

## **BBSRC's response to NanoJury UK**

### **Introduction**

The research that BBSRC funds includes some of the most exciting, challenging and contentious areas of modern science. We aim to promote public discussion about issues surrounding the conduct, implications and potential applications of our research to inform our thinking and to help us address matters of public interest or concern. As part of our programme of activities, BBSRC provided financial support to 'NanoJury UK', a citizen's jury organised by PEALS, Greenpeace and the Cambridge Nanoscience Interdisciplinary Research Collaboration (IRC) that looked at the issues surrounding the application of nanotechnologies. The Jury brought together 15 randomly-chosen people from different backgrounds who heard evidence from a variety of witnesses including scientists, civil society representatives and government advisors. The Jury produced a series of recommendations that were considered by BBSRC's Bioscience for Society Strategy Panel.

Engaging the public upstream, whilst necessary in order that intelligence is gathered and the wider public involved before products are developed, is likely to elicit broad responses. Some of the recommendations from the NanoJury go beyond the scope of nanotechnologies, and some might have been predicted. The independent evaluators praised the process overall but noted that the jurors had had to learn about nanotechnologies before they could make their recommendations, which provided a constraint within which the organisers and participants had to work. In our response we comment only on those recommendations relevant to BBSRC, although we will be pleased to discuss other issues as required. In common with the evaluators, we see the Jury as a valuable and innovative experiment that provides a number of useful lessons for the future.

### **Response to recommendations**

#### **(i) General 1 and 6, regarding public or non-specialist representation on committees, and the need for citizens' juries at points decided by public consensus.**

BBSRC has believed for many years that public views should be considered during the development of new technologies and strongly supports this recommendation. We feel that public and non-specialist views can be gathered in a number of ways, including citizens' juries. For example, BBSRC supported the first consensus conference on plant biotechnology in 1994 that raised issues such as labelling and choice; issues that were subsequently shown to be of vital importance to public acceptance of the use of GM technology in agriculture and food science. We have also employed other methods of gathering public views such as focus groups and workshops (e.g. on bioremediation in 2000/1), consultations and discussion groups (e.g. on farm animal genomics in 2004) and public attitude studies (e.g. on diet and health in 2005).

In 2005, BBSRC set up the Bioscience for Society Strategy Panel to advise the Council at a strategic level on consumer and public interest issues. The Panel's membership includes ethicists, social scientists, educationalists and those with expertise in animal welfare, environmental and consumer issues. The Panel uses a variety of techniques to gather information about public attitudes and advises BBSRC accordingly. We believe

that having a separate Panel is a better alternative to minority non-specialist membership on every committee. The latter can result in 'tokenism', and also after a few meetings the non-specialist may become so involved in the particular area that they cease to validly represent the non-specialist community from which they were chosen. This view was articulated in BBSRC's recent response to the AEBC report 'What Shapes the Research Agenda?'.

**(ii) General 3 and 6, recommending greater openness in public funding of the development of nanotechnologies, and more public consultation and dialogue about nanotechnology.**

BBSRC is a partner in another public dialogue project about nanotechnology ('Nanodialogues'), led by DEMOS, that will look more particularly at public views about how nanoscience research is funded. This project is currently on-going and a report will be published later this year. We have also recently launched an exhibition about nanotechnology and held a discussion meeting in conjunction with the exhibition in April 2006 at the Edinburgh Science Festival. The exhibition currently showcases some of the recommendations from NanoJury alongside some of the science that we fund and will be developed to highlight outcomes from Nanodialogues when that project is complete. It will tour other venues and festivals around the UK, where we will also host discussion meetings.

More generally, information about how BBSRC funds science is available on our website, including lists of the criteria that are used by the peer reviewers, details of the process and information about the projects we are currently funding. We welcome feedback about our processes either via our website or at Open Meetings. Our decision-making structures were one of the topics selected for discussion at our first Open Meeting, in February 2005.

**(iii) Communication, recommending that scientists' communication skills should be improved and that scientists should go into schools to talk with students about science as a career.**

BBSRC is seeking to increase the opportunities and funding for communications skills training for our funded researchers, and has already contributed to a public affairs training course run by the Cambridge IRC. In addition, we run media training courses for our scientists and will be running one focussed on nanoscience at the University of Bristol in June 2006.

BBSRC supports several schemes that encourage scientists to interact with school pupils and students, for example the Researchers in Residence and Nuffield bursaries schemes. Much of this activity is coordinated by Research Councils UK. The Councils also support science teachers by producing resources and supporting training, and would be interested to see if there is a demand for specific support about nanoscience.