Minutes of the Council member discussion at Malmaison, Oxford on 5 October 2016

Present:

<table>
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<tr>
<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 Doreen Cantrell</td>
<td>Mr Hugh Dunlop</td>
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<td>Professor Chris Day</td>
<td>Dr Declan Mulkeen</td>
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<td>Professor Dame Janet Finch</td>
<td>Dr Tony Peatfield</td>
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<td>Professor Paddy Johnston</td>
<td>Dr Frances Rawle</td>
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<td>Baroness Onora O’Neill</td>
<td>Mrs Julie Kemp</td>
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<td>Dr Mene Pangalos</td>
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Apologies:
Dr John Brown
Professor Dame Sally Davies

1. **Announcements and apologies**

   Mr Brydon welcomed members to the meeting and noted that apologies had been received from Dr Brown and Dame Sally Davies.

   Mr Brydon was joined by Council in congratulating Ms Nebhrajani on her re-appointment as the Chair of the Human Tissue Authority for a further three years from 1 April 2017. Mr Brydon also congratulated Dr Jim Smith on his appointment as the Director of Science at the Wellcome Trust from 1 December. Dr Smith would step down from his current positions at the MRC and as Research Director at the Crick, but would continue to run his laboratory at the Francis Crick Institute.

   He reminded members that because of delays in recruiting new members to replace those whose terms had ended, Council was currently not legally constituted to take decisions. This was therefore not a formal Council meeting.

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 business meeting held on 13 July**
The minutes of the Council business meeting held on 13 July were agreed as an accurate record subject to Mr Bulger’s name being removed from the list of attendees as he had not been present at the meeting.

4. Matters arising

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

Dame Janet updated members on the discussions at the CARAC meeting held on 29 September. There had been a discussion regarding the establishment of the Dementia Research Institute from a risk perspective and members had also discussed the serious email failures that had affected MRC Head Office and the lessons learned. Mr Dunlop explained that a failure of the servers had caused the majority of emails sent or received by Head Office staff on Thursday 11th and Friday 12th August to be lost.

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

Baroness O’Neill informed members that ERPIC had met on 15 July. ERPIC had discussed the EU Data Protection Regulation which would come into force in May 2018 in all EU member states. It was not yet clear how the Brexit process would deal with EU regulations due to come into place between now and when the UK exited the EU. ERPIC had agreed that there was a need to review UK legislation to ensure it remained in line with that in the EU following Brexit, and the MRC would need to engage with this process to ensure the needs of research were taken into account.

ERPIC had approved an updated MRC policy on transparency related to Clinical Trials, Clinical and Public Health Intervention Studies, which would be published on the website. This was consistent with the new UK Concordat on Open Research Data, which had been developed by UUK, RCUK, HEFCE and the Wellcome Trust and published in July.

Dr Rawle informed members that the ruling on the Freedom of Information Tribunal case relating to access to individual patient data from the MRC funded clinical trial, PACE, had been released in August. The appeal had been disallowed and QMUL had accepted the outcome and released the requested data.

Members were concerned that this raised a potential issue with regards to what consent meant in clinical studies in relation to promises made to participants about confidentiality of data, and it was agreed that the matter required a more detailed discussion at a future Council meeting.

4C. Minutes from the Strategy Board meetings held on 19 July and 6 September

Sir John updated members on discussions at the Strategy Board meeting that had been held on 19 July. Mr Brydon and Dame Sally Macintyre had attended the meeting and Dr Pangalos had attended the dinner discussion.

Strategy Board had received an update on progress with the Stratified Medicine Initiative. There had been impressive examples of how some of the Stratified Medicine consortia had changed medicine such as UK-PBC, which had played a major role in recent FDA approval of the first new drug for primary biliary cholangitis in 20 years and provoked substantial industry engagement as a result of new potential drug targets for the disease. Strategy Board had also noted the substantial new EU funding for stratified medicine, both through the Horizon 2020 New Concepts in Patient Stratification and the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI), which may not be available to UK researchers after the UK leaves the EU.

Other items discussed by Strategy Board included an initiative for a multi-funder initiative provisionally called the UK Partnership for Prevention Sciences (UKPPS); an update on the RCUK Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and three aligned cross-Council calls for Foundation Awards – 150 applications had been shortlisted for a decision
in January 2017; and an update on the Newton Fund which would be extended for a further 2.5 years from 2019 to 2021.

Professor Jane Elliott, CEO of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), had attended the meeting to present an overview of ESRC’s portfolio and strategic priorities. There were a number of ESRC activities in areas with strong alignment with the MRC including mental health, data infrastructure and longitudinal studies.

