

# MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL



# 03A

Author: Simone Bryan

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## **Minutes of the Council Business meeting held at Chicheley Hall on 9 July 2019**

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**Present:**

<b>Council</b>	<b>Apologies</b>
Professor Fiona Watt (Executive Chair)	Dr Roger Highfield
	Professor John Iredale
Dr John Brown	Dr Mene Pangalos
Mr Richard Murley	Professor Charlotte Watts
Professor Jill Pell	
Professor Sir Munir Pirmohamed	<b>Head Office staff</b>
Professor Eleanor Riley	Dr Rob Buckle
Dr Graham Spittle	Ms Simone Bryan
Professor Irene Tracey	Professor Patrick Chinnery
Dr Louise Wood	Mr Hugh Dunlop
Dr Pauline Williams	Dr Katy Ingleby
	Dr Louise Leong
<b>UKRI Observer</b>	Mrs Lauren Merritt
Neil Phimister	Dr Declan Mulkeen
	Dr Frances Rawle
	Ms Susan Simon

### **1. Welcome and introductions**

Professor Fiona Watt welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Neil Phimister, Strategic Finance Business Partner, as the UKRI observer.

Professor Watt congratulated Professor Charlotte Watts on her Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George, and Dr Louise Wood on her Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

Apologies had been received from Drs Roger Highfield and Mene Pangalos, and Professors John Iredale and Charlotte Watts.

### **2. Register of declared interests**

Professor Watt reminded members to notify the secretariat of updates if their declared interests had changed.

### **3. Minutes of the Council meeting held on 7 May 2019**

Professor Watt updated members on actions arising from the May meeting: The Francis Crick Institute had submitted an Operating Plan as requested by Council, and Professor Eleanor Riley had agreed to chair the MRC remuneration committee.

The minutes of the Council business meeting were approved as an accurate record.

#### **3a. Matters Arising**

#### **3b. Updated Roles and Responsibilities of Council, Strategy Board and Management Board**

Professor Watt referred members to the updated roles and responsibilities of Council, Strategy Board and Management Board that now included the relationship with central UKRI. Council noted the update.

#### **3c. Council Rolling Programme for 2019/20**

Professor Watt referred members to the rolling programme covering the 2019/20 Council meetings and greater than one-year business cycle. Council noted the programme.

#### **3d. Council Self-Assessment**

Dr Frances Rawle introduced this item which informed Council of the main themes arising from the Council annual self-review and proposed actions to be taken forward in response to these. Members were asked to suggest to the office additional training or support for new Council member induction programme.

#### **3e. Council Objectives**

Dr Rawle introduced this item and presented Council with the objectives for the current year 2019/20, updated following discussion at the last meeting. Council approved the 2019/20 objectives.

### **4. Finance Report**

Mr Dunlop presented Council with an update on the year-to-date result to end of May 2019 and an update on Operating Expenditure (Opex) which covers all the MRC's Head Office costs and those back-office activities, such as Finance and HR, within the MRC's Institutes and Units.

Forecast pressures meant that there was no available headroom to fund additional posts in the new organisation design. A programme of work was undertaken over April and May to reduce forecast pressures, identify savings levers and prioritise all vacancies currently in UKRI (excluding Institutes and units). The situation will be continued to be monitored as we progress throughout the year.

### **5. Safety, security and resilience annual update**

Professor Watt asked Susan Simon to introduce this item. Ms Simon presented Council with a summary of the annual safety, security and resilience report covering a summary of the notable activities for the MRC relating to health and safety, business continuity, security and crisis

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management for the financial year 2018/19. Ms Simon highlighted that accident and near miss data show an ongoing trend of increased near miss reporting, demonstrating an increasingly positive safety culture, however due to lack of resource, there has been little change in how reports lead to the identification of unsafe causes and conditions and underlying / root causes. Incident data for the MRC London Institute of Medical Sciences (LMS) was low due to reporting through Imperial College London systems. A Health and Safety management priority over the coming year is to determine the reasons why incident investigation is not routinely completed, and to ensure that all incidents are investigated fully to determine root causes and corrective actions, before being closed.

