

**IN CONFIDENCE**

**SUBJECT: MINUTES OF THE BIOSCIENCE FOR SOCIETY STRATEGY PANEL, 19  
MAY 2011**

**MEETING: BIOSCIENCE FOR SOCIETY STRATEGY PANEL 30 SEPTEMBER 2011**

**ACTION**

The Panel is invited to:

**APPROVE** the minutes as a true record of the meeting

## **IN CONFIDENCE**

**MINUTES** of the Bioscience for Society Strategy Panel Meeting held on 19 May 2011 at MRC, 1 Kemble Street, London.

Those attending:

Sir Roland Jackson (Chair)  
Wendy Barnaby  
Professor Kenneth Boyd  
Dr Jane Calvert  
Professor Robert Dingwall  
Dr Richard Dyer OBE  
Professor Christine Hauskeller  
Professor Brian Ilbery  
Dr Sandra Knapp  
Dr Tom MacMillan  
Dr Erinma Ochu  
Dr Gene Rowe  
Professor Vincent Walsh

### **BBSRC Office**

Mr Paul Gemmill  
Dr Patrick Middleton  
Dr Emma Longridge

### **Apologies**

Dr Steven Walker

### **Chairman's Welcome and Introduction**

1. Sir Roland welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their flexibility given the change of times. He also thanked everyone for their efforts on the working groups.
2. Mr Gemmill outlined the plans for revising the structure of the Strategy Panels and how their roles and responsibilities interact with those of Strategy Advisory Board. Plans are for four science panels and three domain specific panels (to include BSS). These plans are not finalised but are expected to be discussed at Council on 7 July. The new structure should allow panels to be more linked with each other.
3. Sir Roland noted three new appointments to Council and asked for details to be circulated after the meeting.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to circulate details of new Council appointments to BSS

### **Round table of issues (standing item)**

*RCUK Public Engagement with Research Advisory Panel correspondence*

4. Sir Roland invited Dr Middleton to talk about recent correspondence sent from RCUK's Public Engagement with Research Advisory Panel to the Chief Executives of the seven Research Councils. The letter and response from Professor Douglas Kell had been circulated prior to the meeting. Dr Middleton outlined the actions taken since, namely that Professor Kathy Sykes and Dr James Wilsdon had met with Professor Kell to discuss the letters.
5. Dr MacMillan noted that he felt some of the points in the original letter were not addressed specifically in the response and that the role of BSS, particularly in BBSRC's strategic

planning may have been over played. He said he felt the letter was unnecessarily defensive and that it would have been helpful to include discussion of the areas where BBSRC feels it can improve and the barriers there are to that happening. Professor Dingwall echoed this by observing that BBSRC are good at many things they do but that it should be recognised that there are improvements that can be made.

6. The Panel discussed how the letter could prompt improvements in cross-Council communications. Different Councils approach public engagement differently and they could all learn from one another. Mr Gemmill noted that the Research Councils can work well together and that there are many drivers that will encourage cross-Council working in future. Sir Roland summarised that BSS encouraged BBSRC to take advantage of opportunities for making links in this area. He also noted the ongoing issue of how public engagement can be truly embedded in strategy.
7. Dr Middleton informed the Panel that RCUK will be reviewing their Public Engagement with Research Advisory Panel.

#### *University of Bradford correspondence*

8. Sir Roland informed the Panel of some correspondence on dual use of technologies from the University of Bradford that will be circulated via email, together with BBSRC process in this area, after the meeting.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to circulate University of Bradford letter on dual use together with BBSRC process in this area

#### *Public engagement and REF*

9. Sir Roland began a discussion about how public engagement is to be counted in REF; it will only be counted if it relates directly to the funded research. There was a feeling that this could present challenges and may be something that BSS should consider/bear in mind.

#### *BBSRC Council*

10. Dr Dyer raised the issue of how important it is to have a strong voice on Council that is well versed in public engagement issues. Mr Gemmill noted that the criteria for appointments to Council are beyond BBSRC's control but that new member Professor Russell Foster has a keen interest in public engagement and that other members of Council had expressed an interest in learning more about public engagement at the last Council meeting. More linkage between BSS and Council would be appreciated.
11. Sir Roland suggested that one or more Council members could be invited to BSS's next meeting.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to invite a member of Council to BSS's next meeting.

#### **Minutes of the last meeting**

12. A number of small changes were made to the minutes after which the Panel approved the Minutes.

#### *Matters Arising*

13. Sir Roland asked that the action from point 14, about BSS asking the new Strategy Panels a question about future social challenges, remain a standing item.

