

SUMMARY OF THE BBSRC BIOSCIENCE SKILLS AND CAREERS PANEL (BSC) MEETING ON 18 JULY 2011

Role of BSC and Changes to Strategy Panels

Since its' establishment, BSC has played an important role in setting the direction of BBSRC's broad skills and careers strategy and implementation, and in monitoring progress against major priorities. Since its first meeting in January 2009, BSC has advised BBSRC on a broad range of areas, including: the inclusion and prioritisation of different topics to be addressed by BBSRC (BSC workplan 2009, 2010 and 2011); BBSRC's major review of its training portfolio in 2010; and the development of the Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) competition in 2011. In addition, BSC has provided strategic input into the development and monitoring of a number of areas relating to skills and careers, such as the issues around careers for postdoctoral researchers.

The current Terms of Reference and membership composition for BSC has remained largely unchanged since its creation, where a proportion of the Panel has comprised members co-opted from BBSRC's other Strategy Panels. With the introduction of the revised BBSRC Science Strategy Panels, BSC was asked to consider the future role and direction of the Panel itself, its relationship to the work of BBSRC's Training Award Committee (TAC), and any changes to membership that were needed to enable BSC to fulfil its role. The Panel recommended:

- BSC should continue to provide a strategic overview of skills and careers issues of relevance to BBSRC and to monitor and assess the effectiveness of existing mechanisms to address these issues.
- BSC members should continue to have a significant role in integrating strategy between BSC and BBSRC's other panels and committees
- BSC should maintain links with other organisations that have an interest in bioscience skills and careers issues; these include, for example, Vitae, Funding Councils, Sector Skills Councils, and Society of Biology.
- BSC and TAC should continue to work as separate bodies, but a link should remain between the two groups through membership of the Chair of TAC on BSC, and annual joint meetings of BSC and TAC.
- The size of the panel should be reduced (but the size of TAC increased to accommodate increased engagement with institutions managing BBSRC Training Grants).
- Membership should continue to include representatives from across the bioscience sector, including industry, BBSRC institute(s) and the Bioscience sector lead from the newly restructured Higher Education Academy.

Full details of BSC's recommendations will be considered by BBSRC Appointments Board in September 2011.

Programme and Policy Development

(a) *Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs)*

BSC was invited to discuss the proposed approach to assessment and allocation of awards through the new DTP scheme. In particular, the Panel discussed:

- the appropriate number of partnerships that should be awarded in total to achieve the appropriate spread of excellent training across the breadth of BBSRC's remit; and,
- the need for TAC to consider how the portfolio of partnerships might deliver both excellence of training and strategic fit with BBSRC's remit and priority areas.

The Panel noted that the closing date for proposals was 15 September 2011 and that BBSRC's Training Awards Committee would be assessing bids at its' meeting on 1/2 December 2011.

(b) *International Student Eligibility*

The Panel noted that discussions between the Research Councils on widening of student eligibility were ongoing, and that there is a need to understand further the issues and consequences of potentially changing the eligibility rules for international students.

(c) *BBSRC Flexible Interchange Programme (FLIP)*

In July 2010, BSC undertook a comprehensive Training Review of BBSRC's Skills and Careers activities. With respect to BBSRC's "People Exchange" portfolio, it suggested that the current set of schemes should be simplified and rationalised. It therefore recommended that BBSRC design a new flexible people movement programme through consolidation of existing schemes.

For the purposes of FLIP, it is envisaged that the new scheme will specifically supersede BBSRC's Industry Interchange Programme, Industrial Impact Fellowship, Research Development Fellowship, Institute Development Fellowships, and Discipline Hopping Awards.

To inform development of the new FLIP scheme, BSC was asked to consider a number of important issues as follows:

- Assessment criteria
- Assessment process
- Length of awards
- Eligibility
- What the award will provide
- Potential Partners and Types of Movement
- Connectivity to previously-funded BBSRC research
- Impact and monitoring

The provisional timetable for FLIP is still to be decided but it is anticipated that the first awards will be made in late 2012.

Exploiting new ways of Working

(a) *eLearning for Systems Approaches*

BBSRC's requirement for an on-line distance learning package to support systems and integrated approaches will be met from October 2012 onwards by the SysMIC course

(**S**ystems training in **M**aths, **I**nformatics and **C**omputational biology). The consortium comprises University College London, Birkbeck, the Open University and the University of Edinburgh.

Dr Geraint Thomas from University College London attended BSC to present an overview of the main aims, course structure and delivery of the course. In addition, Dr Thomas highlighted the current proposals for targeting participants and selecting students.

The Panel noted 1250 places were available over 4 years with up to 660 reserved for new BBSRC students funded by the new DTPs. BSC recommended that individuals registered for a Professional Doctorate through the new Advanced Training Partnerships (ATPs) should also be given access to the course.

(b) Evaluation of BBSRC “Genomics” Research

The Panel noted the recent evaluation from a specialist Review Panel that had been convened to provide an independent evaluation of two programmes of BBSRC-supported “genomics” research:

- the Investigating Gene Function Initiative
- “genomics” research funded through responsive mode

(c) Next Generation Sequencing Skills Update

The Panel noted progress towards implementation of the Recommendations of BBSRC’s Review of Next Generation Sequencing Technologies that relate to skills.

Review of Progress Against BSC Workplans

The Panel reviewed progress against the priority areas which it had identified in its’ 2011 Workplan, together with any ongoing activity connected to Workplans for 2009 and 2010.

Current priorities areas for 2011 are as follows:

Strategically Important and Vulnerable Capabilities

- Food Security: Advanced Training Partnerships in Agri-food
- Skills for Bioenergy and Industrial Biotechnology
- Mathematics and Systems Biology Skills for Biologists
- Computational Biology, Big Data and Next Generation Sequencing Skills
- Skills for Systematics and Taxonomy

Broader Skills and Careers Issues

- Doctoral Training Partnership scheme (revision of Quota DTGs)
- Interchange Awards: Promoting researcher development and people exchange through partnerships
- Culture change in the employment of postdoctoral researchers
- Strengthening the career structure for research technicians