

**IN CONFIDENCE**

**SUBJECT: MINUTES OF THE BIOSCIENCE FOR SOCIETY STRATEGY PANEL  
30 JANUARY 2014**

**MEETING: BIOSCIENCE FOR SOCIETY STRATEGY PANEL  
20 MAY 2014**

**ACTION**

The Panel is invited to:

- i. **APPROVE** the minutes as a true record of the meeting
- ii. **DISCUSS** any matters arising

## **Minutes of the last meeting**

### **IN CONFIDENCE**

## **Minutes of the Bioscience for Society Strategy Panel meeting held on 30 January 2014 at Westminster Central Hall, London.**

Those Attending:

### **Panel Members**

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

### **BBSRC Office**

Professor Jackie Hunter  
Mr Paul Gemmill  
Mr Matt Goode  
Dr Patrick Middleton

### **Apologies**

Professor Joanna Chataway  
Professor Russell Foster (observer from BBSRC Council)

## **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTON**

1. Mr Gemmill updated the Panel and covered the following:
  - BBSRC has appointed a new Chief Executive, who will join the meeting later. Prof. Jackie Hunter has a mix of business and academic expertise and is a supporter of openness.
  - Funding allocations for the coming year are not yet agreed, leading to some uncertainty in the short term.
  - BBSRC and all Research Councils are undergoing a number of reviews, including the triennial review and a 'deep-dive' review into communications.
  - BBSRC has awarded three Synthetic Biology Research Centres (SBRCs) today with contribution from EPSRC.
  - This year is BBSRC's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and BBSRC is running a programme of activities to mark the year.

2. In response to Mr Gemmill's update the Panel raised a number of points.
3. Sir Roland, as a member of the review team for the SBRC's, complimented the running of the review panel and noted that the approach of the grant applications to ethical, legal and social issues (ELSI) was mixed. Sir Roland noted that the ELSI aspects of the review were not what decided funding and suggested that, in the future, a larger cohort of reviewers for these aspects is used (recognising the complications with conflicts of interest in a relatively small field).
4. Dr Calvert noted that, in her experience, reviewers not qualified to comment on social science aspects of a joint bid often did so to the potential detriment of the social science work. Prof. Hauskeller suggested that there was still an issue with some scientists feeling that social scientists were there to provide a service for the natural sciences. The Panel agreed that there was a need for reviewers with specific ELSI expertise to review those aspects of interdisciplinary bids.

## **Minutes of the last meeting**

5. The Panel accepted the minutes of the last meeting as an accurate reflection of their discussions.

## **Strategy Panel Updates**

6. The Panel discussed the updates from other strategy advisory panels (SAPs).

### **Bioscience for Health Strategy Advisory Panel (BfH)**

7. Prof. Hankins noted that, besides refreshing of the strategy in this area, there was little to interest BSS. Dr Middleton informed the panel that BBSRC were carrying out a small, rapid public dialogue around food, nutrition and health to help inform the strategy refresh.

### **Bioscience for Industry Strategy Panel (BSI)**

8. Dr Sinnett-Smith noted that the update was more thorough and informative than past updates and highlighted that the boundary between public engagement and knowledge exchange was blurred. He also noted that the BSI definition of stakeholders seemed narrowly restricted to business.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to provide BSI stakeholder map for next BSS meeting.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to explore the PE/KE boundary with colleagues in BSI secretariat.

9. Dr Sinnett-Smith also noted that there was little information about the BSI SAP on BBSRC's website.

### **Bioscience for Skills and Careers Strategy Panel (BSC)**

10. Dr Ochu had not yet been introduced to the Panel. She offered her position as the link person between BSC and BSS to other BSS Panel members.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to forge closer links between BSC and BSS.

11. Sir Roland noted that there was nothing in the BSC note about openness or public engagement. Dr Weiner sought clarification on what a 'vulnerable subject' is, and Prof. Knapp informed the Panel that it included subjects such as taxonomy where there is a skills gap due to the low number of researchers in the field. Dr Ochu noted that the work of the Panel was not very strategic and focussed on skills for industry without considering why people may drop out of science.

