

IN CONFIDENCE

MINUTES of the Bioscience for Society Strategy Panel Meeting held on 18 January 2012 at RIBA, 66 Portland Place, London

Those attending:

Panel Members

Sir Roland Jackson (Chair)

Ms Wendy Barnaby

Professor Kenneth Boyd

Professor Robert Dingwall

Dr Richard Dyer

Professor Mark Hankins

Professor Christine Hauskeller

Professor Brian Ilbery

Dr Sandra Knapp

Dr Tom MacMillan (present for items 1 and 3 via telephone)

Dr Erinma Ochu

Dr Gene Rowe

Dr Patrick Sinnett-Smith

BBSRC Office

Dr Paul Burrows

Mr Paul Gemmill

Mr Matt Goode

Dr Patrick Middleton

Dr Emma Longridge

Apologies:

Professor Jane Calvert

Professor Russell Foster (observer from BBSRC Council)

Chair's welcome and introduction

1. Sir Roland welcomed the Panel to the meeting, especially new members Professor Mark Hankins and Dr Patrick Sinnett-Smith, and invited a round table of introductions.
2. Sir Roland extended BBSRC's thanks to those Panel members who took part in Institute Assessment Panel visits: Ms Wendy Barnaby, Professor Robert Dingwall, Dr Sandra Knapp, Dr Gene Rowe. Mr Gemmill extended his thanks to Sir Roland, who also took part in these visits.
3. At their September 2011 meeting BSS discussed the issue of potential dual uses of BBSRC-funded research. Sir Roland updated the Panel that BBSRC's position statement (a joint statement with MRC and the Wellcome Trust) on this subject is being updated and Dr Longridge will ask for BSS's input on this in due course.

Global Food Security Programme

4. This item was taken before item two to allow Dr MacMillan to take part remotely. Mr Goode reminded the Panel that the Global Food Security Programme (GFS) is a multi-partner programme and that BBSRC is leading on the Communications and Public Engagement elements of the Programme, on behalf of all the organisations involved.
5. There is a Communications and Public Engagement Group (CPEG) and BBSRC is represented by Professor Giles Oldroyd. Through Professor Oldroyd, BSS were asked to comment on the GFS Communications and Public Engagement Strategy. CPEG and the

Programme Coordination Group have continued to refine the Strategy and a final version will be produced soon.

6. Under that strategy, there are two main streams of work for public engagement (alongside the communication elements of the strategy). The first is an exhibition to be used for public engagement which will be launched at the Big Bang Fair in March. CPEG have been assisting in the drafting of the exhibition and BSS will be made aware of the content as it nears completion.
7. The second element of the public engagement work is a dialogue project. This will be carried out in two phases. Given that GFS represents a broad and complex range of topics, more understanding of public views is required before embarking on an in-depth dialogue project. The first phase will therefore be a scoping attitudinal study to identify areas for further dialogue. An Oversight Group has been formed for this project (including Dr MacMillan and Professor Alan Irwin as members), an invitation to tender is in development and the first meeting of the Oversight Group will be on 23 January 2012.
8. Given his involvement in the Oversight Group, Sir Roland invited Dr MacMillan to share his views. Dr MacMillan outlined concerns about the invitation to tender that the Oversight Group are currently discussing. He noted the risks of combining the attitudinal work with the second dialogue phase and so framing the attitudinal work as dialogue. He also noted a need for transparency, it should be clear how GFS is able to change as a result of the dialogue. Is the Governance of the programme prepared to receive the findings? Is there 'room for manoeuvre' to shape the programme in terms of where allocated money might be spent or are funds already committed?
9. Mr Goode reassured BSS that the invitation to tender will not be issued until the Oversight Group have had their concerns addressed, time is being taken to get this right. He outlined the structure of GFS, highlighting that dialogue findings will be presented to CPEG, the Programme Coordination Group and the programme's Strategy Advisory Board. The ITT states that these groups will make a response and significant individuals on those groups will help to ensure that the results are carefully considered. Mr Goode also clarified that while individual funders may need to stay within their remits, the partners cover a wide area and funding is not fully committed, allowing some flexibility to respond to the dialogue. Unilateral or multilateral responses, outside of the programme, may also be appropriate responses.
10. The Panel then discussed the need for honest information provision as part of the dialogue process. There was support for using the phase one work as a mapping exercise to, at least in part, understand areas where the public have limited awareness of the issues and may require more information. Some topics such as famine, food price spikes and interest in local and regional foods may already be in the public consciousness but joining everything into a global picture may be less familiar to the public.
11. Sir Roland asked whether the concerns raised are something that BSS should look to act on. Dr MacMillan said that a commitment from GFS to respond to the dialogue findings was helpful, he is reassured that the programme will be listening. He felt he would still like to know more about what might actually be done as a response and that there is still some vagueness about the money available to GFS and how it is going to be spent.
12. Sir Roland asked that this be kept on BSS's agenda.

