC would work with the other research councils and NIHR to ensure that a consistent message was being provided to universities in multi-disciplinary research areas. With regards to MRC university units, a comprehensive framework of governance and assurance had been put in place to provide the MRC with sufficient insight and influence during the quinquennial period. This would include annual meetings with the unit directors and oversight meetings with the university at regular points in the quinquennial period. The MRC would also need to consider whether there would be value in reaching out to more than just the top 12 universities in receipt of MRC funding.

Council discussed the impact of the university unit transfers on the list of the top 12 universities by spend. Members highlighted that some universities that had not previously been in the MRC’s top 12, now were as a result of the transfers. However, it was noted that the MRC’s spending in these areas had not changed just the way which it was allocated.

Members agreed that some other universities could benefit from the strategic visits and the programme should be expanded to include the top 15 to 20 universities in receipt of MRC funding. Focus should also be given to those universities that were most improved or had major strategic investments. Members also discussed what the MRC could do to
help early career researchers who were not in the top universities and noted that as well as grant and fellowship funding, these researchers might need more support and advice in preparing research proposals and developing their careers.

11. **Draft agenda for May Council**

Council noted the draft agenda for the May Council meeting and agreed that more time should be allocated to the MRCT discussion.

12. **Annual review of Council committees**

Council noted the paper which outlined the membership and terms of reference of each of Council’s subcommittees. They approved the proposed amendments to the Nominations Committees terms of reference to additionally include advising to the Chairman on the membership of Council’s subcommittees and advising the CEO and Chairman on appointments to Management Board. Council also approved an extension to the Council Finance Committee’s (CFC) terms of reference to encompass providing advice on material unplanned expenditure and agreed that the Council Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (CARAC) should have some members on it who were not also on CFC to ensure further independent challenge on CFC recommendations. Members noted that membership on Council’s subcommittees was co-terminous with Council membership.

13. **The MRC’s relationship with the Technology Strategy Board**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Iain Gray, Chief Executive of the Technology Strategy Board (TSB), to the meeting.

Mr Gray thanked members for the opportunity to engage with Council. He presented an overview of the TSB covering its formation and funding profile. The TSB’s role was to accelerate economic growth by stimulating and supporting business led innovation working with a wide range of partners in the public and private sectors. The TSB prioritised investment in areas or themes most likely to generate sustainable UK economic growth, focusing on areas which addressed global challenges and market opportunities, complemented and supported by innovation in competences and enabling technologies. With regards to economic impact, there was strong evidence that demonstrated a significant economic return for every pound invested by the TSB. In its first six years, the TSB had leveraged £1.5bn private sector research and development (R&D) investment. In response to queries from members, Mr Gray explained that every TSB programme had a set of metrics established at the outset and for newer programmes this included projected market forecasts.

Mr Gray then outlined the TSB’s range of tools to help businesses, each focused on helping to solve specific innovation challenges. This included the Catapults - world-leading centres of innovation designed to bridge the gap between businesses, academia, research and government to accelerate commercialisation in specific fields. So far the TSB had established seven Catapults and there were plans to establish two more in 2015/16.

There were a number of areas of collaboration between the TSB and the research councils. Current key areas of co-operation between the MRC and TSB included stratified medicine, regenerative medicine and cell therapies, and the Biomedical Catalyst. The MRC and TSB had worked together closely from the early stages of the stratified medicine initiative. Within the current spending period the TSB had agreed to invest up to £50m over five years into a series of investments as part of a Stratified Medicine Innovation Platform (SMIP) and the MRC had committed £60m. The MRC was also working closely with the TSB on the development of a Precision Medicine Catapult which was expected to be operational by 2015.
Since its formation, the TSB had supported work to address translation and commercialisation challenges in the area of regenerative medicine and cell therapies. A strategy for UK regenerative medicine had been published in March 2012 sponsored by four of the research councils and the TSB. This had informed the establishment of the cross-council UK Regenerative Medicine Platform, led by the MRC, which had been implemented in close co-operation with the TSB Cell Therapy Catapult and both had become operational in the summer of 2013.

Since its inception the MRC/TSB Biomedical Catalyst had been received with strong support from the Government and businesses. A clear indicator of the confidence the Government had in the Catalyst was the announcement in the 2013 spending review of an extra £185m for the TSB, part of which was specifically for an extension of funding beyond the originally planned three-year allocation for the Biomedical Catalyst.

Mr Gray concluded by asking for Council’s views on whether MRC/TSB co-operation was focused on the right priority areas and if success was jointly communicated well enough for the benefit of the community.

Sir John thanked Mr Gray for his informative presentation and noted that a lot of credit for the successful collaborations between the MRC and TSB should go to Dr Mulkeen’s group and staff at the TSB. He also informed members that he and Mr Gray met regularly through OSHCR. There was significant value in having TSB’s membership on OSHCR as it allowed them to have visibility of work that was going on and helped the MRC and TSB to co-ordinate and work together where the opportunities presented themselves.

Members queried how the TSB made good objective decisions on the projects it supported given the incredible range of technologies covered. Mr Gray confirmed that the processes covered both technological and business assessment and were robust, but were also evolving with experience. Competitions were shaped based on input from experts and industry advisory groups, and the TSB had 500 paid expert assessors on its books to evaluate applications. Conflicts of interest had to be declared and were well managed.

Members discussed the proportion of TSB projects that had an HEI partner. They noted that projects were business led and approximately two-thirds had an HEI partner. SMEs were using universities as much as big businesses as research partners. Knowledge transfer partnerships were used to introduce universities to companies which had not previously worked with them.

Members considered whether more could be done to explore European opportunities. It was agreed that there was a need to cover a wider range of European science and innovation strategy issues.

There was some discussion about the difficulty in obtaining downstream funding for a project if the UK market proposition was to sell to the NHS, because of the perception of low and slow technology adoption in UK health services. In some cases companies had to go to the USA in order to find confident investors. The TSB’s Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) provided business with some new opportunities to work with the NHS through a model of public sector procurement contracts for R&D on new products and services to address public sector challenges. This helped to address the problem in part but more needed to be done to engage with the NHS on the issue, and members agreed that the MRC and TSB should work together to do this. Support also needed to be given to small companies to help them identify the right people to work with to progress their ideas. Medilinks, an organisation which aimed to connect the academic, business and clinical sectors, was suggested as an example which could be used to help facilitate this.

Finally members discussed whether the MRC and TSB had done enough to publicise what they had achieved together. It was agreed that while more could be done to communicate the big successes, the organisations in receipt of funding acted as strong
advocates in their own right. The big success stories, where there was real commercial breakthrough, needed to be publicised so other companies could use them as examples of how to achieve success. Members suggested that putting these examples forward for Medilinks awards could be another way to bring them to the attention of companies. It was also suggested that the MRC could encourage universities to use the Confidence in Concept and Proximity to Discovery schemes to enable collaboration with local SMEs or other companies interested in the science the universities excelled at.

In conclusion, Mr Gray thanked members for the opportunity to discuss the relationship between the MRC and TSB and emphasised that the TSB was keen to continue to work closely with Council and build its relationship with the MRC further.

14. **Any other business**

Mr Clayton informed members that the BIS capital consultation to identify UK priorities in building a world leading science and research infrastructure would be launched towards the end of April, with responses required by the end of July.