Institute/Swindon Office 'Concordat on Communications and Public Engagement'

This concordat sets out the roles and responsibilities of BBSRC Swindon Office and institutes receiving BBSRC institute strategic programme grant (ISPG) funding, regarding communications and public engagement activities. Its aims are to:

- Enable BBSRC Swindon and the institutes to work together consistently and synergistically to achieve added value and impact;

- Develop ways of working that more closely resemble BBSRC's interactions with foci of BBSRC funding in universities, such as BSBEC and the ISB centres.

The concordat is based on the principle of cooperation, support and alignment of activities around shared goals, within which is recognised the need for flexibility for BBSRC Swindon Office and individual institutes to meet demands of their respective 'communities'.

1. Ways of working

1.1 Topics covered in an institute's communication and public engagement activities should reflect the proportion of institute funding derived from BBSRC (these activities should be regarded as integral to work supported by ISPG and other BBSRC funding streams). Swindon Office's activities should reflect the proportion (approx. one-third) of BBSRC research funding invested at institutes.

1.2 BBSRC will fund and resource institute participation in any large or 'quick turnaround' projects led by BBSRC, which may be considered additional to 'routine' institute-Swindon Office collaboration, and for which institute resources are unavailable or inadequate.

1.3 Swindon Office's External Relations Unit will provide advice and support on publicising BBSRC-supported work if requested to do so by institutes, and will seek appropriate specialist advice from institutes for its activities.

1. 4 The Bioscience for Society (BSS) strategy panel remains BBSRC's major source of independent advice on societal issues around the biosciences. It will continue to oversee and advise on these aspects of BBSRC-supported research at institutes.

1.5 Swindon Office will continue to provide access to specialist support for schools liaison to institutes and other major recipients of BBSRC funding, through the BBSRC-funded Inspiring Young Scientists Coordinator specialist services which may be accessed by institutes.

2. High profile activities, policy positions and societal impact

2.1 To enable all interested parties to optimise input to, and benefits from, high profile activities, Swindon Office and institutes will work closely together. Institutes should notify Swindon Office in advance of planning high profile activities that draw upon expertise and input from researchers supported by BBSRC funding, and which are relevant to BBSRC's role as the principal public funder of UK bioscience (such activities would include, for example, visits by and meetings with Ministers and senior government officials, parliamentary engagement, prestigious public lectures, national media briefings). Swindon Office will notify institutes of its plans for high profile activities, and opportunities for institute representation within RCUK-led activities.

2.2. Scientists are encouraged to communicate their research widely and to contribute to public dialogue and debate, where it is expected that they will express scientifically valid views on any topic in which they are qualified to do so. They may express personal opinions, but in doing so must make it clear that they are commenting in a strictly personal capacity. When commenting on behalf of BBSRC/or a BBSRC research programme, or in any way representing their institute, they should take into account the need to respect:

- Any social and wider context of the research
- BBSRC's (or any other funder's) position or policies*
- Their institute's position or policies*

* They should become acquainted with such policies to the extent that they are in the public domain (see for example www.bbsrc.ac.uk/organisation/policies/position/public-interest.aspx).

2.3. To help BBSRC and institutes discharge their responsibilities to address ethical and other societal issues arising from research, institutes should alert Swindon Office as soon as they become aware of any potential issues. These might include, for example, use of BBSRC-funded expertise/facilities at an institute for contract research by commercial or other external funders. Working with the institutes, Swindon Directors can then decide whether or not BBSRC/Swindon Office involvement is appropriate. (See also 1.4 and 4.2). Swindon Office and institutes should regularly consider and identify mitigation strategies in areas of potential concern, for example, possible misrepresentation by third parties.

3. Media relations and "branding"

3.1 Swindon Office and institutes will continue to work together on joint media releases – for example in BBSRC announcements that include one or more institutes, or institute announcements of success in BBSRC schemes to support knowledge exchange.

3.2 Swindon Office will alert institutes in advance of BBSRC media releases being circulated to the media. Where the content is particularly relevant to institutes, every endeavour will be made to give at least 2 days notice.

3.3 Institutes should make all reasonable endeavours to provide draft media releases that refer to work funded/activities supported by BBSRC* to Swindon office at least 2 days in advance of circulation to the media (either for immediate release or under embargo). In exceptional circumstances, where it is impossible to meet this requirement, institutes should notify Swindon Office immediately of the topic of the forthcoming release, and provide details as soon as possible thereafter.

* Acknowledgement is required for all types of BBSRC support, not solely ISPGs. For example, acknowledgement should be given for knowledge exchange and commercialisation activities, and for international partnerships, resulting from BBSRC-funded schemes)

3.4 Institutes' corporate communications and public engagement (e.g. websites, publications, media releases, public displays, schools events, scientific meetings and conferences, open days and community events), should explicitly state the position of the institute within the BBSRC community. Scientific posters, conference papers, and public exhibition posters that describe work funded/supported by BBSRC must acknowledge the source of funding.

i) For use in textual narratives:

This research is funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)

This research is funded by xxxx, using facilities funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)

ii) On web home page, notepaper, signage etc: (i.e. where space is limited):
{Institute name} receives strategic funding from the BBSRC (logo)

iii) on media release boilerplates/ Editor's notes, on covers/frontispieces of corporate publications, and on display posters etc:
{Institute name} receives a total of £xxM in strategic programme grants from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council

4. Researchers at institutes

4.1 Research leaders funded through ISPGs are expected to address ethical and other societal issues associated with their research, in a way comparable to that of BBSRC grant holders at institutes and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

4.2 Research leaders funded through ISPGs should be willing to contribute when requested to communications and public engagement activities led by BBSRC. These research leaders should also contribute to some form of public engagement activity (equivalent to approximately 2 days a year), in line with the conditions for BBSRC grant holders; and they should encourage widespread participation of institute staff.