

## IN CONFIDENCE

**MINUTES** of the BBSRC/EPSRC Synthetic Biology Oversight Group Meeting held on 29 April 2010 at The Honourable Society of Gray's Inn, London.

Those attending:-

### Panel Members

|                      |                              |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| Brian Johnson        | Chair                        |
| Katherine Bainbridge | Defra                        |
| Darren Bhattachary   | BMRB (items 5 to 7 only)     |
| Jane Calvert         | University of Edinburgh      |
| Jo Coleman           | EPSRC                        |
| Janet Cotter         | Greenpeace (from 12.15)      |
| Robert Edwards       | Durham University            |
| Laura Grant          | Laura Grant Associates       |
| Andy Hunter          | BMRB (items 5 to 7 only)     |
| Suzannah Lansdell    | Sciencewise                  |
| Emma Longridge       | BBSRC, Secretariat           |
| Patrick Middleton    | BBSRC                        |
| Kate Miller          | ESRC (for Dawn Woodgate)     |
| Lesley Paterson      | Royal Academy of Engineering |
| Helena Paul          | Econexus                     |
| Judith Petts         | University of Birmingham     |
| Susan Soulsby        | EPSRC                        |
| Bella Williams       | Laura Grant Associates       |
| Phillip Wright       | Sheffield University         |

### Apologies

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Ben Davis     | University of Oxford                           |
| Jackie Haq    | PEALS, University of Newcastle                 |
| Colin Pavelin | Department of Health (replacing John Connolly) |
| James Wilsdon | Royal Society                                  |

### 1. Chair's Update

Brian Johnson welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies for absence. He reminded the group that its remit is to oversee the process of the dialogue, and outlined the aim of this meeting as being an opportunity to help the group reflect on this process. It also provides an opportunity for the Group to share their thoughts with the Steering Group about how well the process conformed to the principles of the dialogue.

He also conveyed his thanks to the Group for their involvement with this process, for all of their input both at meetings and via email.

The Group's attention was drawn to item 9, 'Items to note' OG19 Research Council Funding Activity and OG20 Relationship between Dialogue Steering and Oversight Groups.

### 2. Minutes of the meeting held 3 February 2010

The minutes of the meeting held 3 February 2010 were APPROVED. It was noted that the Decision Register from the meeting had not been circulated with the minutes.

**ACTION: Research Councils to circulate the Decision Register.**

### Matters arising

Brian Johnson noted a comment minuted under item 6, 'Options for the dialogue', about the way that the dialogue has affected the academics involved. He felt this should be explored further and hoped it would be raised in item 8 of this meeting.

Brian Johnson guided the group through the actions from the last meeting. Most actions had been completed. BMRB and Laura Grant Associates own the data that they have generated and that participants contact information has been gathered such that the Research Councils can now keep the information. However, there were still concerns about whether or not the data obtained from the IML voting and the complete stakeholder interview transcripts would be stored and who might have access to them. **ACTION: Research Councils to clarify with BMRB how the IML voting data and stakeholder interviews will be stored.**

### **3. Risks of a dialogue around synthetic biology**

This item was covered in item 2. It was noted that it will be necessary to determine whether the listed risks were averted and that some of the risks will be ongoing, the Steering Group should be made aware of these. **ACTION: Research Councils to review the current risk register and prepare a modified register for the next Steering Group meeting.**

### **4. Research Council Update**

Emma Longridge gave a brief update of planned activities around the dialogue.

7 May - BMRB will be running a workshop with participants to allow them to shape the recommendations.

20 May - Steering Group meeting to begin to formulate their advice to the Research Councils about a way forward.

24 May – BBSRC, EPSRC and NERC are running a session at the British Science Association Science Communication Conference using this and the Geoengineering dialogue to illustrate the challenges of upstream engagement.

14 June – event to launch the report and begin its dissemination. The Oversight Group will, of course, be invited formally in due course and were asked to suggest names of other potential invitees. **ACTION: Oversight group to suggest names of invitees for report launch event.**

The report will be digested over the summer by BBSRC's BSS and EPSRC's SIP Panel who will formulate advice for a meeting on 8 October of the Research Council's Chief Executives who will be looking to agree how a way forward with the recommendations.

Judith Petts noted that she is going to an EPSRC Responsible Innovation meeting at which she will raise the dialogue. There was a question about how the BBSRC/EPSRC networks in synthetic biology can be kept informed of the dialogue's results and how they can be helped to use them. The Research Councils have already begun the process of talking to the Networks about the project and hope to generate summary pamphlets to disseminate relevant findings to this and other interested groups. There may also be opportunities to connect the Networks with participants from the dialogue who have expressed an interest in further dialogue projects. Brian Johnson noted that advising on how this process of embedding could work will be the role of the Steering Group. The Group questioned whether there is a media strategy around the launch and were informed that there is.

### **5. Presentation by BMRB**

BMRB presented emerging findings and recommendations from the public dialogue workshops and the Stakeholder interviews.

### **6. Presentation by Laura Grant Associates**

Laura Grant presented a summary of their evaluation of Workshops 1-3.

## 7. Questions and Answers

There was an opportunity for the Oversight Group to ask BMRB and Laura Grant Associates questions about their reports. There was some discussion about specifics of the ideas that were explored in the workshops. It was felt that the participants influence over the third workshop had been less than everyone had hoped it could have been. It was also noted that whilst the RAEng pilot dialogue indicated that there could be differences in public attitudes towards synthetic biology depending on whether an organism was modified or created 'from scratch' this was not echoed in this dialogue (although this was not specifically probed for either).

Laura Grant had presented a word cloud of key words participants would use to describe their experience. One of the words used was 'knowledge' and this led to some discussion about the fact that there was a sense that some people had used the internet between workshops to try to gather information but that this information was not readily available. It would have perhaps been helpful to guide participants to useful resources.

There was also some further exploration of what the dialogue findings mean for the way that the Research Councils administer funding and consider social and ethical issues.

## 8. Reflection and feedback – a mini workshop

Laura Grant and Bella Williams led a workshop to explore the strengths and successes as well as the weaknesses and challenges of the dialogue process. Discussions were captured by the Oversight Group during the afternoon and will be written up separately by Laura Grant Associates. **ACTION: Laura Grant Associates to write up discussions from the reflection workshop. ACTION: Research Councils to circulate the feedback from the workshop to the Oversight and Steering Groups.**

### Summary of actions discharged

**ACTION: Research Councils to circulate the Decision Register - COMPLETE**

**ACTION: Research Councils to clarify with BMRB how the IML voting data and stakeholder interviews will be stored.**

BMRB will anonymise the data and hold it on file for 6 months after project closure. After this time all transcripts and raw data will be deleted and the project archived. All files will be backed up, so a backup copy of data is held on a server in the US for 7 years. This is a secure site. Restricted material such as transcripts may be kept for longer if there is a legitimate business reason that does not compromise the confidentiality of the research. This would need to be agreed in writing with BBSRC/EPSC.

**ACTION: Research Councils to review the current risk register and prepare a modified register for the next Steering Group meeting - COMPLETE**

**ACTION: Oversight group to suggest names of invitees for report launch event - COMPLETE**

**ACTION: Laura Grant Associates to write up discussions from the reflection workshop**

These were presented to the Steering Group at their meeting on 20 May 2010. They are also available in the evaluator's interim evaluation report available at [www.bbsrc.ac.uk/syntheticbiologydialogue](http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/syntheticbiologydialogue)

**ACTION: Research Councils to circulate the feedback from the workshop to the Oversight and Steering Groups - COMPLETE**