

IN CONFIDENCE

**SUBJECT: MINUTES OF THE BIOSCIENCE FOR SOCIETY STRATEGY PANEL, 28
JANUARY 2011**

**MEETING: BIOSCIENCE FOR SOCIETY STRATEGY PANEL
19 MAY 2011**

ACTION

The Panel is invited to:

APPROVE the minutes as a true record of the meeting

**IN CONFIDENCE
DRAFT**

MINUTES of the Bioscience for Society Strategy Panel Meeting held on 28 January 2011 at 1 Victoria Street, BIS, London.

Those attending:-

Panel Members

Sir Roland Jackson (Chair)
Professor Robert Dingwall
Dr Richard Dyer OBE
Dr Sandra Knapp
Dr Gene Rowe
Professor Vincent Walsh
Professor Kenneth Boyd
Wendy Barnaby
Dr Erinma Ochu
Professor Brian Ilbery
Professor Christine Hauskeller
Dr Jane Calvert

BBSRC Office

Mr Paul Gemmill
Dr Monica Winstanley OBE
Dr Patrick Middleton
Dr Emma Longridge

Apologies

Dr Tom MacMillan
Mr Steven Walker

Chairman's Welcome and Introduction

1. Sir Roland welcomed the Panel members, especially the new members and invited everyone to introduce themselves. Mr Gemmill took the opportunity to emphasise the importance of the BSS Panel to BBSRC, particularly the diversity of viewpoints that its members bring to discussions.

Round table of issues (standing item)

2. Sir Roland raised DIY biology as a potential issue that the Panel may wish to consider further. There was agreement that it would be valuable to explore the evidence about the extent to which DIY biology is happening. Dr Knapp highlighted the contribution that amateur science can make to research. Dr Calvert pointed out that the situation in the US and UK is likely to be quite different with different regulatory environments making it more difficult to carry out certain kinds of experiments outside of the laboratory in the UK. She also raised the connected issues of open source science and intellectual property in the context of DIY biology.

ACTION: The Secretariat agreed to explore the evidence for how much DIY biology might be happening in the UK.

Minutes of the last meeting

3. Ms Barnaby requested that Science and People in paragraph 2.1 be changed to People & Science

A miss-spelling of discrete was noted in paragraph 5.6
With these changes the Panel approved the minutes.

Role of BSS

4. Sir Roland introduced this paper, highlighting the role of BSS as BBSRC's critical friend. He talked about the important difference that BSS can make to BBSRC and our scientific community by influencing policy and the process of science funding. He also spoke about the need to consider the way that BBSRC fits into a bigger picture within RCUK and the rest of the UK as well as globally.
5. There was agreement that the two main proposals in the paper, to have longer meetings and set up working groups for particular topics, should be implemented. Discussion around the table agreed 12 noon to be a suitable start time and that meetings could run later.
6. Dr Rowe and Professor Ilbery raised that working groups may need to meet as well as communicate via email. Professor Hauskeller raised that there would need to be a clear way for working groups to bring their discussions back to the whole Panel to make decisions and thus make sure the diversity of views on the Panel are represented in decision-making.
7. Dr Ochu suggested that online working would be useful and Mr Gemmill noted that this has worked in other instance with BBSRC committees but that there are security considerations to working in this way.

ACTION BBSRC to investigate online working for BSS

8. Professor Dingwall and others highlighted that longer meetings should not mean that they are held less frequently.

Horizon scanning – next steps

9. Sir Roland noted the two main points for discussion under this paper: how the various BBSRC Panels can be better linked together and whether BSS should set up a group to discuss the idea of nature and naturalness. Sir Roland invited Mr Gemmill to update the Panel on upcoming changes to BBSRC's Panels.
10. Mr Gemmill outlined the rationale for reorganising the strategy panels to better reflect BBSRC's strategic priorities and to create more nimble panels with fewer members and more discursive meetings. Mr Gemmill noted that the role and form of Strategy Advisory Board (SAB) is also under consideration.
11. There followed some discussion about how BSS currently feeds into SAB and that it would be valuable if BSS's minutes were passed to SAB or if BSS were able to suggest agenda items for SAB to discuss. It was also felt that communications from SAB to BSS would be welcomed.
12. Professor Walsh suggested that BSS could go and meet other Panels and give a short presentation to make sure that they are aware of BSS and the work that they do.

