

MINUTES of the Bioscience for Society Strategy Panel Meeting held on 7 May 2010 at RIBA, London.

Those attending:-

Panel Members

Professor A Irwin, Chair
Ms W Barnaby
Professor D Burke CBE
Professor R Dingwall
Dr B Johnson
Dr T MacMillan
Dr R Dyer
Sir Roland Jackson
Dr S Knapp
Dr G Rowe
Professor L Archer

BBSRC Office

Mr P Gemmill
Dr P Middleton
Dr M Winstanley OBE

Apologies

Professor V Walsh
Mr S Walker
Professor K Boyd
Professor D Kell

1. Horizon scanning workshop

1.1. A report of the horizon scanning workshop can be found at annex 1. The workshop was introduced by Prof Irwin as an opportunity to pause, look at the 'big picture'; and revisit the focus of BSS's work.

2. Chairman's introduction and report

2.1. Prof Irwin thanked the panel for their input into the BBSRC Policy for Knowledge Exchange and Commercialisation and noted that BSS's comments had been incorporated into the document.

ACTION: The secretariat was asked to clarify the role of the BBSRC Bioscience for Industry Strategy Panel

3. Round table of issues (standing item)

3.1. Sir Roland informed the panel that the various BIS science in society groups, including the Science for All group chaired by Sir Roland, have produced reports and action plans. The Science for All group is currently undertaking follow-up work such as working on typologies of public engagement (details online: <http://interactive.bis.gov.uk/scienceandsociety/site/all/>).

3.2. Other items raised by panel members include: the Nuffield Bioethics Council's enquiry on new approaches to bioenergy; the Food Standards Agency's dialogue

work around GM; an ESRC funding call for projects on science and maths; and work being undertaken by the Royal Society entitled, “Unpicking the impact of brain research” (<http://royalsociety.org/Unpicking-the-impact-of-brain-research>).

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2010

- 4.1. The panel suggested the following changes to the minutes which when made would make the minutes a true record of the meeting:
 - Dr Dyer noted that he did not formally register a conflict of interest as stated in 4.2. BBSRC office indicated that they would take this issue forward within BBSRC on an individual and case-by-case basis to ensure maximum fairness to all.
 - Point 8.3; Dr Rowe asks that the word, “activity” is inserted at the end of the second sentence so that it reads, “...conflated public engagement and social science activity”
- 4.2. Dr MacMillan noted that care should be taken to ensure the minutes are an accurate record of the meeting

5. Update: Institute Assessment Exercise (IAE) – Public engagement

- 5.1. Dr Winstanley introduced this paper by outlining the future plans for the IAE and asking if BSS members would be happy to volunteer to be involved in visiting the institutes as part of an assessment panel. Dr Winstanley also proposed that BBSRC office might compile a draft scoring grid by which BSS could assess institutes’ public engagement activities for the panel to consider at its next meeting in September.
- 5.2. Sir Roland noted that the FAQ’s were appropriate and that it was important that the scoring system was able to assess institutes’ justification for differing balances of activities in particular institutes (i.e. schools work versus dialogue).
- 5.3. Dr Archer supported the proposal for a scoring grid and noted that 5.3 of Annex I (‘Criteria for Assessment’) should be further developed and ‘unpicked’ in drafting the grid. Dr Rowe agreed and noted that it would be necessary to have more than four elements in the grid.
- 5.4. The panel raised the possibility of sharing the scoring grid with institutes such that they would understand clearly what BSS would be assessing them on, however it was agreed that this may give the institutes too much information and that the current level of guidance was appropriate.
- 5.5. Prof Irwin asked members if they would be happy to serve on the Institute Assessment Panel, the panel agreed that one BSS member should be involved for each institute.

ACTION: BBSRC office to compile a draft scoring grid for assessing institutes’ public engagement programmes.

6. Update on BBSRC public dialogue & engagement activities

- 6.1. Dr Middleton introduced this paper and invited comments from the panel.
- 6.2. Dr Johnson, in his role of chair of the steering and oversight groups for the BBSRC/EPSRC Synthetic Biology Dialogue, highlighted that this stage of the dialogue has been concluded successfully. Dr Winstanley told the panel that

Professors Douglas Kell and David Delpy would be amongst the panel members at the launch event for the dialogue and that there was considerable interest in synthetic biology from BBSRC Councils and Strategy Advisory Board.

