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Minutes of the Bioscience for Society Strategy Advisory Panel meeting held on 24 November 2016 at The Grand Connaught Rooms, 61-65 Great Queen Street, London, WC2B 5DA.

Those Attending:

Panel Members

Dr Erinma Ochu (Chair)
Dr Jane Calvert
Professor Mark Hankins
Professor Brian Ilbery
Mr Ben Johnson
Dr Lawrence McGinty
Mr Patrick Mulvany
Dr Patrick Sinnett-Smith
Professor Sarah Wolfensohn

BBSRC Office

Dr Charly Cureton
Mr Paul Gemmill
Mrs Tracey Jewitt
Dr Patrick Middleton

Apologies:

Professor Robert Dingwall
Professor Joanna Chataway
Professor Christine Hauskeller
Dr Martyn Pickersgill
Dr Kate Weiner
Mr Rob Yorke

ITEM 1: CHAIR'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION (ORAL)

1. Dr Ochu welcomed everyone to the meeting and informed Members that she would be Chairing the meeting in Professor Dingwall's absence.
2. The Chair then welcomed Mrs Jewitt, Head of Engagement and Insight at BBSRC, to the meeting, informing the Panel that Mrs Jewitt was attending the meeting as an observer.
3. Apologies were received from Professor Dingwall, Professor Chataway, Professor Hauskeller, Dr Pickersgill, Dr Weiner and Mr Yorke.
4. It was noted that Dr Weiner had sent in comments on the papers and these were considered under the relevant agenda items.
5. The Chair informed the Panel that Professor Ilbery was attending his last meeting, as he was retiring from the Panel at the end of December 2016. She thanked Professor Ilbery for his considerable contribution to the Panel and BBSRC activities over the last six years, before wishing him well in his retirement.
6. Members were reminded to check their details currently held on the Declared Interests Register and update as necessary.

ITEM 2: UPDATE FROM BBSRC (ORAL)

7. The Panel was provided with an update on the creation of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the associated Higher Education and Research (HER) Bill. The update included information about the progress of the HER Bill through parliament and the anticipated timetable for the Bill to receive Royal Assent (March-April 2017).

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8. Mr Gemmill described the current challenging environment BBSRC and the other Councils (that are expected to combine to form UKRI) are operating within, highlighting the climate of uncertainty underpinning current discussions and planning and the impact of recent competing pressures on BEIS colleagues' time (including work on the Autumn Statement) on transition planning. He went on to outline John Kingman's (interim Chair UKRI) vision of the shape of UKRI, before updating the Panel on the recruitment timescales for key positions, including the Chief Executive (currently underway), Chief Finance Officer (planned to start shortly) and first non-executive board members (planned to start shortly), expressing BEIS' ambition for these positions to be recruited to by the end of February 2017.
9. In response to challenge from the Panel around BBSRC's formal position on the creation of UKRI, Mr Gemmill stressed the opportunities that BBSRC saw in the creation of UKRI, and the proactive role it was taking in trying to influence and shape current discussions and to ensure that Bioscience had a strong voice in the new organisation.
10. A Member asked Mr Gemmill to comment on the likely impact of UKRI on future BBSRC funding decisions. Mr Gemmill explained that it was anticipated that the individual Councils would retain autonomy in allocating delegated funds as per the Haldane principle, and pointed out that the underlying financial pressures would still impact on individual council funding plans.
11. Mr Gemmill provided the Panel with a brief update on the BBSRC-relevant outcomes from the Autumn Statement. He welcomed the announcement of an extra £2 billion a year for research and development by 2020, and stated that greater clarity would be required regarding how the funds will be allocated before BBSRC could better understand the implications of the Statement.
12. Mr Gemmill provided the Panel with an update on the Institute Assessment Exercise (IAE). Members were informed that, with the exception of the new Quadram Institute, all institutes had submitted Institute Strategic Programme Grant (ISPGs) and Core Capability Grant (CCGs) applications, which had now undergone peer review. He explained that the core recommendations from the assessment panel were now awaiting BBSRC Council consideration at their meeting on the 7 December 2016. The Panel was informed that the final outcomes from the IAE would be announced in Spring 2017, following meetings with the individual institutes in early 2017.

