

OFFICIAL

MINUTES of the Bioscience for Society Strategy Panel Meeting held on 11 January 2013 at MRC, 1 Kemble Street, London

Those attending:

Panel Members

Sir Roland Jackson (Chair)  
Ms Wendy Barnaby  
Dr Jane Calvert  
Dr Richard Dyer  
Professor Mark Hankins  
Professor Christine Hauskeller  
Professor Brian Ilbery  
Dr Sandra Knapp  
Mr Patrick Mulvany  
Dr Erinma Ochu  
Dr Gene Rowe  
Dr Patrick Sinnett-Smith  
Dr Kate Weiner

BBSRC Office

Mr Paul Gemmill  
Mr Matt Goode  
Professor Doug Kell (items 1-4)  
Dr Emma Longridge  
Dr Patrick Middleton

Apologies:

Professor Kenneth Boyd  
Professor Russell Foster (observer from BBSRC Council)

**Item 1**

**Chair's welcome and introduction**

1. Sir Roland welcomed new members Dr Kate Weiner, University of Sheffield, and Patrick Mulvany, Practical Action/UK Food Group, and initiated a round table of introductions.
2. Sir Roland reminded BSS that, as they will be aware from the dialogue work around Basic Bioscience Underpinning Health, BBSRC is currently in the process of a light-touch, mid-term review and refresh of BBSRC's current Strategic Plan. This is not intended to result in a change in BBSRC's overall strategic direction; BBSRC has had endorsement and support for the strategic vision as laid out in the current document. However, it is timely to consider progress and to update the document. There is an opportunity for BSS to input into the refresh over the next few months. Owing to the nature of their work, other strategy panels have discrete sections of the document to comment upon. BSS have a different remit and the Panel's input is likely to be useful over a larger proportion of the document.
3. Sir Roland noted that there was not a specific opportunity for BSS to discuss the refresh of the Strategic Plan at this meeting but it would be helpful if the Panel could bear the refresh in mind during the meeting, and advise how they feel they can most usefully input over the next few months, perhaps via the Extranet.
4. Sir Roland also gave an update on the Council dinner that he attended to discuss 'Ethical and Social Issues affecting the BBSRC and the Importance of Public Engagement to

BBSRC'. Professor Kell responded highlighting the range of skills and expertise that Council members draw upon in their roles.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to circulate to BSS the approved note of the Council dinner

## **Item 2**

### **Minutes of last meeting**

5. The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

#### *Matters arising*

6. It was asked how BBSRC keeps a watching brief on DIYBio. Dr Middleton outlined how the Panel Secretariat, as part of their roles at BBSRC, maintain an awareness of activities relating to all of BSS's remit, including DIYBio.
7. Several actions, below, were not addressed in the meeting papers and will be carried over to subsequent meetings.

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

**ACTION:** BSS to receive a summary of comments from Institutes in response to comments received around public engagement during the IAE.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to brief Committee Chairs on dual use (once the funders' joint dual use policy has been updated).

## **Item 3**

### **Round table of issues**

8. Dr Rowe highlighted that the Food Standards Agency 'Consumer attitudes to GM labelling' study included public engagement/dialogue (<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/research/ssres/foodsafetyss/gm-labelling/> )
9. Dr Sinnott-Smith highlighted the current process to establish a Concordat on openness in the use of animals in research, which BBSRC is involved in and which includes a public dialogue element.
10. Professor Dyer raised, and the Panel discussed, the potentially negative effects of hyperbole around certain areas of science, including the undermining effect on the integrity of scientists and the cumulative negative effect on society's perception of scientists. It was noted that researchers need enthusiasm and motivation to do what they do, and that they must also justify their work to the public, which may come across as hype.
11. Correction to draft minutes:  
Mr Mulvany noted the DEFRA Secretary of State's speech at the Oxford Farming Conference particularly the Minister's comments about the potential of GM technologies and asked who in BBSRC is providing him with information about other options. He also asked if JIC had provided information or evidence, directly or indirectly, to the European Commission process leading to the Communication on the amalgamation of many seeds regulations, and if so, whether he could see their submission.
12. Dr Ochu highlighted some relevant events:
  - UCL extreme citizen science lecture on 22 January
  - Creating Impact Case Studies for REF - NCCPE - 16 January, Bristol
  - Tackling ethical issues in community based participatory research - 28 February, Durham university
  - Engaged Future consultation (universities) - NCCPE event, 20 February, London

13. Mr Gemmill highlighted a number of BBSRC activities not mentioned elsewhere in the papers including BBSRC-relevant aspects of the Autumn Statement, the current Triennial Review of Research Councils, closer working between BBSRC and NERC on topics such as soil, water, GFS and landuse, and finally the imminent publication of the Government's Agri-tech strategy.