### **Exploiting New Ways of Working Strategy Advisory Panel (ENWW)**

12. Prof. Hauskeller attended the last meeting of the ENWW Panel and found it very interesting. She presented BSS's work on public engagement and ELSI and explored the Panel's view on the ethical review processes. Prof. Hauskeller reported that the

Panel had a long discussion about skills and how to ensure a smooth transition between generations of researchers. Prof. Hauskeller suggested that perhaps there should be some mandatory training for scientists around ELSI and similar topics.

13. Dr Calvert asked what the ENWW Panel meant by 'open innovation' and Prof. Hauskeller suggested that the Panel did not have clear definition but it brought together many things including big data, skills, engagement and international connections.

#### **Food Security Strategy Advisory Panel (FS)**

14. Mr Mulvany thanked the Secretariat for linking him up with the FS SAP Secretariat. He noted that BSS is never mentioned in the FS SAP updates.
15. Mr Mulvany highlighted three items from the FS SAP update of relevance to BSS. First, FS SAP is looking into nutritional enhancement in foods – Mr Mulvany noted that this could be achieved without using GM techniques. Second, FS SAP has set up a sub-group on sustainable intensification and Mr Mulvany has been invited to become a member. Third, Mr Mulvany drew the Panel's attention to an upcoming international research programme on nitrogen in crop production which raises questions on where the focus of will lie – exclusively biotechnological or also including other aspects such as soil science or mixed planting?
16. Mr Mulvany, spurred in part by his recent visit to the John Innes Centre, raised a wider point in that he feels researchers are not always exposed to a wide range of views and options and this can limit their thinking when considering which strategies to employ to solve particular challenges. This sparked a short discussion on scientific culture. Ms Barnaby agreed that she had experienced similar issues when talking to some researchers and Prof. Knapp agreed that open discussions were essential but that did not mean that consensus would be reached or people should be expected to change their views or actions. Other members raised the role that BBSRC as a funder can play in shaping scientific culture and the behaviour of the community.
17. Mr Mulvany urged the Panel to prepare for the visit of Professor Benton at the next BSS meeting in May.

#### **Industrial Biotechnology and Bioenergy Strategy Advisory Panel (IBBE)**

18. Prof. Ilbery could not make the most recent meeting of the IBBE SAP but Sir Roland attended in his place.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to ensure BSS members linked to other panels are aware of meeting dates

19. Prof. Ilbery noted that the BBSRC Sustainable Bioenergy Outreach Group had been disbanded to be replaced by a formal IBBE SAP subgroup with a similar remit.
20. Sir Roland commented on the peer review process for the IBBE Catalysts, noting that the office was receptive to considering ELSI and to bringing in broader expertise to the review process.

#### **Research Advisory Panel (RAP)**

21. Sir Roland noted a number of items for interest to BSS from the most recent RAP meeting, including the increasing internationalisation of research; BBSRC success in securing capital funding; and four strategic think pieces (on openness; how genotype, phenotype and the environment interact; single cell biology; and predictive health). In a short discussion, the Panel queried how the successful capital funding was being strategically and appropriately allocated, and noted that other Panels had also discussed how genotype, phenotype and the environment interact.

## Global Food Security communications and public engagement update

22. Mr Goode introduced this oral item. He outlined how the public engagement strand of work was moving forward, with the senior GFS decision-making group agreeing a series of next steps: revising the communication and engagement strategy to take account of the public engagement work in 2012; setting up a standing public panel; and building a network of GFS champions. Mr Goode noted that progress was slow due to GFS being a multi-agency programme and the Secretariat's desire to keep all partners on board.
23. Dr Calvert asked which partners were less keen to move forward with the public engagement aspects of the programme. Mr Goode replied that those with existing policies are concerned that the public engagement elements may conflict with policy positions. Mr Goode noted that work was needed to explain that public engagement is a softer process and could be helpful to policymakers.
24. Mr Mulvany asked whether GFS were aware of the recent Global Strategic Framework of the UN Committee on World Food Security and whether DFID were engaged, noting that the context was around concern from poorer countries that rich countries are pushing a particular agenda. Mr Goode replied that DFID were a partner in GFS and suggested that such policy questions would be best put to Prof. Benton at the next meeting.