ITEM 3: UPDATE ON THE EMBEDDING WIDER PERSPECTIVES PROJECT (BSS 04/2016)

13. Dr Cureton introduced this item and took the panel through a short presentation which gave an overview of the project and outlined the progress to date and future plans.
14. The Panel was very supportive of the work and the overall direction of the project. There was discussion around the project's outcomes, in particular the degree to which some outcomes were central while others were secondary. In addition the Panel encouraged the Office to reconsider the wording and thinking behind the outcome around trust in BBSRC to reflect more mutual trust. The secretariat agreed to re-circulate the desired outcomes document for further comment following the meeting.

Action: Secretariat to circulate the desired outcomes document (**Annex 4**) for further comment

Action: Panel members to provide the Secretariat with suggested amendments to the desired outcomes document (**Annex 4**)

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15. The Panel welcomed the framework of questions as a tool to flexibility support wider perspective consideration but raised some specific points. Due to time constraints these were not discussed in depth during the meeting and the Secretariat agreed to recirculate the framework of questions for further comment.

Action: Secretariat to circulate the framework of questions (**Annex 6**) for further amendment

Action: Panel members to provide Secretariat with suggested amendments to the framework of questions (**Annex 6**)

16. The Panel questioned the extent of ambition and reach of the project. The Office outlined that the scope of the project has currently been limited to supporting BBSRC office colleagues to more routinely and effectively consider wider perspectives and the corresponding ambition of the project was to see such considerations become embedded as 'business as usual' activities.

17. The Panel recommended that the Office learn from the culture change projects funded as part of RCUK public engagement strategy: the Beacons and Catalysts and that BBSRC takes steps to talk widely about the project with external stakeholders.

Action: Secretariat to look at learnings from the Beacons/Catalysts

ITEM 4: STRATEGY PANEL UPDATES (BSS 05/2016)

18. Dr Ochu introduced this item, explaining that the majority of updates from the Strategy Advisory Panels (SAPs) were composed of meeting agendas, as many of the panels had only recently held meetings, and the Secretariats had not yet compiled minutes/meeting notes. The Panel expressed their frustration at the lack of information provided and also commented on the lack of consistency in link members receiving strategy panel papers, limiting the Panel's ability to effectively engage with other SAPs.

19. Dr Ochu informed the Panel that, following Professor Ilbery's retirement, two link positions were now available, for the Bioscience Skills and Careers Strategy Advisory Panel and the Industrial Biotechnology and Bioenergy Strategy Advisory Panel. Panel members were encouraged to register their interest in either vacancy.

Action: Panel members to register their interest in either available link position with the Secretariat

20. Dr Middleton informed the Panel that a project had just launched within BBSRC to look at information sharing between SAPs. He highlighted the optimised approach BSS has adopted of publishing full minutes online as soon as possible after a meeting, but reflected that not all panels currently felt as able to support such an approach.

Action: Secretariat to review the BSS-Strategy Panel link scheme and make recommendations on its implementation moving forward

21. Mr Mulvany drew the Panel's attention to item 3 from the Research Advisory Panel (RAP) update (Global Food Security Programme: Update and emerging challenges), commending Professor Benton and the Panel's recognition that farmers are keen on new farming approaches/practices and that investment in developing such systems is a lot cheaper than the in-depth genetic restructuring of an industry crop.

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ITEM 5: HORIZON SCANNING SESSION (EXERCISE)

22. Unfortunately there was insufficient time within the meeting to cover this item and it was agreed that the Panel should submit items for inclusion under this item following the meeting.

Action: Panel members to provide Secretariat with any new topics/reports/items of interest to the Panel and BBSRC.

ITEM 6: GENOME EDITING: ACCESSING WIDER PERSPECTIVES (BSS 06/2016)

23. Dr Middleton introduced this item, providing a brief update on the formation of the joint BSS/Exploiting New Ways of Working Strategy Advisory Panel (ENWW) genome editing sub group, including progress with the development of draft terms of reference, membership criteria and RAP's endorsement of the approach being taken.

24. The Panel was informed that since the last BSS meeting, the Nuffield Council on Bioethics had published its review of genome editing¹ and that the review had identified two areas "which required urgent ethical consideration: human reproduction and livestock".

