

Q Are there any areas that are particularly vulnerable to potential future funding cuts? There has been a focus on model organisms, but a loss of comparative physiology.

A We aren't planning to concentrate funding in particular areas, but with limited finances, some areas may be affected by RO investment elsewhere. We are examining key skill gaps, demographics, etc and trying to ensure a sustainable base of future PIs and focussed capacity building. At the moment, we are looking at the evidence, once we have some had data we will be able to make some informed decisions. However, we have no control over who ROs hire, and some areas have several funders whilst in others we are the sole provider.

Q: What will BBSRC do when faced with serious cuts in the next spending review

A: There is widespread recognition that bioscience will be at the heart of providing solutions to some of the major challenges facing humankind, such as: feeding nine billion people sustainably by 2050; developing renewable sources of energy, chemicals and industrial raw materials to reduce our dependence on fossil sources; and maintaining good health across the lifecourse, reducing the need for medical and social intervention. In addition, bioscience offers enormous potential for growth, underpinning a new and sustainable bio-based economy. We therefore expect to be able to put forward a very strong case for continued / increased investment in UK bioscience in the next Spending Review.

BBSRC Council has made a strong commitment to researcher-led bioscience, and we would expect this to remain a high priority within any future funding settlement. In the event of a significant reduction in BBSRC's budget, Council is determined that BBSRC would not 'salami slice' funding across all aspects of BBSRC business, but would instead seek to ensure that all activities we continue to fund are properly supported. BBSRC's response to any reduction in funding would be informed by consultation with its research and user communities.

Q How successful has the FAPESP scheme been? Is this a pilot for other funders e.g. NSF?

A The RCUK scheme with FAPESP has been successful for BBSRC with several grants awarded across all areas of BBSRC strategic Plan. BBSRC is in discussions to initiate a pilot RCUK scheme with CNPq thereby extending eligibility across all of Brazil. Bilateral working with NSF is gaining momentum through Ideas labs and bilateral funding. BBSRC is gaining much experience through ERA-Nets in building international funding schemes and peer review. NSF is now joining ERA-Nets as a co-funder. We also have an agreement with NIA where we fund UK components of US projects. DBT is another example.

Q Please can you explain collaboration with other countries, in context of Horizon 20:20.

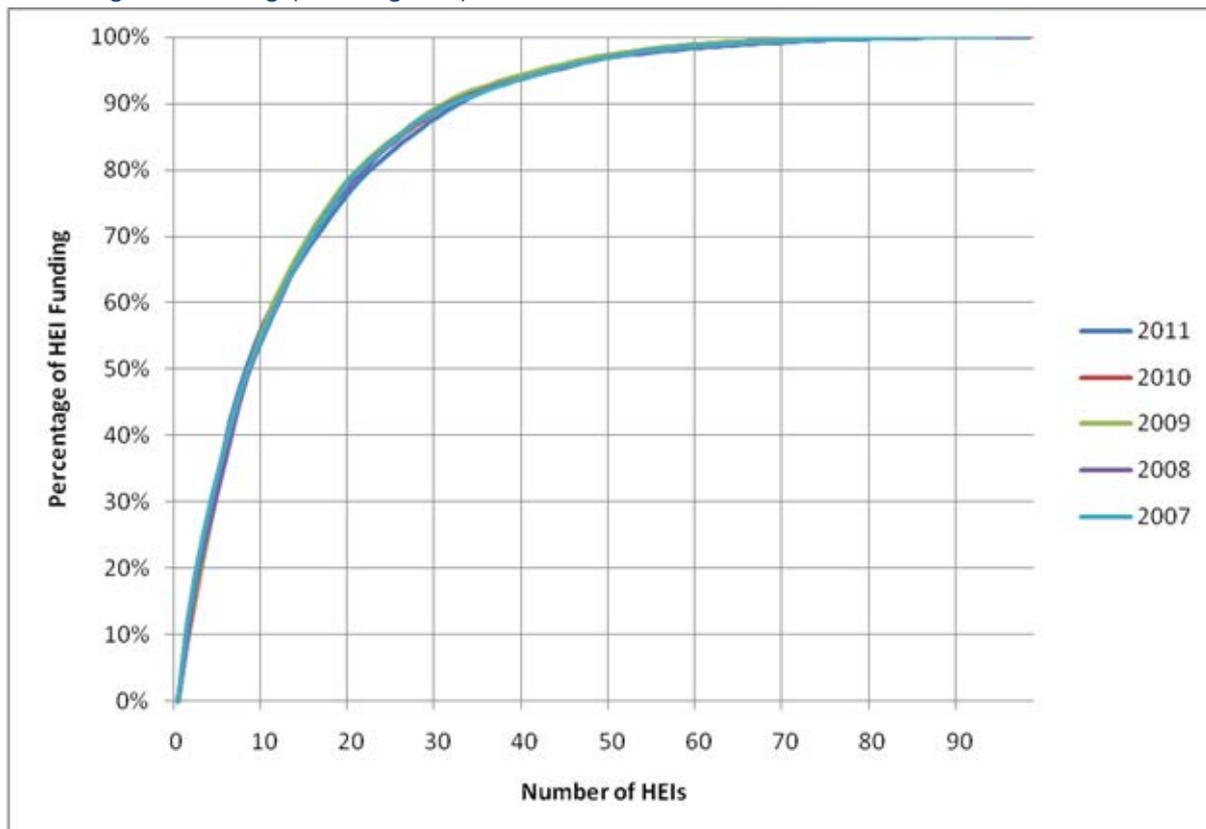
A Currently being negotiated at the top level. Ensuring that BBSRC priorities are in scope through input to BIS based on discussions at BBSRC Strategy Panels. Top level discussions on structure going well, awaiting budget confirmation (the European Commission has asked for £90billion over 7 years).