**ACTION:** Mr Goode to raise with the GFS Champion the issue of rich countries pushing a certain agenda onto poorer countries – and that this is not in line with the Global Strategic Framework of the UN Committee on World Food Security.

## Round Table

25. Dr Calvert raised awareness of the Vilnius Declaration (Horizons for Social Sciences and Humanities) whose principles resonate with the openness aspirations of BBSRC.
26. Prof. Hankins noted the recent TV report on the use of animals in research.
27. Ms Barnaby noted that the University of Cambridge had adopted synthetic biology as a strategic research initiative programme with the Centre for Science and Policy.
28. Mr Yorke drew the Panel's attention to an *Economist* article around scientific practice noting that 'uninteresting' science is very important – for instance soil science.
29. Prof. Ilbery noted that Horizon2020 is launching.
30. Dr Ochu noted that AHRC have 'cultural engagement fellows' which may be an interesting model for BBSRC to explore

**ACTION:** Secretariat to exploring bringing the AHRC 'cultural engagement fellows' to the next meeting

31. Dr Pickersgill noted that a recent US bioethics commission may be relevant to BBSRC.
32. Mr Mulvany echoed Mr Yorke's point around soils and noted the recent Oxford Real Farming Conference, at which a draft agro-ecology (Food Security) bill was launched. Mr Mulvany also noted that there appeared to be moves within the EU to reconsider the precautionary approach to regulation.

## Openness around the use of animals in research

33. Dr Middleton introduced this paper and Dr Sinnett-Smith, who has been involved in creating the openness concordat, commented that it was nearly in a condition which would allow most of those engaged to sign up to it.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to circulate the published version of the statement.

34. The Panel questioned what would change as a result of the concordat. Dr Sinnett-Smith noted that there will be an annual report of progress and a formal review in three years' time. Ms Barnaby suggested that BBSRC send the concordat to its research community.
35. Dr Pickersgill suggested that, in practice, a commitment to increased openness may end up being pushed down to PhD students to fulfil. This sentiment was echoed by others. Although Prof. Hankins suggested that HEIs are taking this seriously as it is the institution that is making the commitment. Specific communications training will also be required.
36. Prof. Ilbery noted that some of the concordat's wording appears to ignore the value of two-way dialogue. Prof. Hauskeller suggested that the concordat should open up debate and create new pathways for accountability. Dr Ochu noted that there was no mention of the 3Rs or animal welfare and suggested that it would be sensible to open up conversations with institutions around the power that we have over other species.
37. Mr Gemmill informed the Panel that the recent exposé by BUAV of mis-practice at Imperial College London has led BBSRC to commit to communicate the lessons learnt to the research community. Prof. Hankins and Dr Sinnett-Smith recommended reading the Brown Report of this incident.

## **BBSRC: an Open Organisation**

38. Dr Middleton introduced this paper. Mr Gemmill outlined that Professor Hunter (BBSRC's recently appointed Chief Executive) was supportive of this work. He noted that there were a series of straightforward steps that could be taken relatively quickly, such as open Council meetings or the timely publishing of Panels' minutes. Mr Gemmill was pleased that openness had impetus within BBSRC, though more work was needed to develop a shared organisational understanding of what it means in practice. Mr Gemmill highlighted that two Council members were engaged through membership of the working group.
39. Sir Roland noted that RAP was very supportive of the concept and highlighted that openness draws on such things as responsible research and innovation but also goes beyond it. Dr Calvert suggested involving EPSRC and the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, particularly as she felt it needed to include a normative, public good framing.
40. Dr Ochu encouraged BBSRC to ensure that openness results in some practical changes and is not simply a talking-shop. She encouraged BBSRC to consider developing its approach in a more open manner and to take part in activities with organisations that are already practicing openness, for instance Mozilla and the Open Data Institute.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to explore how BBSRC can take a more open approach as it develops its thinking on openness.

41. Mr Mulvany sparked a Panel discussion on the openness of meeting minutes and Panel papers. Mr Mulvany noted that he found BBSRC minutes difficult to interpret at present. BSS had a discussion on the complexities around full disclosure – including its potential to stifle people's views and contribution to discussion.