Members raised concerns that the rising level of near miss reporting had not influenced the accident statistics. Questions were raised about where accountability for health and safety sits within MRC Institutes. Mr Dunlop clarified that accountability and oversight sits with Institute Directors and assurance is secured through the annual assurance programme. Members stressed the importance of Directors allocating sufficient resource to ensure the identification of underlying / root causes, and in addition, for LMS, that there be appropriate GDPR compliant procedures in place to ensure release of relevant incident information from Imperial College systems.

Richard Murley asked whether procedures were in place for managing a crisis and minimising the impact on business continuity and the MRC reputation. Ms Simon explained an incident management exercise was completed in April 2018 to rehearse decision-making in a scenario that affected one Head Office location while the incident management team was split across multiple locations, mirroring a real scenario. The exercise achieved the stated objectives, with minor changes to written plans completed. With changes to personnel in the incident management team, another exercise is planned for financial year 2019/20.

Ms Simon explained that the MRC is developing a 5-year strategic plan for Health and Safety and considerations for improvement include; regularly capturing incident causes, and a review of risk assessment and high hazard activities. Members requested to see the Health and Safety 5-year strategic plan once finalised and that in line with governance requirements there should a plan in place to evaluate the effectiveness of new Health and Safety strategy.

### **6. Appointment of new Research Board Chair**

Dr Buckle introduced this item and explained that the current Chair of the Neurosciences and Mental Health Board, Professor Patrick Chinnery, has taken up a new role at MRC as Clinical Director resulting in a new Board Chair needing to be appointed. Following interviews an offer has been made to Professor Paul Matthews, Head of the Division of Brain Sciences in the Department of Medicine of Imperial College, London. As part of the decision-making process, consideration had been given to constitution and expertise of the four board chairs and Strategy Board, and geographic location conflicts. Professor Paul Elliot, chair of the Population and Systems Medicine Board is also from Imperial College, but his tenure finishes in 2020.

Dr Buckle explained that all applicants were male and clarified that a number of suitable female applicants were identified, but none had chosen to apply.

Members questioned the extent to which Professor Matthews would be conflicted given his involvement in several MRC strategic investments. Dr Buckle explained that Professor Matthews has involvement in UK Dementia Research Institute and Dementias Platform UK and these conflicts of interest will be appropriately managed. Professor Watt commented that Professor Matthews has research interests spanning both basic and clinical science in neurodegeneration and a strong track record of conducting internationally leading-edge research across academia and industry.

It was noted that Council members affiliated with the Universities of Cambridge, Cardiff or Imperial potentially have an institutional conflict.

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The appointment was approved.

### **7. Updates from the Executive**

Professor Watt introduced this item and members noted the updates. The focus of discussion was on the MRC Strategic Review of Mouse Genetics process for decision-making and staff consultation at MRC Harwell. Dr Buckle updated Council on developments regarding the strategic review, ahead of discussions to be held at the September Strategy Board meeting. It was highlighted that Professor Paul Kaye and Anna Dominiczak would be visiting MRC Harwell in September to meet representatives of key groups and hold one-to-one meetings.

Members questioned whether the MRC's code of conduct specifies the conduct that is expected from its employees in these circumstances, and whether it was appropriate to use Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) during strategic reviews. Graham Spittle highlighted that in the private sector NDAs are commonly used during restructuring exercises. The office commented that the use of NDAs is not considered appropriate in the public sector. Members agreed on the importance of notifying staff upfront that strategic reviews may lead to restructuring. Members also commented on the importance of ensuring MRC investments continue to address strategic needs by responding to developments in the scientific landscape, and that this was important for the MRCs reputation and brand.

### **8. Draft Agenda for October Council meeting**

Dr Declan Mulkeen highlighted two items that should be added to the October agenda; an update on the MRC-led digital health report and a report on research board-based statistics.

### **9. Any other business**

Professor Watt requested two members volunteer to be interviewed as part of the Government Internal Audit Agency audit. Mr Murley and Dr Louise Wood volunteered.

### **10. Council private business**

Following the formal business meeting members had a private meeting.