**Nuffield Council on Bioethics 'Emerging biotechnologies' report**

14. Dr Calvert gave a comprehensive introduction to the report, having been involved in writing it. She noted that the report does not focus on ethical issues, as Nuffield reports usually would, but takes a step back and considers why and how emerging biotechnologies research is funded at all.
15. Emerging biotechnologies can be characterised by their ambiguity, uncertainty and transformative potential which means they can be shaped by their context and can be pushed or pulled in different directions. The report therefore discusses the need for public discursive ethics, openness and inclusion, candour and a willingness to consider other possible solutions.
16. The report raises concerns that the impact agenda encourages hyperbole without good evidence. A diversity of values should influence research policy, beyond advice from science and industry (which assumes, but is not explicit about, certain values being important) so that social and not just economic benefits are realised.
17. The Panel discussed the idea of 'lock in' where one option is pursued, perhaps without consideration of other options. This included discussion of the role of Intellectual Property Rights in 'lock in'. Professor Hauskeller noted we can also become 'locked in' in our expectations so that when technologies do not fulfil their original promises e.g. stem cell therapies, we do not see the other impacts that they do generate e.g. developments in cancer and fertility as a result of stem cell research.
18. BSS also discussed the challenge that BBSRC's remit presents, to fund science (including biotechnologies as well as other kinds of science) rather than social science, making it more difficult to take holistic views on options to pursue. Here the role of interdisciplinarity was highlighted, integrated research programmes that involve multiple Research Councils from the beginning.
19. Dr Weiner raised the question of whether the success of past technologies is reviewed. This type of review is done periodically at BBSRC, managed in house with community input. These reviews are published but Mr Gemmill noted that they may not be widely known.
20. The Panel questioned whether BBSRC governance involves a wide enough range of voices and whether industry should be balanced by other viewpoints.

**Item 4**

**Strategy Panel Updates**

Basic Bioscience Underpinning Health

21. The Panel noted that although key priorities for BBUH, aging and epigenetics, were not specifically named in the public dialogue understanding the effects of getting older and of the environment on our bodies were.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to circulate further information on the International collaboration work with ESRC, mentioned in BBUH's update

Bioscience for Industry

22. BSS received further input from Mr Goode about the content of the discussion around public engagement and communications at the last meeting of BSI. The Panel encouraged the Secretariat to consider how BSS and public engagement can support the themes of BSI.

#### Bioscience Skills and Careers

**ACTION:** Secretariat to ensure that the work of BSC and BSS is joined up, BSC should be aware of the Public Engagement Training that BSS has had input to

#### Exploiting New Ways of Working

23. BSS noted ENWW's Digital Organism work and commented on the potential ethical issues, and hyperbole, that this topic could raise.

#### Food Security

24. Dr Middleton attended this Panel meeting and gave an update from his own perspective. He noted that the FS panel had identified BSS as one of the most important Panels to link with. The Panel agreed that the likely importance of food security in the coming year and the importance of how the issue is framed (broadly rather than a narrow focus on e.g. biofortification), would make this a useful partnership.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to develop the link between BSS and the FS panel

**ACTION:** Secretariat to find out more about the shared BBUH/Food Security Panel work on Diet and Health

#### Industrial Biotechnology and Bioenergy

25. Professor Ilbery gave an additional verbal update on his attendance at the last IBBE meeting highlighting key topics raised in the BSS-led discussion around energy, waste, water, GM, 'how science is done', public perceptions of the oil industry.