**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.

14. There was some further discussion of DIY biology. Dr Middleton outlined BBSRC's understanding that it could be divided into garage biology, completely independent individuals working from home/a garage or citizen science where participation in experiments is used as a tool for public engagement. Dr Ochu suggested that the difference between these two kinds of DIYBio is to do with whether and how risk is considered. Professor Hauskeller and Dr Calvert talked about how science is more available and about how the democratisation of science changes how people engage with science. What will the effects be of individuals being able to access information about their telomeres to determine lifespan be for example? Dr Knapp highlighted that lots of citizen science already goes on in her field.

**ACTION:** Sir Roland asked BBSRC to look further into this area and consider how it might affect BBSRC's business.

15. BBSRC had explored online working but found that sites such as Huddle would not be secure enough for BSS's work and there is not the capacity to introduce an Extranet site for BSS. It was agreed that a mechanism for online working wasn't currently an urgent issue.
16. Dr Ochu clarified that in paragraph 48 she had been enquiring about alignment of operational requirements around public engagement and social and ethical issues. Mr Gemmill clarified that these functions will remain within individual Research Councils and that the Shared Services Centre will deal only with functions such as Finance, Procurement and HR.

#### **Nuffield Council on Bioethics: Emerging Biotechnologies Consultation**

17. Sir Roland noted that Dr Calvert is on the working party for this project so would not be participating in this discussion, except to provide guidance as needed.
18. Dr Middleton introduced the paper asking for BSS's advice on the highlighted questions in particular. The views from BSS will be collated with other streams of advice from BBSRC and other Research Councils to form an RCUK response.
19. The Panel discussed how difficult it is to define an emerging technology or biotechnology; when is something emerging? What makes it biotechnology? They were critical of the broad scope of the questions – the answers are complex and each could be a research project on their own. It will be important to focus on BBSRC's concerns to narrow the scope of the response.
20. Some core issues were highlighted as: Privacy, Autonomy, world aspects, environment, access to information.
21. Accountability was discussed, including not over regulating, how BBSRC addresses accountability and being open about the limitations of accountability.
22. Public engagement was discussed in this context. It was seen as being important to encourage thinking, discussion and reflexivity among scientists. Public engagement should be used appropriately however, it should not be done automatically but done after consideration.

#### **Nature and Naturalness: working group report**

23. Sir Roland encouraged the Panel to consider this paper in terms of the actions that can be taken as a result.

24. Professor Boyd introduced the paper by highlighting the key points. Definitions of nature and naturalness are different in different contexts. Without a consensus definition it is more important to explore the meaning in context so BBSRC should not discuss the concept of nature in the abstract. It is not a question of training people about the issues but about helping people to educate one another about discussing the issues.
25. Sir Roland echoed the importance of using examples to consider the issue of nature and naturalness and of focussing on the process not the product. Professor Boyd highlighted that this reflexivity should be encouraged as part of a scientists education.
26. Dr Knapp talked about the need to consider the world in shades of grey, not black and white. Dr Dyer noted that we should be careful not to suggest that the discussion of what is natural is so open ended as to say 'anything goes'.
27. Dr Middleton suggested that BBSRC could work with the working group to modify this paper into an article for BBSRC's website. Dr Calvert suggested the need for some discussion tools to help researchers get the most from the paper and to help them continue the discussion. Dr Knapp noted that this may include information on how to engage people in discussion rather than argument, for which the Natural History Museum have tools to help.

**ACTION:** BBSRC to work with the nature and naturalness working group to turn the paper into an article for the website and to develop discussion tools to accompany it.

#### **Social and ethical concerns: working group report**

28. Dr Rowe requested that Professor Hauskeller and Sir Roland also be acknowledged for their input into this paper.
29. Dr Longridge described recent events which have changed the remit of the group. Grants processing has moved to the SSC and there is no longer the resource to process the ethical and social concerns form. As a replacement, with BSS's approval, a revised set of questions will be included in the application form. This has the benefit that all applicants, not just the successful ones, will have to consider the issues raised by their work.
30. Dr Rowe reiterated the main points of the paper. The definition of a social and ethical issue must be revised. Use of the tick box format will have a role but should be complemented by use of open questioning too, such as using the phrase 'how will...' or by asking for justification of answers given.
31. Dipstick testing could be done if Secretariat generate a summary of the answers given to the social and ethical questions from a sample of grants and providing this to BSS after each round of funding. After a year BSS would have a good impression of the types and answers being given and issues raised and could then consider a revision.
32. Sir Roland asked for this working group to continue and to influence the development of the new section of the grants application form. Dr Rowe asked for a 'strawman' to comment upon as the next step in this process.

**ACTION:** With help from the working group, BBSRC to develop a new ethical and social concerns section of the grant application form.