25. Dr Middleton informed the Panel, that following the publication of this report, an additional aim had been added to the Group's terms of reference, to consider how BBSRC should respond to the report's call for urgent ethical consideration around human reproduction and livestock.

26. The Panel commented on the timeliness of this work and the importance of such discussions and engagement happening as upstream as possible. They encouraged BBSRC to consider the language it uses in discussions and publications, to ensure that it is understandable for all stakeholders. Members also encouraged consideration of the terminology to be used, citing apparent differences in reaction from some Non-Governmental Organisations to the terms 'Gene Drives'² and 'Genome Editing'³.

27. Panel Members also raised the importance of ensuring that international perspectives, such as those of the Biodiversity Convention (CBD), and implications of the technology for animal welfare were also considered by the sub group.

ITEM 7: UPDATE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT TEAM ACTIVITIES (ORAL)

28. Dr Middleton introduced this item and provided the Panel with an overview of current BBSRC CET activities. He took the Panel through a short presentation to demonstrate how current CET activities mapped onto to the BBSRC Corporate Communication and Engagement Strategy, drawing to the Panel's attention the six activities forming the current focus of attention:

- Frontier bioscience campaign
- BBSRC in the policy arena

¹ <http://nuffieldbioethics.org/wp-content/uploads/Genome-editing-an-ethical-review.pdf>

² Gene drive is a technique that promotes the inheritance of a particular gene to increase its prevalence in a population (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gene_drive)

³ Genome editing is a powerful research tool that allows sections of DNA in the genome to be precisely removed or replaced using 'molecular scissors' (<http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/news/policy/2015/150902-n-genome-editing-position-statement/>)

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- Genome editing engagement
 - Widening perspectives
 - Change communications
 - Establishing internal communications
29. The Panel was then provided with short updates on the 'focus activities' that had not been discussed during the meeting, in particular the rationale behind the frontier bioscience campaign and the findings from the recent corporate stakeholder engagement survey, including steps BBSRC plans to undertake in the policy arena in response to some of the findings.
30. Dr Middleton then provided the Panel with a brief overview of recent BBSRC media activities, covering the range of platforms BBSRC uses (Twitter, Facebook, Tumbler, YouTube and LinkedIn), before highlighting the success of Tumbler (an image-led blog) as a mechanism for BBSRC to engage with younger audiences (typically 16-24 year olds) and its recent success in being highly commended in the UK Blog Awards.
31. Mr Mulvany commended BBSRC for its profile in social media and wondered if this could be used to raise further interest in the broad range of biological sciences and their application that he felt are currently under-represented in the media feeds.
32. The Panel discussed a range of ideas for raising BBSRC's profile in the media but discounted the majority of these (including identifying a key figure to spearhead engagement with BBSRC science (akin to Brian Cox and physics) and producing a fly-on-the-wall documentary involving BBSRC-funded scientists), where Members questioned the likely impact of or buy-in (from independent filmmakers) for these activities.
33. Mr Gemmill highlighted the significant input BBSRC already has with current rural affairs programmes and how branded goods (logoed lab coats and equipment stickers etc.) have been used to successfully increase BBSRC visibility, but reflected on the fact that often the programmes fail to openly mention BBSRC or its funding underpinning the research stories. Dr Middleton mentioned the ongoing work BBSRC is undertaking to build and improve interactions with BBSRC-funded researchers, to ensure a steady stream of research stories.

ITEM 8: AOB (ORAL)

34. A Member raised to the attention of the Panel their concern around the delivery of the Global Challenges Research Fund, in particular the challenging delivery timescales and the significant number of fledgling collaborations being established with researchers in developing countries to access the fund and the impact these could have on the quality of science being funded. It was agreed that this topic would be added to a future agenda for further discussion.

Action: Secretariat to ensure a discussion on the delivery of the Global Challenges Research Fund is tabled for a future meeting

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35. A Member queried whether or not the Panel was likely to see any feedback from the institutes following the IAE. Mr Gemmill confirmed that no such response was expected.

36. The Panel was informed that BBSRC anticipated holding the next BSS meeting in March 2017 and members would be canvassed for their availability shortly.

Action: Secretariat to consult BSS members for their availability for a meeting in March 2017