#### Research Advisory Panel

26. Dr Calvert noted that the first meeting had been a familiarisation meeting. The Panel is large and Dr Calvert is the only non-bioscientist. Discussions of public engagement tend to be framed in terms of generating enthusiasm and increasing public awareness.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to work with the Secretariats of other Panels to produce a paper for BSS's May meeting to define the role of the 'link' person and scope opportunities for reciprocal visits

**ACTION:** Secretariat to explore possibilities for update content to be a bespoke update and summary of activity, rather than a copy of minutes

**ACTION:** Secretariat to provide a summary of the answers given to BSS's question 'What are the three major societal challenges biology is likely to face in the next years?' including how the Panels approach these issues.

### **Item 5**

#### **Institute Public Engagement Embedding Plans**

27. Dr Middleton introduced this item. BBSRC Council requested that strategically funded institutes prepare a document outlining their plans for embedding public engagement across their organisations. BSS were asked to comment on the plans on behalf of Council. BSS's discussion has been written up separately so that feedback can be shared with Institutes.

### **Item 6**

#### **Citizen Science and co-design**

28. Dr Longridge introduced this paper highlighting the upcoming funding call for crowdsourced projects and asking the Panel to focus on the questions in the paper around public involvement with science.
29. BSS welcomed the funding call for crowdsourced projects and made a number of comments on the process and content of the call. These included discussion about the implied top down relationship between researcher and crowd which leaves less scope for the crowd to be able to feedback and be fully involved; this will be something to be aware of when applications are assessed.
30. BSS also highlighted that there are a number of ethical challenges associated with involving members of the public in crowdsourcing projects, none of which are insurmountable but which do need to be considered at the outset of the project, and should be embedded in the initial applications. BBSRC may wish to consider providing on-going support for successful applicants.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to feed BSS's comments back to colleagues leading the crowdsourcing call

31. BSS then discussed the concept of public involvement in science and whether and how BBSRC might encourage/support this kind of work by its community. The Panel noted that BBSRC would need to be very clear about the purposes of engaging the public in this way and what would be gained that could not be achieved by another mechanism. Dr Weiner highlighted that NIHR are evaluating the benefits of public involvement in their research which might provide useful insight.

#### **Item 7**

##### **Basic Bioscience Underpinning Health Public Dialogue**

32. Dr Middleton introduced this paper with input from Dr Rowe, who conducted a light-touch evaluation of the dialogue. The process of the dialogue had been good, with some minor lessons to learn, such as how time spent on different aspects was balanced during the day.
33. Dr Middleton outlined that the dialogue findings had been positively received by BBSRC Science Group and will be discussed by the Basic Bioscience Underpinning Health Strategy Panel at their next meeting. The expectation is that BBSRC will reflect on the key findings of the dialogue and draft responses to them, including summarising current and potential future activities related to the topic areas. Dr Middleton also noted that the dialogue had been a useful tool for illustrating to BBSRC colleagues what dialogue is and what it can achieve.
34. BSS welcomed the dialogue as having been a useful exercise and encouraged BBSRC to consider running dialogue projects around strategy in the future. However, the Panel cautioned against putting too much weight on findings from a small cohort and suggested that future projects might look at engaging more people, perhaps at different locations.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to prepare and discuss with BSS BBSRC's response to the dialogue

#### **Items to Note and rapid items**

##### **Item 8**

##### **Proposal for a horizon scanning meeting**

35. The Panel agreed that a longer Panel meeting in May would be valuable and agreed to consider the details of this via email.

36. Mr Gemmill agreed to initiate high level discussions with Institute directors about public dialogue, perhaps through Executive Group meetings with Directors<sup>1</sup>.

**ACTION:** Mr Gemmill to initiate high level discussions with Institute directors about public dialogue

**Item 9**

**GFS Communications and Public Engagement update**

37. Mr Goode gave an oral update including updating the Panel on progress with the GFS public dialogue work carried out in 2012. A meeting was held in November 2012 with GFS advisory bodies from which a multi-layered approach was proposed where dialogue is encouraged and supported at a strategic level, at the level of initiatives and the level of individual GFS-supported researchers. A Working Group is being set up to develop these initial ideas before seeking sign off from the GFS Programme Co-ordination Group.
38. Sir Roland requested that this item be kept on the agenda at subsequent BSS meetings so that the Panel can feed in as required.

**Item 10**

**Update on communications, public engagement and other activities**

39. The Panel noted this paper and Sir Roland thanked the Secretariat, commenting that the update is helpful.

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<sup>1</sup> Since the BSS meeting, Sir Roland has made a presentation to Institute Directors about public dialogue