ACTION: Secretariat to include an update on GFS and dialogue around GFS at BSS's next meeting, including a response to Dr MacMillan's point about what a response to the dialogue findings might look like

Round table of issues (standing item)

13. Professor Ilbery noted that he provides a link with BSS by sitting on the Sustainable Bioenergy Outreach Group.
14. Sir Roland drew the Panel's attention to a recent press statement about a review by the United States' National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity (NSABB) of plans to publish work on the transmissibility of H5N1 avian influenza virus. Due to the potential of the work to be used for harmful as well as beneficial ends, NSABB recommended that the publications

should not include methodological details that 'could enable replication of the experiments by those who would seek to do harm'. Sir Roland asked how BBSRC would respond if a similar situation arose in the UK.

15. Dr Middleton outlined the mechanisms that BBSRC has in place for identifying ethical and social issues and for ensuring the research is conducted in line with legal and regulatory frameworks.
16. Grant applications also need to comply with BBSRC's research data sharing policy. The policy recognises that under certain circumstances (i.e. proprietary data) sharing data may be inappropriate. Should national security issues be identified then a one-off special exemption to the requirements of the policy may be granted. This decision would be made in consultation with a range of external bodies, including BSS.
17. What this means is that BBSRC take a case by case approach and if there was a genuine issue of e.g. national security BBSRC might well take a similar approach to NSABB with respect to publication. This is a timely reminder to BBSRC to ensure that the recent synthetic biology call with DSTL is monitored carefully and ERU are already working closely with Research Group colleagues on this.
18. Professor Dingwall noted that this type of issue is an international challenge given that work may be published outside of the country it was carried out in – in whose jurisdiction is it to decide whether or not something should be published?

Rapid items

Minutes of last meeting

19. Subject to a small change to the minutes, they were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

Matters arising

20. Dr Longridge provided an update on current requests for funding for public engagement activities on responsive mode grants. Funding is being requested but only for small amounts of money. Dr Dyer suggested that it would be valuable to hear from Committee Chair's about how the committees approach such requests.

ACTION: Secretariat to ask Committee Chairs for an account of how they deal with requests through responsive mode for funding for public engagement activities.

21. Sir Roland suggested that an action to pose a question from BSS to other panels be 'parked'.

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.

22. Dr Middleton noted that Duncan Eggar would be invited to a BSS meeting when an appropriate opportunity arose.
23. Dr Middleton reported that BBSRC intends to do a complete evaluation of the Institute Assessment Exercise process once it is complete, including lessons learned and best practice.
24. Dr Middleton updated the Panel on the RCUK 'review of dialogues' work. Involve have been appointed as contractors and work is underway. There will be a review of dialogues to date and development of resources for supporting future RCUK dialogues.

ACTION: Secretariat to circulate details of the RCUK 'review of dialogues'

25. Professor Dingwall suggested that BSS might be interested to see a digest of the comments returned to Institutes as part of the Institute Assessment Exercise in relation to public engagement, in order to gain an overall picture of public engagement at Institutes.

ACTION: Secretariat to provide BSS with a digest of IAE comments in relation to public engagement as well as any feedback to assessors that was received from Institutes.

26. Mr Gemmill noted that Council will look at IAE in relation to upcoming spend at Institutes at its next meeting. In light of the recent governance changes at Institutes, members of Executive Group will now have partnership meetings with Institutes based around the themes of the IAE, representing a more active and continuous relationship with Institutes.
27. Sir Roland requested that paragraph 58 of the minutes be noted by the Panel and requested that a note on this subject be prepared for the next BSS meeting.

ACTION: Secretariat to prepare a paper in relation how BBSRC will be able to respond in a year's time to a letter such as that discussed in BSS28/2011.

Terms of reference refresh

28. Dr Longridge introduced this paper noting that with recent discussions within BSS about their influence within BBSRC and recent changes to BBSRC's strategy advisory structure, it seemed an appropriate time to revisit BSS's Terms of Reference.
29. Professor Hauskeller noted that the original terms were more powerfully worded than the suggested new terms and the Panel agreed that more clarity was needed. She also commented that 'fulfilling' would be a better word than 'discharging'.
30. Professor Ilbery noted that public attitudes should not be missed from the new terms and Dr Ochu noted that the embedding role of BSS should not be lost; its role in shaping and guiding and advising BBSRC.
31. Professor Hankins and Professor Dingwall questioned what is covered by 'responsible' research and suggested it should be clear that this does not include research integrity.
32. Dr Dyer highlighted that BSS is not in a position to 'hold BBSRC to account' but is there to challenge BBSRC and act as a critical friend. Professor Dingwall suggested that BSS has a role to challenge BBSRC to explain its decisions.
33. Sir Roland requested that the new terms be carefully matched to the new structure.
34. The Panel liked the references to BSS's case by case involvement in BBSRC business and the important horizon scanning function that the Panel has.

