

Meeting Note: Policy Forum 16th June 2021

Attendees:

Jane Banks SC (Staff)
Ryan Mercer SC (Staff)
Flo Bullough GSL
Elizabeth Chamberlain IOP
Sarah Garry BSSS

Joseph Lewis IES
Rob Massey RAS
Arthur Nicholas IST
Megan O'Donnell GSL
Tanya Sheridan RSC

Apologies:

Sarah Beacock NI
Liz Bentley RMetS
Gavin Blackett ORS
Lorenzo Casarosa IMAREST

Sean Edmunds IPEM
Laura Marshall RSB
Daniel Stoker IMAREST

1) Welcome and introduction

- **Jane Banks and Ryan Mercer** opened the meeting, outlining the new format of the meeting, where one or two issues will be discussed. For this first meeting the Science Council has chosen the topics, but members are encouraged to make suggestions for future meetings.
- **Ryan Mercer** explained that the Science Council is developing its initial program of policy activity and in doing so is considering that:
 - The Science Council is a voice for its membership and therefore when it makes a statement it is understood to have the backing of its membership; it therefore cannot act unilaterally without reference to member views.
 - The Science Council's strength is that it can convene members and other stakeholders, to discuss issues as a trusted party.
 - It can also draw on the expertise and capabilities of members to inform and guide its activities.
 - However, it still has limited resources for undertaking independent research or gathering primary evidence.
- In a brief discussion it was highlighted that trust and ongoing communication between the Science Council and its members is important, as not every word put out can be approved by all members, but instead the Science Council needs to be confident that what its communicating has members backing.

2) Workforce

- **Ryan Mercer** outlined the Science Council's early thinking about Workforce as a strand of policy activity. Noting that:
 - The Government has an aspiration for 2.4% of GDP to be spent on R&D, for this to be possible the future scientific workforce will need to be strengthened.
 - It is a pan-scientific issue, impacting on all our members in a relatively common way.
 - Members are undertaking work in this space on their specific needs and priorities (especially RSC, RSB, IoP).
 - The Science council could bring together the key messages and policy asks from across the membership and wider science policy community, providing an overview for Government.
- In the following discussion points made included:
 - Objectives for the work could be to both:
 - Create a set of markers for government to be measured against
 - Build credibility of the science council as a voice for members, enabling both members and policymakers to see the Science Council as effective in that role.
 - The Government's 2.4% agenda needs to account for the capacity of human resource and how to ensure that money is spent effectively.
 - Related priority areas could include science education and capital spending on science related infrastructure, such as data networks and connectivity.
 - Government will likely have an appetite for coherent sector wide solutions.
 - When talking around the 2.4% agenda, it is important to note that this refers just to R&D spending, while there are also workforce challenges for employers relating to the practical application of science.
- The Royal Society of Chemistry has been undertaking the following work in this space:
 - A major report on workforce published last year, with follow up work to come, potentially in 2022.
 - The report showed how much of the workforce in chemistry is interdisciplinary, and how central maths skills are to that.
 - Apprentices and technical skills are a shortage area (for example lab technician apprenticeships).
 - A piece of work around "what works for innovation" will be launched in the Autumn.
- The Institute of Physics has been undertaking a piece of work on workforce. The first phase of this is almost complete and will provide quantitative evidence to feed into the spending review. A second phase is planned, which will include a deep dive look at skills and future demand.

3) UK approach to Global Science

- **Ryan Mercer** noted that a common theme of initial conversations with member organisations on policy, was a set of issues related to how the UK approaches international collaboration and the global nature of scientific endeavour, these issues including:
 - Immigration reform
 - Trusted research campaign – tone of communication
 - Participation in international programmes eg: Horizon Europe
 - Funding for programmes that support international collaboration eg: International Development funding.
- In the ensuing discussion around the area, the following comments were made:
 - We're still waiting to hear more about the Cabinet Office's Trusted Research programme and the BEIS Research Collaboration Advice Team (RCAT).
 - Environment in universities is open and collaborative, which may not be well understood in Government.
 - The science community is not naïve about the risks associated with international collaboration, but government rhetoric around this can have a chilling impact on UK science.
 - These issues are indicative of need from clarity from science community to Government given the seeming contradictory messaging from the Government side.
 - Universities UK and Russell Group are likely to be engaged on this and should be a priority for the science council to work with.

Ryan Mercer, Policy Officer
1 July 2021