Finally, Strategy Board members had had a dinner discussion with Dr Pangalos regarding AstraZeneca’s position within the UK pharmaceutical and biomedical industry and shared interests between academia and industry.

Mr Brydon had attended the September Strategy Board meeting. Colleagues from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC): the CEO Professor Andrew Thompson, Associate Director of Research Dr Gary Grubb and AHRC Council member and Professor of Philosophy Fiona Macpherson had attended the meeting to discuss synergies between the MRC and AHRC. Areas of AHRC interest with relevance to the MRC included the link between neuroscience and philosophy; design and health; and mental health; as well as the social, cultural and historical determinants of health; sexual behaviour and health; gender and disability studies; and patient narratives and culture and arts in therapy. Global public health also presented a particular opportunity for collaborations.

Strategy Board had agreed to award £1m MRC funding, in partnership with £2.3m from the Welsh Government, to support the Wales Genomic Medicine Centre to contribute to the Genomics England (GeL) 100,000 Genome Project through the delivery of samples and clinical data from patients with rare diseases to GeL for sequencing and analysis. This was part of the Whole Genome Sequencing for Health and Wealth Initiative with the aim to increase capacity in genome sequencing in the devolved administrations and strengthen engagement with GeL. Scottish and Northern Irish partnerships had been funded from the rapid investment fund by Strategy Board in July 2015.

Council members noted the discussion with Professor Elliott in July regarding ESRC’s review of longitudinal studies and highlighted the importance of improving integration between social and medical sciences.

Council also noted the discussions with AHRC regarding areas of synergy and highlighted that there were other topics which had not been covered such as opportunities for collaboration with archaeologists and historians in the field of medicine. Sir John agreed that these were areas of common interest. He explained that the topics focused on during the discussion with Strategy Board had been selected by AHRC to reflect the specialities of the AHRC colleagues who had attended the meeting.

Finally, members discussed the need to improve interactions between Council and Strategy Board and noted that an item would be included on the December Council agenda regarding the matter.

5. CEO’s report

Sir John informed members that sadly Sir Patrick Sissons had died on 25 September, aged 71. He was Regius Professor of Physic at Cambridge University from 2005 to 2012. He served two terms on the MRC Physiological Medicine and Infections Board in the late 1990s/early 2000s, including a spell as Deputy Board Chair.

Sir John Savill then provided updates on the following areas:

The Crick

Mr Bulger informed members that a technical report prepared by Crossrail 2 was expected shortly which would identify the extent of any interference on the Crick from the new rail tunnels and make recommendations on design measures for Crossrail 2 to mitigate the impact.
Sir John informed members that Professor Nelson, on behalf of RCUK, had sent a letter to BEIS regarding differences between the White Paper and the Higher Education and Research Bill and highlighting principles which needed to be protected in primary or secondary legislation. The letter had also been circulated to Council for information.

Sir John reported that recruitment for the role of CEO of UKRI had been launched; interviews would take place in November.

There was some discussion regarding the aspects of the bill which related to higher education. Council noted there were some concerns within the university sector regarding quality control and the plans to remove the Royal Charters from universities.

Prion Unit – progress in appointing a scientific lead for the structural studies programme

Sir John informed members that, although the interviews for the Programme Leader of the Structural Biology Programme at the Prion Unit had been delayed owing to illness, an appointment was expected soon. An update would be provided to Council in December.

Board Chair recruitment

Council noted that interviews for new chairs for the Neurosciences and Mental Health Board and the Molecular and Cellular Medicine Board had taken place on 4 October. A paper would be presented to Council in December for a decision regarding the appointments.

Chair’s reappointment

Sir John was joined by Council members in congratulating Mr Brydon on his reappointment as Chair of the MRC until March 2018.

6. Finance report

Mr Dunlop informed members that the last triennial valuation of the MRC pension scheme as at 31 December 2013 had shown a surplus of £160.1m. The scheme’s financial position was reviewed annually between valuations and the annual review as at 31 December 2015 continued to show a positive funding position with a slightly higher surplus than that in December 2013. The next triennial update would be provided to Council in October 2017.

Mr Dunlop reported that the mid-year forecast for 2016/17 had identified ~£10m for rapid spend initiatives including the £1m award to the Wales Genomics Medicine Centre which had been approved by Strategy Board.

The year-to-date results were on track although there could be an increase in commercial fund income.

7. Research integrity and reproducibility update and annual report on research misconduct allegations 2015/16

Members noted the report and confirmed that the draft RCUK Narrative statement on Research Integrity 2016 and the draft MRC statement on Research Integrity and investigations into allegations of scientific misconduct for 2015/16 should be published when finalised.

8. Agenda for December joint Council/Strategy Board and Council business meetings
Members noted the draft agenda.