ACTION: Revise the Terms of Reference in light of the Panel's comments and circulate for sign off via email.

Citizen Science

35. Dr Middleton introduced this paper as trying to define what citizen science could look like for BBSRC, emphasising that citizen science should lead to better research. He asked the Panel to clarify principles for BBSRC to fund citizen science and criteria for assessing what a good citizen science project would look like.
36. The Panel spent some time discussing this and concluded that citizen science actually comprises two types of activity with a continuum in between, and that the name may not be helpful. One extreme might better be described as crowd sourcing, engaging the public to help gather or analyse large data sets. At the other extreme, citizens are engaged in forming research questions and work with researchers on a level footing to answer those questions.

ACTION: Secretariat to further explore the two definitions of citizen science and whether/how BBSRC might respond to them.

37. Public engagement may be part of crowd sourcing to a greater or lesser extent and it would be important to emphasise the public engagement aspect of any citizen science call.

Professor Dingwall suggested that such projects could be encouraged from researchers as a way to fund research not feasible under the regular system.

38. The phrase 'non-scientist' should be replaced by 'non-specialist'. It should be recognised that amateurs have a great deal to offer science, both in terms of knowledge and enthusiasm, and should not be prevented from leading a project.
39. Dr Ochu referred to an EPSRC project and noted that there are examples of members of the public encountering a problem, collecting the data and generating an answer at a local level – but can this be scaled up? The questions and 'need' should come from the citizens.
40. Dr Dyer asked how BBSRC would deal with someone asking for funding for this type of project now and Professor Hauskeller talked about how an expert can be defined.
41. The Panel advised guarding against people inventing problems to solve and against requiring applicants to incorporate citizen science in project applications. Professor Hauskeller also highlighted issues of ownership and patents that would have to be thought through.
42. Dr Ochu suggested running a sand pit to explore what might already be happening in this area and possible ideas for future projects. Mr Gemmill noted that this might allow BBSRC to identify some types of project that could be funded through responsive mode and others that might require a standalone process to enable funding to happen.

Items for Discussion

BBSRC's Strategy Advisory Structure

43. Dr Burrows introduced this paper and took the Panel through the changes that are being made both to the organisation and composition of the Strategy Panels and to the structure of Council meetings. He highlighted that the changes themselves are not dramatic but will require a new way of thinking. He noted that, where their expertise is appropriate, it would be valuable to have Chairs or Vice Chairs of Panels who are also Council members.
44. Sir Roland emphasised the special role that BSS has in that its work cuts across the work of the whole of BBSRC. He invited BSS to consider how horizontal interactions across panels could be facilitated, how BSS could be represented on the Research Strategy Panel and how BSS can convey its work to Executive Group and Council.
45. BSS made clear the importance to BBSRC of BSS remaining an independent panel and therefore retaining a Chair who is independent of Council. They welcomed regular attendance of BSS meetings by a member of Council but asked that this should happen by invitation as an observer as is the case currently rather than by a member of Council being an official member of the Panel.
46. Dr Ochu asked what impact BSS has had in recent years. Mr Gemmill referred her to Annex I which shows that BSS's recent impacts. He noted that the new structure can help formalise matters so BBSRC can make sure that its influence is felt, and that BSS is influenced by the other Strategy Panels.
47. Dr Dyer noted that downward communication from Council will also be important. Dr Burrows noted that Council subgroups could include more members who are not on Council.
48. Sir Roland prompted the Panel to consider how they can interact with the other domain and sector panels. Dr Knapp noted that there are clear links between the work of the domain panels which will facilitate good linkage between those panels but that the disconnect is riskiest between the domain and the sector panels. Dr Burrows noted that sector panels are currently developing sector strategies. The Panel agreed that public engagement should be included in all of these strategies and that BSS should be engaged in their drafting at the earliest possible stage.
49. Mr Gemmill noted that there will soon be an Extranet for use by the Strategy Panels and he suggested that BSS could agree members to be formal links for each panel to keep BSS abreast of agendas and activities of those panels, with the option of attending meetings as appropriate.

ACTION: BSS should have an independent chair, not a member of Council, but BSS would welcome a Council member as an observer, by invitation, at BSS meetings

ACTION: BSS to be represented on the Research Strategy Panel

ACTION: Secretariat to ask for expressions of interest for BSS members to act as the link person for each domain panel (apart from the Research Strategy Panel) and each sector panel, their role will include receiving early sight of proposed agendas to identify potential issues relevant to BSS

ACTION: BSS would like to help the sector panels shape any sector strategy documents they might produce. BSS would like to be involved at an early stage to allow their views to be taken into account whilst the strategy is being developed.