ACTION: BSS would like to ask each of the new panels the question 'What are the three major social challenges biology is likely to face in the next years?' so that their comments can be reflected back to BSS and the summarised comments from all the Panels, including from BSS, can be shared with them.

13. Dr Ochu suggested having all the Panels meet at least once per year to share their activities. Mr Gemmill agreed that it may be useful to have certain Panels meet on the same day, as happens with funding committees. Professor Hauskeller suggested that cross-Panel working groups may sometimes be useful.
14. There was also some discussion about how Council members are appointed and whether there would be any scope for influencing the membership of Council.

ACTION: Secretariat to investigate how other Research Councils' Councils are appointed.

15. Sir Roland invited Professor Boyd to introduce the discussion on naturalness. Professor Boyd raised ideas about whether people consider themselves to be part of or separate from nature when they talk about something being unnatural and why unnatural is considered bad when nature can often be bad too. Although the idea of something being unnatural and therefore bad can seem incoherent it keeps coming up during dialogue around new technologies. Perhaps science is moving faster than moral thinking and so this is our way of articulating our unease? If we can work through that unease we could find an equilibrium of understanding. Natural can be a euphemism for what is normal and what is right, fitting or appropriate (and this will vary for individuals). It can be a question of emotion rather than rational consideration.
16. There was recognition from the Panel that this is not a question where they will be able to reach a conclusion. Dr Calvert noted that making things so that they are 'unnatural' can be beneficial as they won't be able to interbreed in the wild and can be patented (unlike things from nature).
17. Professor Hauskeller commented that talking about nature and natural could be about control and avoiding decision-making, about putting a boundary between what we can and can't control.
18. Sir Roland pointed out that the discussion had become broader than the issue of nature and could be linked in with the development of public engagement training by talking about exploring unease and encouraging people to articulate their ideas and concerns beyond 'it is unnatural'.

ACTION: Establish a working group to explore the idea of naturalness (perhaps in the context of the strategic priorities).

Review of grant ethical monitoring

19. The Panel strongly felt that whole process appeared bureaucratic and that it would be important not to add further bureaucracy as a result of this review. Professor Ilbery noted that there needed to be more open-ended questions rather than the current mechanistic approach. There was agreement that although some of the considerations can be tick box (whether the appropriate regulations being adhered to) others should not be.
20. Professor Hauskeller suggested that this is about the kind of science that BBSRC funds and so this consideration should happen at committee level as well as individual scientists.
21. Dr Dyer noted that few grants are raised with BSS and Sir Roland commented that dipstick testing as suggested in the paper would help understand whether this means there is a problem with the system.
22. Professor Walsh pointed out that there need to be immediate consequences for not considering these issues and that EU funding includes consideration of ethical issues and public engagement as part of the scoring process.
23. Dr Calvert advocated using the impact statement to prompt consideration of ethical and social issues as this would allow for more discursive answers and Dr Knapp agreed that this could also minimise administrative burden on applicants.
24. Professor Boyd noted that there are also ethical issues with not funding research that could be considered risky.
25. Professor Hauskeller noted that these issues should also be included in consideration of studentships.
26. Sir Roland proposed that a working group be set up to refine the ethical and social concerns form and this was agreed to.

ACTION: Establish a working group to refine the ethical and social concerns form.
ACTION: Establish a system for 'dipstick testing' of funded grants as a method of regularly reviewing the ethical monitoring process.

