

## EVALUATION OF THE BBSRC GENES AND DEVELOPMENTAL BIOLOGY COMMITTEE RESPONSIVE MODE PORTFOLIO 2006

### BBSRC RESPONSE TO THE PANEL'S REPORT

This document sets out the response of the BBSRC to the findings of the review panel convened to provide an independent scientific evaluation of the research supported in responsive mode through the BBSRC Genes and Developmental Biology Committee (GDB) since the Committee's inception in 1994.

BBSRC thanks the Panel members for their hard work and commitment to this exercise. We are pleased to note the Panel's views that the research outputs and overall quality of research funded through the GDB Committee over the past ten years were mainly good. In addition there were some outstanding examples of outputs and achievements. The remainder of this document sets out BBSRC's response to the Panel's key conclusions, including the views of the current GDB Committee members.

*Key conclusion: The impact of research supported through GDB could be increased by moving to a funding model which encourages and rewards the continuity and stability of research and research groups (i.e. increasing support for longer and larger grants).*

BBSRC recognises the importance of continuity and stability of funding for the research groups that we fund. This is being addressed by an existing programme that encourages grant proposals valued at between £2M and £5M for up to five years (see [www.bbsrc.ac.uk/science/areas/crosscommittee/multidisciplinary\\_programmes.html](http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/science/areas/crosscommittee/multidisciplinary_programmes.html)). We will encourage our grantholders to apply for the most appropriate mode of funding to complete the research, building up a portfolio of awards ranging from longer term grants of five years to short, pilot grants and retaining any appropriate three-year awards. We recognise that a statement on our website stating that grants of all sizes are welcomed would be beneficial.

*Key conclusion: BBSRC, possibly working through Research Councils UK (RCUK), should continue to identify ways to contribute to improving job security, benefits and career prospects for research staff.*

BBSRC is already working with Research Councils UK (RCUK) to address these issues. RCUK has recently published *Research Careers: a strategy for success* (see [www.rcuk.ac.uk/rescareer/strategy.htm](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/rescareer/strategy.htm)) which sets out the ways in which the research councils are seeking to influence the career development of researchers and the attractiveness of research career paths. A key aim in this strategy is the revision of the 1996 Concordat to produce a comprehensive code of practice for employers and funders on the management and development of research staff. BBSRC has also developed a Human Resources Strategy which gives details of the responsibilities of our grantholders to the staff funded on their grants. New criteria being introduced this year will allow committees to consider the investment in people likely to result from a grant award. BBSRC recognises the difficulties of recruiting

and retaining the best researchers and is developing new guidance for grant applicants on how to request appropriate postdoctoral salaries.

*Key conclusion: BBSRC should investigate the apparent gap in support for the development of bioinformatic tools for research within GDB's remit. Should this gap be real, the Council should take steps either to review its policy for support of bioinformatics research through all committees, or to encourage more applications to GDB in this area.*

The level of support for bioinformatics has increased since the period covered by this evaluation and GDB currently believes it receives a reasonable number of bioinformatics applications which are dealt with appropriately by the Committee.

Support for this area of research was also identified as a possible gap in the Biochemistry and Cell Biology Committee's (BCB) portfolio and so this matter will be referred, for investigation, to the Tools & Resources Strategy Panel which has responsibility for setting strategy in this area.

*Key conclusion: BBSRC should remain committed to cross-council communication to facilitate interdisciplinary research.*

BBSRC is fully committed to funding interdisciplinary research and is considering how the level of cross-council communication might be improved. This will include closer liaison with the other research councils funding genes and developmental biology research.

*Key conclusion: BBSRC should consider the relevance, breadth, and clarity of Priority Areas within the GDB remit.*

BBSRC accepts that there is confusion about Priority Areas (PAs) within the GDB community; this was also identified as a problem by other portfolio review panels. BBSRC will take steps to clarify the position of PAs and to reinforce the fact that the quality of the science is the key criterion for BBSRC funding. The future of PAs will be referred to future meetings of the Chairs of the Research Committees; changing the terminology from 'Priority Areas' to 'Highlights' might help reduce confusion.

*Key conclusion: BBSRC should seek to promote further contacts and collaborations between GDB grantholders and industry, when appropriate. Specifically, liaising with university administrators on technology transfer could be very beneficial in some circumstances.*

Encouraging interaction between research and industry is a key priority for BBSRC, and we have already met our commitment to double our investment in collaborative grants by 2007-08. Our Bioscience for Industry Strategy Panel regularly reviews BBSRC's support in this area and identifies new mechanisms to support knowledge transfer. We already have strong links with university research offices and will consider how we might develop these further to make our grantholders more aware of the opportunities in technology transfer. It may be appropriate to review the current rules for Industrial Partnership Awards to ensure that they do not disadvantage small companies.

*Key conclusion: BBSRC should continue to seek opportunities to encourage and facilitate bioscientists to engage with the public. This could include dedicated financial support, dissemination of examples of best practise, consultation with experts from other organisations, and assessing the amount of time available for such activities.*

We require our grantholders to spend 1-2 days per year on engaging with the public about their research, and provide a wide range of mechanisms to assist grantholders to carry out these activities, including funding schemes, web-based resources and communications training. We also encourage and assist grantholders to participate in discussion meetings and events for the general public.

*Key conclusion: The Panel endorses the attempts of BBSRC to increase the number of longer and larger grants provided through the GDB committee. Allowing the length of the grant to reflect the needs of the science and the research group would be beneficial and should ensure that an appropriate balance between longer and larger grants and three-year, one-RA grants is maintained.*

As discussed above, we recognise that some research groups would benefit from longer term funding and have introduced a new programme to allow grantholders to apply for longer and/or larger grants. Between 2001 and 2005, the GDB committee funded 20% of all larger responsive mode grants: nine grants were funded at a value of over £0.5M, two of which were over £1M. We will encourage grantholders to apply for the most appropriate funding model to complete the research.

BBSRC  
June 2007