Responsible Innovation

50. Sir Roland introduced this paper highlighting the current activities that were outlined in the paper that could fit under Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) as well as the questions posed in the paper about how BBSRC might do better in this area.
51. Professor Dingwall emphasised that RRI should not result in more regulation that strangles innovation and suggested that point vii) might be better phrased to say that BBSRC have delegated responsibility to those who know best (although there may be an opportunity to remind them of their responsibilities).
52. Professor Boyd commented that it is not a bad thing for procedures to evolve, things should not be over rationalised and it is not possible to be perfect so it is more important to strive do the best that can be done.
53. Ms Barnaby suggested that BBSRC's approach is sporadic and that linking activities would be beneficial, perhaps a top down approach would help. Sir Roland agreed that current activities do cover the RRI agenda but that a light touch framework might give BBSRC an opportunity to consider its position in the round. Dr Ochu suggested that this might also be an opportunity to assess whether the activities that are underway are working.
54. Dr Knapp suggested focussing on openness and Professor Boyd highlighted the difference between responsible and accountable – can BBSRC give reasons for its decisions?
55. Mr Gemmill noted that the new strategy advisory structure will help BSS test BBSRC on how responsible it is being. Dr Burrows suggested engaging Council with the RRI agenda over a Council dinner.

ACTION: Explore engaging Council with RRI by making it the topic of a Council dinner.

56. Professor Hauskeller noted that the words 'responsible innovation' are very applied and doing research just because it is interesting should not be ignored.
57. Sir Roland summed up by saying that the concept of RRI is difficult to grasp and apply effectively but that it is part of BSS's whole business.

Bioenergy public engagement update

58. Dr Middleton introduced this paper drawing the Panel's attention to the newly reconstituted Sustainable Bioenergy Outreach Group.
59. Professor Ilbery summarised the first meeting of that group. He said there was an involved discussion at the meeting but the Group identified that behaviour change, interdisciplinarity and different scales from local to global were important topics for bioenergy.
60. Sir Roland commented that the paper presented a good, comprehensive package of work and asked what the next steps were. Dr Middleton said there was a need to focus on particular issues and there was an action on BBSRC to arrange a workshop of industry and NGO representatives to help identify particular issues. He also highlighted the business case that has been submitted to Sciencewise for a dialogue project and the tools that are being developed for that work. BBSRC are engaged with DECC on this project and are keen to

make links in both directions between their programmes of public engagement. Seminars are being organised to engage policymakers with current research on bioenergy.

To note

Embedding considerations of ethical and social issues

61. Dr Longridge introduced this paper outlining the current progress on implementing the new ethical and social concerns form that BSS signed off after its last meeting.
62. The Panel agreed the aims and objectives outlined in Annex III, to be applied as the new form is implemented. The Panel were happy not to push for cross-council involvement at this stage.

BBSRC Public Engagement training

63. This working group met immediately prior to the full BSS meeting. Dr Knapp summarised the changes that the working group had suggested be made to the course details. The course will be run as a taster for early career researchers to pique people's interest. It will not seek to provide all of the more practical support may be needed at a later date. Adjustments were made to the emphasis and order of some parts of the course. Suggestions were made to include pre-course reading and a task as well as the idea of having a resource for people to take away as a 'things to remember about public engagement'. An important message will be that evaluation is a part of public engagement. She noted that selection criteria may need to be developed should interest in the course exceed supply.
64. Professor Dingwall began a discussion about the gap between PhD students, post-docs and senior management who do understand the public engagement agenda, and middle managers who seem to struggle more and who are not well catered for in terms of training and support to become involved with public engagement.
65. Dr Ochu noted that the new RCUK Catalysts are embedding public engagement and training and Professor Boyd echoed the thought that BBSRC should be enabling others rather than needing to do things themselves.

ACTION: BBSRC to proceed with running a public engagement training course

ACTION: Public engagement training working group to help BBSRC to reflect on how it can help middle level researchers appreciate and do public engagement

Communications and PE programme

66. The Panel welcomed this paper as a useful overview of ERU's activities. There was some discussion of how the Unit's activities are evaluated. As an example Mr Goode discussed the way that ERU's media work is assessed.

ACTION: BBSRC to circulate to BSS the next media evaluation that is completed

67. Mr Gemmill suggested that BBSRC successfully securing more funding for UK bioscience is an excellent measure of success and that recent funding announcements are, at least in part, directly due to ERU activities.

AOB

68. Dr Ochu advised the Panel of her new role at the University of Lancaster.
69. A paper was tabled to discuss how BBSRC can feed into Nuffield Council on Bioethics' strategic review. Sir Roland will attend a meeting on behalf of BBSRC on 23 January 2012. The Panel made a number of useful comments that will be incorporated into a briefing document for Sir Roland.

ACTION: BBSRC to summarise comments and forward to Sir Roland as a briefing document