Q Because of the deadlock over the EU budget, what is the likely outcome for Horizon 20:20?

A The UK line is that it wishes to see a smaller EU budget, but science and innovation to have a bigger part in a reduced budget.

Q Are there plans to concentrate funding towards certain research intensive institutions?

A: There is no specific 'concentration agenda,' and we have no policy objective to concentrate funding in fewer institutions. However, we are implementing measures for increased efficiency and greater impact. This may have some effect on the concentration of funding. We are monitoring this, and there has not been a dramatic change since 2007. Around 50% of the total value of 'live' grants is directed to just 8 HEI, but a total of 81 HEIs receive grant funding (2010 figures).



Q How is BBSRC encouraging the translation of research to policy?

A This question was originally a little unclear, and related to agriculture. Perhaps we could have a broad answer, and then a few specific examples from different sectors? This is basically another form of impact, so we should encourage people to think about it and contribute ideas.

Q How is BBSRC planning to help small research groups access large data sets from the "omics revolution;" are there plans to provide a central facility for bio-informatics?

ELIXIR / EBI was set up to provide a central facility for bio-informatics data, and plans to form an ELIXIR-UK node that is also expecting to develop training and knowledge exchange for users and developers across UK bioscience research base. We have a £6m call for the Bioinformatics and Biological Resources fund, the purpose of which is to provide 'proper support for resources such as databases, genetic resources and culture collections which require long term maintenance and curation'.

Q Follow on – Liz Lyon (Bath) offered the Data Curation Centre as a possible centralised facility. Would we be able to/want to use this?

A BBSRC has no plans to adopt the DCC as a centralised facility. Also, see comment above.

Q Is there a strategy to start funding individual researchers for Open Access publication, rather than funding the institutions?

A The simple answer to this is no, we do not have plans to fund individuals, as it is not practical. Our experience with the existing system of applying for funding on grants under the FEC rules has not worked as we need institutions to set up funding streams to meet these costs as so much of the cost occurs after the end of the award. This did not happen with funds being sought under indirect costs so we have moved to providing ring-fenced funds to institutions.

Q What does a priority mean? How do you distinguish between applications that are in or out of a priority area?

A We need to make a case to BIS that we use public money effectively, so we tell them our three high level priorities, but we recognise that to maintain a healthy science base we have to fund underpinning world class bioscience. We don't say that we only fund priority areas, and the distribution is roughly 50:50.

Q Would a grant in a priority area take precedence? Are there plans to increase funding towards this?

A We judge grants on a variety of assessment criteria. Discussions of strategic importance don't increase scores dramatically, but can help in the final rank ordering of grants. If more applications come in in these areas, the funding proportions may change.