33. The Panel had a number of pieces of advice to assist in this process. Ms Barnaby encouraged joining up with the NCCPE work on social and ethical issues training. Professor Dingwall encouraged separating regulatory compliance from ethics as ethics is about more than complying with the rules. Professor Boyd highlighted the importance of encouraging people to engage by avoiding bureaucracy. Dr MacMillan encouraged linking up with what is

rehearsed in the impact sections of the application form but keeping impact and ethics distinct. He also suggested joining up with ESRC to see what they ask. Professor Ilbery emphasised the importance assessors will play in avoiding standard text. Professor Walsh suggested explicit reference to how much weight this section will be given. Professor Hauskeller highlighted the importance of the consideration process as much as the issues themselves.

#### **Public engagement training: working group report**

34. Dr Ochu introduced this paper. She highlighted the main points from the paper including; the training should be open to everyone, experiential learning would be beneficial, mentoring would be helpful, it may be possible to adapt and adopt other training programmes, if budget allows an event to celebrate public engagement would show the importance BBSRC places on engagement.
35. Dr Middleton said he liked the idea of having a celebration event but that resources would be a limiting factor. For the training, he said that of the formats suggested, BBSRC would like to trial a one day course, perhaps starting with a specific session for BSBE. It would of course be wise to learn as much as possible from other courses. He noted that the training would build up a bank of potential mentors that BBSRC could link up with one another on an informal basis.
36. Professor Boyd suggested that if BBSRC were to require some kind of education in this area, Universities would have to provide the training themselves.
37. Dr Rowe emphasised the need for public engagement rather than science communication focus – it should include training on evaluation, two way dialogue and getting something back.
38. Dr Middleton emphasised that BBSRC were not looking to buy in trainers but to develop the training within ERU, with help from BSS, and use outside experts where additional expertise is required.
39. Professor Dingwall suggested looking for a sponsor for a celebration event that could be along the lines of Innovator of the Year. He asked what the requirements are on the new Doctoral Training Partnerships. In the long run he suggested that it may be a good idea to require researchers to complete a public engagement course before they are eligible for a large grant.
40. Dr Dyer noted that with the number of researchers that BBSRC support, a training course will have limited impact and something else should be done too. Sir Roland agreed with this, there will be a continuing issue of education vs training but we can begin by doing what we can. Dr Middleton commented that this maybe something to raise with the Bioscience Skills and Careers Strategy Panel.

#### **Update: synthetic biology dialogue**

41. The Panel welcomed and noted this paper.
42. One commitment in the response was to explore involving members of the public in modifying the requirements on grant applicants to consider the social context of their work. BSS advised that bringing together a focus group for this purpose would be suitable. Dr Calvert suggested that the definition of 'public' can be fairly broad.
43. On a related topic, Sir Roland enquired whether there had been any feedback on BSS comments on the public engagement aspects of the Synthetic Biology Networks.

**ACTION:** BBSRC to identify whether anything has changed at the Synthetic Biology Networks as result of BSS's involvement.

**Update: Institute Assessment Exercise**

- 44. The Panel agreed that the assessments as written in the paper reflected BSS's feedback.
- 45. Dr Knapp requested that more detailed notes from the assessment meeting be provided to BSS as background for the site visits.
- 46. Dr MacMillan noted that BBSRC pass a lot of responsibility to institutes for public engagement and societal issues and that it is important that they are able to fulfil that role and BBSRC should consider its own responsibilities.

**Communications and public engagement programme**

- 47. The Panel noted this paper.
- 48. On the topic of Bioenergy Sir Roland commented that he, Dr Middleton and Duncan Eggar had met recently to discuss bioenergy in relation to BSS. A more detailed paper on this will be included at the next BSS meeting.
- 49. Dr Middleton highlighted that the bioenergy scenarios will be piloted at Cheltenham Science Festival and BSS members would be welcome to attend. Dr Calvert queried whether any social scientists were embedded in BSBEAC, which Dr Middleton confirmed there were.
- 50. Dr Middleton outlined the new Schools Regional Champions 2011/13. Dr Ochu enquired whether this was simply a widening participation activity which Dr Middleton confirmed it definitely was not.
- 51. Sir Roland requested that BSBEAC and GFS remain as standing items for BSS.

**Global Food Security Communications and Public Engagement Group update**

- 52. Dr Middleton introduced this paper. Dr MacMillan enquired whether any research had been funded as part of GFS. Dr Middleton confirmed that although a Project Coordination Board had been formed, no new money had been spent in the area yet. Dr MacMillan emphasised that it will be really important to have space for social and other issues to be linked back into the project board. It could look like a communications group rather than a communications and public engagement group. It will be important to recognise that GFS is not just a bioscience problem, there are wider issues and solutions.

**AOB**

- 53. There was no other business.