

Meeting Note: Policy Forum 6th December 2021

Attendees:

Jane Banks SC (Staff & Chair)
Ryan Mercer SC (Staff)
Elizabeth Chamberlain IOP
Sean Edmunds IPEM
Frances Evans ASE
Stephen French IFST
Nicky King SNS

Joseph Lewis IES
Laura Marshall RSB
Robert Massey RAS
Arthur Nicholas IST
Andy Smith BASES

Guests:

Jon Broderick RSC
Katie Raymer RSC

Apologies:

Sarah Garry BSS
David Lloyd-Roach IChemE
Caren Reid ASPIH

Tanya Sheridan RSC
Rachel Stonehouse IOM3

1) Welcome

- **Jane Banks** opened the meeting.

2) Review of Science Council Policy activity - 2021

- **Ryan Mercer** gave a presentation on the Science Council's policy activity in 2021, (slides circulated with this email) highlighting that:
 - The Science Council created a new Policy Officer position (to which Ryan was appointed).
 - The Science Council Policy Forum has been evolved, with meetings focused on a set agenda of shared interest, rather than just sharing updates from member organisations.
 - The Science Council has written to and met with Sir Patrick Vallance to discuss Professional Registration, EDI and how the Science Council can be a bridge between Government and member organisations.
 - The Science Council produced a joint letter to Rishi Sunak (Chancellor of the Exchequer), signed by 26 member organisations, ahead of the 2021 Spending Review, calling for steady rises of investment in R&D, restoring funding to scientific collaboration projects impacted by ODA cuts and the need for

investment in skills and science education to support the future science workforce.

- Policy Forum members made the following points in about the Science Council's activities:
 - That it is a positive step forward for member organisations to be looking to speak together with a shared voice on some issues through the Science Council.
 - It is good for the Science Council to highlight issues such as science funding, which individual members may not be able to engage with effectively.
- Policy Forum members made the following observations about the state of science policy in 2021:
 - Very little extra money coming from Government through research councils, meaning long term or less directly applicable research has not benefited from spending increases.
 - Devolved nations responded very differently to the pandemic and the Science Council should consider how it can engage with them more in future. Some member organisations are considering what they may need to do should Scotland become independent.

3) Reflections on COP 26

- **Joseph Lewis (IES)** gave a presentation on what happened at COP 26 (slides circulated with minutes) making the following points:
 - Outcomes were overall mixed with the sector feeling that while not a failure there is a need for greater ambition:
 - Some positive steps including the move to an annual climate conference and commitments on methane, deforestation and more countries setting net zero targets.
 - There are continued concerns that some commitments are not ambitious enough including the phase down of coal and lack of substance to China's net zero commitment.
 - There was a positive recognition of science playing a positive role, and highlighting how it can help facilitate finding solutions and on the importance of greater science skills.
 - Going forward, all of the commitments made require a lot of focus on implementation and maintaining scrutiny on this to ensure targets are met will be an important task for the scientific community.
- Policy Forum members made the following points in relation to the challenges the UK science community faces in relation to climate change:
 - The science community has a role to play in supporting scrutiny around the carbon budgets.

- There is increasing a call on the science community to demonstrate the net-negative technologies deployed at scale.
- Support for carbon capture and storage isn't unequivocal. Some of the current ethical debates around this, for example, a strategy of using bioenergy with carbon capture long term, would involve massive land use and reduction of bio-diversity.
- Many are concerned about the language of NET Zero, as implies lots of tree planting and ecology change, rather than emissions reduction.
- Policy Forum members particularly highlighted the importance of public engagement and awareness making the following points:
 - Improving the scientific literacy of the population appears to be a cross cutting theme which we all have a role in enhancing and is essential when tackling major societal challenges like climate change.
 - When the Science is unclear and debated in public it can be hard for the public to follow, but just because scientists don't agree it doesn't mean that having that debate is unhealthy but need to consider how it's perceived and understood.
 - Some member organisations have particular routes to public engagement, for example BASES have ease of public engagement through sport.
 - Many people are interested in how they can reduce their impact on the environment, but are not clear on the relative impact of their actions. Eg: People have concerns around the lifecycle impacts of electric vehicles (which have been debunked but this isn't universally understood).
 - However, the importance of systems thinking was noted, because transformative change to the system is needed rather than just reducing individual contributions to unsustainable systems.
- Policy forum members expressed interest in how other member organisations are reducing their carbon outputs and that the Science Council may have a role in sharing best practice here.

4) Science Council activity 2022

- **Ryan Mercer** gave a short presentation on the Science Council's plans for policy activity in 2022, (slides circulated with this email) highlighting that:
 - The Science Council now has a limited budget to undertake events to support our policy activity.
 - Policy activities are intended to both highlight areas where there are common challenges and views across the scientific community, but also convene on areas of difference.
 - The events under consideration include:

- A roundtable on workforce issues, bringing together the pieces of work and evidence gathered by member organisations, to highlight shared priorities.
 - A panel discussion on internationalism in science and Britain's place in the global scientific community, to enable the Science Council to enter this debate and provide a post-covid networking opportunity.
 - A major day long conference on net-zero/sustainability, specifically on what the UK needs to do to meet its climate targets, which brings together member organisations with different perspectives to discuss the issues openly.
- Policy Forum members broadly welcomed the approach outlined and made the following points:
 - It is important that we view constructive debate within science is healthy, both to the public and Government.
 - There could be value in some sort of event to discuss how we can work together on scientific literacy, communicating with the public around scientific method and consensus.
 - Member organisations and others do a lot of outreach work (eg. British Science Association, but there may be strength in coming together on this to emphasise the importance.
 - On internationalism, the debate is about more than just Europe and Brexit, but on issues like the importance/challenges of scientific relationships with countries like China and Russia.

Ryan Mercer, Policy Officer