Does the BBSRC prioritise projects likely to benefit British industry rather than companies overseas?

A The specific rules of different schemes vary according to their objectives, but in most circumstances a company with a research presence in the UK is preferable as a partner.

Q What mechanisms exist to address gaps or remediate losses in key areas of the national research base?

A Past experience has shown that the research base shows an ability to regenerate quickly in response to stimulus in the form of targeted funding. Collaborative activity with other countries is also helpful. This is also an area where the partnerships BBSRC is developing with key universities may be useful.

Q Is a sector switch between an institute and a university an eligible move within FLIP?

A BBSRC's FLeXible Interchange Programme (FLIP) supports the movement of people from one environment to a different one to exchange knowledge/technology/skills, developing bioscience research/researchers and addressing our strategic priorities. An

institute/university move could be eligible provided it addressed those objectives, but the scheme is not intended to assist normal scientific recruitment.

Q Is the size of awards from the Follow-on Fund big enough to bridge the gap between scientific discovery and commercialisation?

A More funding for this would be great but FoF already makes awards up to £1M, and we need to tension our priorities within a limited budget.

Where does basic (cell) biology fit into BBSRC strategy?

Not really answered at the time – it was part of two questions. Any answers welcomed!

How does BBSRC promote basic biology?

BBSRC continue to promote case studies with public/policy/commercial interest, but this should not downplay the fact that these achievements build upon the fundamental basic biological research which is also being carried out. Taking basic science through industry is a particular strength in the biosciences and one BBSRC need to continue to promote. Basic bioscience is still well represented in the BBSRC funding portfolio, around half of our responsive mode funding goes to basic underpinning bioscience.

What mechanisms will be used to fund research into diet and health, other than DRINC2?

This is currently at an early stage, so we have no fixed ideas yet. There have been cuts across both Food security and Basic Bioscience Underpinning Health. We're still working on it, and hope to feed it into the strategic plan. There will be more information next year.

Climate change, in particular the importance of CO₂ and methanol, doesn't seem to show up in any of the priorities.

This would fall under LWEC, a partnerships between 21 public sector organisations. Research in this area may also fall into BBSRC Living with Environmental Change (LWEC) and Food Security priorities. We have a successful interface with NERC and we are optimistic that future opportunities between the councils will be developed. Please contact the BBSRC remit inbox (remit@bbsrc.ac.uk) if you have any research which you are unsure of remit with, in advance of developing and submitting a full application.

Does BBSRC still welcome research into cognitive neuroscience? There is an impression within the community that this is not the case.

BBSRC went through a programme of encouraging new thinking about certain areas (for example through highlights and strategic priorities) to help foster innovative research into new areas (and therefore expand the science base). Neuroscience is a discipline where BBSRC already received a good number of high quality applications, therefore does not need to be promoted in this way. BBSRC still funds a good amount of cognitive neuroscience, and welcomes applications on neuroscience within the remit of BBSRC. There is a joint statement of understanding between BBSRC and the British Neuroscience Association clarifying this point.

Soil science is a welcome feature in the discussion about possible future strategic priorities, will there be consideration for 'precision farming' to feature as a strategic priority? Are there mechanisms available for BBSRC to deliver research in this area, given its interdisciplinary nature?

Culturally, agriculture is something which fits wholly into BBSRC remit, and ~20% of our annual spending goes to academic departments outside the 'traditional biosciences' departments. We have a strong industry base in agriculture and would welcome comments on how to improve delivery mechanisms in this area. Currently BBSRC staff are involved with a Government consultation process on looking at developing agricultural systems.

What is the overlap with MRC on the One biology, One Health agenda?

The "one medicine" agenda addresses the mutual benefit to be gained from synergy between human and veterinary medicine and disease studies. Similarly, the term "one health" is used to describe synergistic benefits from studies to understand normal healthy function and its maintenance in humans and domesticated animals. As with any project on the biology/ medical interface, the decision on whether a proposal should be considered by one council or more than one, and how any joint consideration might be conducted is made on a case by case basis. Consequently applicants are advised to consult BBSRC before submission if making a proposal with a significant medical or human health component.

Is there a concentrated source of funding information and statistics?

Yes – [Portfolio analyser](#) and <http://qtr.rcuk.ac.uk>.