

Visit of Dr Rachel Bishop
Newcastle University EPSRC Strategic Relationship Contact

Thursday 9th November 2017

Notes from the Visit

Industrial Strategy

- The EPSRC has introduced new posts linked to the industrial strategy. The post holders will be responsible for managing the EPSRC's input into making proposals for Industrial Strategy Challenge Funding.
- Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund competitions will operate to very short timeframes.
- The 11 areas proposed for 'wave 2' of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund are all still 'in play' until the Autumn Budget Statement (22nd November). The funding competitions for those selected will follow after the funders have had business cases formally approved in April 2018. Some "open and transparent" activities around this (eg sandpits, appointing leaders) are likely to take place prior to April, however, and, based upon this pre-work, the resulting calls for proposals are likely to close with very short deadlines after they are announced. Spend will then begin in September 2017 for 2.5 years. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion will be an important consideration.
 - Services 4.0
 - High Performance Low Energy Housing
 - Cheap and Clean Energy fit for our Future
 - Early Diagnosis
 - Mental Health
 - Healthy Ageing
 - Quantum Tech
 - Digital Manufacturing
 - Immersive Technologies
 - Low-Carbon Bio-Industry
 - Agriculture and Agricultural Productivity
- There is no update yet on what will happen with respect to wave 3 of the industrial strategy challenge fund. The Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund is currently due to continue until 2021 but this may be extended. This would have an impact upon wave 3.

Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs)

- An announcement on CDTs is anticipated soon.
- If CDT priority areas are decided, these will reflect the industrial strategy but there will not be a specific link.
- The EPSRC may have discussions with other Research Councils about co-funding, but the CDT exercise will remain an EPSRC competition and will not be a UKRI venture.
- The CDT call for proposals is likely to be issued in January 2018, with shortlisting of outline proposals in April 2018 and then a July deadline for full proposals. Students would then start in October 2018.
- The EPSRC's Strategic committees continue to debate whether or not priority areas will be defined for the CDT competition.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

- The Research Councils will retain autonomy once within the new UKRI model. The EPSRC is very keen to keep its identity and values such as transparency and proper consultation with the research community.

- The first two years of UKRI will be largely organisational change, rather than altering funding models/landscape. Any transformational change will take place after this time.
- Research areas that can demonstrate importance to society will stand the best chance of investment in a 'UKRI environment'.
- For cross-disciplinary programmes, peer-review like that used for current cross-council programmes such as Energy may be a possibility, but the process is unlikely to change rapidly. Sir Mark Walport is keen to build on previous successes such as the RUCK energy programme and will be working to identify inter/multi disciplinary priorities for UKRI. It is likely that a single research council will lead an activity, with interaction with the others.
- It is likely that UKRI will want to "do more with less", rather than funding "shiny new institutes", yet be very visible.

EPSRC Funding

- Newcastle University continues to perform well with respect to EPSRC funding, in particular in relation to the relative size of the organisation.
- EPSRC 'community led' (responsive mode) and challenge-led (strategic) funding will continue to be funded at a ratio of 60:40. There may be some year-on-year variation to this, depending upon commitments made.
- There is potential that an increasing proportion of strategic funding will be awarded through networks of researchers, rather than through calls for proposals.
- Ideas for emerging EPSRC priorities will be sought through the forthcoming new 'big ideas' approach.
- A competition for linking best-with-best international centres is due as a pilot in December. This is not part of the Global Challenges Research Fund. It will enable leading international research groups to collaborate and contribute to the EPSRC's delivery plan outcomes. Outline proposals will be due in May 2018. There is not yet any information on the budget for this.
- The EPSRC is currently reviewing its public engagement activity. It is likely that there will be increased funding for public-engagement activities in the future.

General Information

- There is no EPSRC institutional sponsorship planned for the future. It is unlikely that this funding model will be used again.
- The EPSRC does not yet have a strategy with respect to place since it funds based upon research excellence. It does, however, recognise the importance of place. Andrew Bourne is currently considering place in the context of regionality of EPSRC funding and industrial collaboration. He is considering whether research leaders are being attracted into the regions and whether the EPSRC can reinforce regional prosperity and help to demonstrate the role of research in a region.

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