- 6.3. Prof Dingwall outlined the approach for bioenergy future scenario development that the BSBECC outreach group had commissioned. In particular he noted that:
- Scenario development is often sector specific and fails to address the wider issues and this should be avoided if possible
 - The scenarios will give a sense of the future and possible pathways to that future
 - There will be commentary on how the scenarios can be used effectively
- 6.4. Dr MacMillan highlighted that many of the stakeholders who the scenarios may seek to engage will have been exposed to many similar exercise and may therefore be disinclined to be readily engaged.
- 6.5. Dr MacMillan noted that Natural England has undertaken scenario development that brought together many previous studies (<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/securefuture/default.aspx>) and brought the panel's attention to the FAN club network (<http://www.foresight.gov.uk/Horizon%20Scanning%20Centre/FanClub/Overview.aspx>).

7. **BBSRC Update: Beacons for Public Engagement and 'Pathways to Impact'**

BEACONS UPDATE

- 7.1. Dr Winstanley introduced this item highlighting;
- The Beacons for Public Engagement have recently been presenting their work to the Research Councils in a series of seminars at Swindon office
 - There is a diversity of approach between the beacons
 - BBSRC does not feel as engaged with the Beacons as it would like
 - There is lack of clarity as to the value that the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) and regional beacons add for the Research Councils given the £4M investment
 - RCUK is reviewing the Beacons and exploring other mechanisms and funding formula
- 7.2. Dr Winstanley asked the panel's advice on how we might encourage the Beacons to share their learning and work.
- 7.3. Dr Rowe commented that he was surprised when the CUEast Beacon was established that it did not seek to draw on his expertise in evaluation.
- 7.4. Dr Knapp suggested that the value of NCCPE would be in drawing together the experiences of the beacons and pulling out best practice advice.

PATHWAYS TO IMPACT

- 7.5. Dr Winstanley went on to discuss 'Pathways to Impact' and the potential for grant applicants to apply for funds to carry out public engagement activities as part of their grant funding (activities must be carried out by the named grant holder and be directly relevant to the grant's science).
- 7.6. Dr Winstanley noted that no BBSRC grant applicants had yet requested this funding and highlighted that such a mechanisms for funding public engagement includes no

monitoring of quality and that expertise for judging the appropriateness of grant applicants' proposed activities is not found on committees. An internal BBSRC mechanism has been put in place such that any applications that include public engagement will be referred to the BBSRC External Relations Unit.

7.7. Dr Johnson noted that NERC brought knowledge exchange expertise onto some of their committees and that this was effective in broadening the knowledge and expertise of the committees.

7.8. Dr MacMillan noted that BSS could have a role more broadly in the assessment of grant applications by helping to judge the legitimacy of broader claims of impact made by grant holders.

8. Support training for considering social issues

8.1. This paper was introduced by Dr Winstanley who outlined the background. Some years ago BBSRC ran a public engagement training course that included elements encouraging researchers to consider the wider issues of their research. More recently BBSRC has met with RCUK, the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) and others to discuss the provision of training to researchers, including training around considering social issues. Dr Winstanley invited the panel to be involved in helping to shape the training and asked for suggestions of who else might be involved in the development (e.g. Keele University).

8.2. Prof Irwin noted that two years ago the Royal Society approached the Open University with a similar proposition. Dr Knapp told the panel that all Natural History Museum staff are expected to undergo training for public engagement.

8.3. Ms Barnaby suggested that any training would benefit from focusing on practical tools and should not dwell overly long on theoretical aspects. While other members of the panel thought that there was value in exploring the theoretical background to help researchers develop a general approach as well as giving them specific tools.

8.4. The value of working with others and of not 'reinventing the wheel' was recognised by the panel and Sir Roland referred the panel to actions that are being taken forward by the BIS Science for All group (3.2 and 3.3, in group's action plan).

8.5. Dr Dyer encouraged BBSRC to emphasise the value of science communication and public engagement during the current financial situation as a way of fostering public support for science.

9. BBSRC's communications & Science in Society programme

9.1. The panel noted the paper