

RAP Meeting Summary – 8th October 2013

The 4th meeting of the Research Advisory Panel (RAP) took place on the 8th October 2013. The role of the RAP is to advise BBSRC on the overall balance and direction of its research grants portfolio, across the whole of BBSRC's scientific remit.

Under Matters Arising and Chair's Business, the RAP was updated on the Triennial Review process and how their advice from the previous meeting in April is being taken forward.

The meeting focussed on the following items:

1. Annual Review of Progress at Strategically Funded Institutes

Following the Institute Assessment Exercise, funding was awarded to BBSRC's strategically funded institutes in 2012, with annual monitoring as a condition of the awards. The RAP was invited to undertake a review of the annual progress reports that had been submitted for the 26 Institute Strategic Programme Grants (ISPGs) and 14 National/Campus Capability Grants (NCGs/CCGs) which are currently underway within BBSRC's strategically funded institutes. RAP members were invited to comment on progress and highlight any strengths or weaknesses, as well as advise on any specific actions resulting from the annual reports. Feedback on progress of the grants will be collated by the office and provided to the institutes in due course.

2. Annual Consideration of Competitive Research Grants

RAP members were presented with an annual review and forward look at BBSRC's research grant funding portfolio. The RAP was invited to note the data on grant funding, discuss the areas highlighted, comment on aspects of the portfolio and discuss future plans. The RAP members were also invited to provide feedback on the data visualisation techniques used within the presentation. The following recommendations were made in response to the data:

- In order for BBSRC-funded research to remain internationally competitive, BBSRC must continue to fund excellent research wherever it may occur, with awards made in open competition (rather than focussing support on the top-funded institutions).
- The RAP advised BBSRC to consider the development of early career fellowships to support newly qualified researchers that aren't yet eligible for David Phillips Fellowships.
- Excellent world class underpinning bioscience (WCUB) should not be neglected – funding too much strategic research would be detrimental to the research base.
- The current levels of funding for excellent WCUB and excellent research in strategic priority areas supported by BBSRC is about right (58% of the portfolio funded in 2012 supports excellent bioscience related to strategic priority areas).
- The RAP advised that BBSRC must continue to fund only excellent research, no matter how strategically relevant. It would also be useful to evaluate how successful the outcomes of research grants related to strategic priority areas are, to find out whether strategic funding is serving its purpose.
- When considering the numbers of Principal/Co-Investigators that BBSRC supports, the RAP would like to see a breakdown of the data across BBSRC's strategic priorities and a breakdown of the different skills held by the community.
- The RAP advised that BBSRC should build better bridges with small research communities e.g. soil scientists. They were also concerned about the low levels of funding allocated to Diet and Health research and its isolation from other research areas.
- Overall the RAP advised that the status of the research funding portfolio should be monitored carefully, in terms of both the proportion of strategically-related research being funded compared to WCUB and the spread across research topics.

3. The RAP was provided with updates from other BBSRC Strategy Advisory Panels and Domain Panels.