42. Sir Roland suggested that there should be a presumption of openness but that this needs to be experienced in practice.
43. Prof.Hunter joined the meeting.
44. Prof.Hunter introduced herself and outlined that she has a background in large pharmaceutical companies and has done much public engagement around the use of animals in research. She is also an academic and has worked closely on open innovation programmes. Referring to the discussion on openness, Prof. Hunter stated that BBSRC should be as open as possible.

## **Joint funders' statement on dual-use research**

45. Dr Middleton introduced this paper. Ms Barnaby asked what action will be taken to share the statement.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to find out the dissemination plans for the statement and what expectations to act there are on the research community.

46. Dr Pickersgill noted that the proposed statement championed self-governance and questioned if this was appropriate.

**ACTION:** Dr Pickersgill to send Secretariat names of others with whom the funders may want to consider consulting in the development of this statement.

47. Mr Mulvany suggested that more thought should be given to how controversial or awkward results are published.

## **Bioenergy**

48. Dr Middleton introduced this paper. Sir Roland noted that the reports could be considered relevant across BBSRC's remit.
49. The Panel discussed the reports and noted that those engaged were not representative and that the sample was skewed. While this may be a failing, the reports still had value. The Panel recommended that BBSRC should in future:
  - Undertake more systematic stakeholder analysis before engaging.
  - Note the gap in what the organisers thought, at a high level, versus what the public participants thought.
  - Note that public input is often more useful at a policy level rather than research prioritisation.
  - Reflect on the outputs of the RCUK Review of Dialogues to validate findings.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to produce a reflective account and summary of the process for the next meeting.

## **Ethical Monitoring**

50. Dr Middleton introduced this paper. Sir Roland, reflecting on his experience as an assessor for the Synthetic Biology Research Centre applications, suggested that the research community are misinterpreting the purpose of this step in the application process and that the word, "ethical" may be the issue. Following discussion, the Panel endorsed Prof. Hunter's suggestion to consider the value of example answers to guide applicants. The Panel also agreed that the free-text box should be

compulsory. Prof. Hauskeller noted that the wording in the guidance notes is not easily accessible.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to review how to provide guidance to grant applicants on filling in the ELSI section of the grant application form.

## **Update on communications and public engagement**

51. There were no comments on this paper.

## **Any other Business**

52. Prof. Hankins noted the recent BBSRC story on reindeer eyes and suggested that BBSRC should be more open about the use of animals in research in this press release.

## ANNEX 1

### ACTION LIST

Action	Progress	Comment
<b>ACTION:</b> Secretariat to provide BSI stakeholder map for next BSS meeting	On going	
<b>ACTION:</b> Secretariat to explore the PE/KE boundary with colleagues in BSI secretariat	On going	
<b>ACTION:</b> Secretariat to forge closer links between BSC and BSS	On going	Dr Knapp has agreed to be the BSC link
<b>ACTION:</b> Secretariat to ensure that BSS members linked to other Panels are aware of meeting dates	On going	Back-office procedures in place
<b>ACTION:</b> Mr Goode to raise with the GFS Champion the issue of rich countries pushing a certain agenda onto poorer countries – and that this is not in line with the Global Strategic Framework of the UN Committee on World Food Security	Complete	
<b>ACTION:</b> Secretariat to exploring bringing the AHRC ‘cultural engagement fellows’ to the next meeting	Not complete	No agenda time in this meeting
<b>ACTION:</b> Secretariat to circulate the published version of the statement	Complete	
<b>ACTION:</b> Secretariat to explore how BBSRC can take a more open approach as it develops its thinking on openness	Complete	Oral update possible during meeting
<b>ACTION:</b> Secretariat to find out the dissemination plans for the statement and what expectations to act there are on the research community	On going	
<b>ACTION:</b> Dr Pickersgill to send Secretariat names of others with whom the funders may consider consulting in the development of this statement	Complete	
<b>ACTION:</b> Secretariat to produce a reflective account and summary of the process for the next meeting	Complete	See paper BSS15/2014
<b>ACTION:</b> Secretariat to review how to provide guidance to grant applicants on filling in the ELSI section of the grant application form	On going	Suggest re-establishing working group