A new model of public engagement for bioenergy

27. The panel were broadly supportive of the new model but noted a number of points to be considered as it develops. Ms Barnaby questioned whether engagement carried out in this way could be representative. Dr Rowe queried how evaluation of the activities would be done. Professor Hauskeller noted that whether or not there was bias would be difficult to evaluate but that the participants may be well placed to tell.
28. Dr Ochu emphasised that it needed to be clear that the results of the engagement would go somewhere so that there is more of a pull for participants than the current push. It was felt that care needed to be taken to ensure there was not more of an emphasis on one way broadcast-type engagement than on two-way approaches akin to dialogue.

Global food security and GM

30. Sir Roland highlighted BBSRCs leadership in the Global Food Security (GFS) partnership. He invited the Panel to feedback on the GM animals position statement via email and prompted them to discuss how BBSRC might engage with the debate around GM in the future.
31. Ms Barnaby noted that it is difficult to avoid the polarisation and emotion that GM engenders. She described a project in Sweden to create a discussion tool where pairs of people, with differing views, were asked to talk and to create a piece of writing together outlining where they agreed or disagreed and their reasoning. She also said that it will be important to frame the questions in a broader sphere, such as 'how do we feed the world?', 'GM may be one answer because...'
32. Professor Boyd commented that he found the GFS website useful. He also commented that the 2008 food price spike may have been linked to increasing interest in biofuel and so BBSRCs thinking on GFS and bioenergy should also be linked. Professor Ilbery also noted that food security is more than just producing more food.
33. The panel expressed that they are keen to work with the GFS steering groups including the Communications and Public Engagement Group and with BBSRCs new GFS Strategy Panel, once their structures become clear.

Embedding public engagement: pathways to impact and training

34. The Panel had a number of suggestions for a potential training course. Dr Knapp noted that the Excellence with Impact competition has highlighted that people sometimes need encouragement to think broadly about what constitutes public engagement but has also highlighted some good examples of engagement activities that people have carried out. Dr Rowe commented that social science skills would be useful to look at, things such as human behaviours, risk perception and how to bring a group together would help researchers run more successful activities. Dr Calvert noted that it would be important to make clear the criticisms of the deficit model of engagement.
35. There was then some discussion about who should/would attend such training. Dr Dyer asked whether it should be obligatory. Dr Winstanley pointed out that perhaps not everyone is well suited to engaging the public but Professor Walsh argued that most people are able to engage in some way and that because they are spending tax payer's money they should be made to justify that to the public.
36. Dr Knapp suggested setting up a mentoring strand to the training, an idea which the Panel endorsed.

37. Professor Dingwall talked about separating out ethics and social science and public engagement practice and suggested online training as a potential way forward.
38. Dr Ochu outlined the approach of the Manchester Beacon to this problem where they look to break down the barriers to people doing public engagement, they try to make it easier for people to do engagement.
39. Sir Roland proposed that a working group be set up to develop a format for public engagement training.

ACTION: Establish a working group to develop a format for public engagement training.

Update: Synthetic biology dialogue

40. Sir Roland reminded the Panel that they must hold BBSRC to account to ensure that the actions they committed to in their response to the dialogue report were carried out. He noted that he had written to Professor Lord Robert Winston to maintain the link between BSS and EPSRC's SIP. He requested that a more detailed update be given at the next meeting including details of progress so far towards completing ongoing tasks.
41. Professor Dingwall requested further information about EPSRC's Responsible Innovation approach.

Update: Institute Assessment Exercise

42. Dr Middleton provided the Panel with some further details about the Institute Assessment Exercise.
43. Dr Dyer asked whether BSS would be able to see the Director's introductions.
44. Professor Boyd corrected his conflicts of interest to include Roslin. Dr Calvert also declared conflicts with Roslin and Dr Rowe declared conflicts with the John Innes Centre.

Communications and science in society programme

45. Sir Roland noted that this paper should be taken in the context of recent upheaval and uncertainty.

AOB

46. Dr Ochu enquired whether the move to the RCUK Shared Services Centre provided an opportunity more alignment between Research Councils. Mr Gemmill agreed that the opportunity was there but that new systems will need to be in before more changes can be introduced.