Meeting Note: Policy Forum 8th December 2022

Attendees:
Jane Banks SC (Staff & Chair)  Joseph Lewis IES
Ryan Mercer SC (Staff)        Robert Massey RAS
Stephen French IFST           Megan O'Donnell GSL
Catriona Inverarity IPEM      Tanya Sheridan RSC
Nicky King SNS                Rachel Stonehouse IOM3

Apologies:
Lawrence Ambrose RCPod
Gavin Blackett ORS
Laura Marshall RSB
Andy Smith BASES

1) Welcome
   - Jane Banks opened the meeting.

2) Feedback on Science Council Climate Conference and updates on COP-27
   - Ryan Mercer opened the discussion noting that the Science Council Climate conference, held on the 29th of September had received positive feedback from attendees and asked member organisations for their reflections on the day.

   - Policy forum members noted some strengths of the conference were as follows:
     o Staff from member organisations all reported back that they found the day useful and are glad they attended.
     o There was a high overall attendance of a range of relevant stakeholders who remained engaged throughout the whole day.
     o That it was a significant win for the Science Council to attract Sir Patrick Valance (GCSA) as the keynote speaker.
     o The various breakout sessions ran smoothly despite the amount of behind the scenes work entailed.
     o That the networking on the day was extremely useful for some member organisations and that in some cases has led to follow on conversations for future collaborations.

   - The process of member organisations collaborating to design the breakout sessions was particularly valuable as it facilitated greater understanding of each other’s work on the topic and has fostered further opportunities for collaboration.

   - Members suggested that similar future events could be improved in a number of ways.
     o Making a delegate list available to attendees, particularly member organisations so they can take full advantage of the networking opportunities available.
     o Ensuring that each breakout has a clear plan to ensure time for an adequate Q&A.
     o Having a clear plan for the event’s legacy, how will activity and engagement from the event continue following the event and how will this be monitored.
3) COP27 Egypt

- **Joseph Lewis** outlined some of the key outcomes of the COP27 climate conference in Egypt:
  - The conference was the first to attempt to resolve the issue of loss and damage to countries as a result of emissions by developed countries, enabling conversations with countries that would otherwise not be involved.
  - There has been some further progress on climate adaptation.
  - No significant progress on mitigation, which is disappointing as it was hoped that COP26 would be the start of a process of commitments ramping up each year.

- Policy forum members noted that they had reduced engagement with their members and stakeholders on COP27 compared to COP26, and there was significantly lower public interest, largely because the conference was not being held in the UK.

4) Latest Government changes and likely impact on Science Policy

- Policy forum members had a short discussion reflecting on how the change in Prime Minister and recent budgetary changes may impact on Science Policy. In the discussion the following points were made:
  - R&D investment was confirmed at £20bn by 2024/2025 but the longer-term commitment to £22bn by 2026 missing, consistent with the wider budget which planned for spending reductions in 2-3 years’ time but not immediately.
  - Constraints on R&D tax credits may have some negative impact.
  - ONS has been recalculating the level of R&D in the economy which may make it appear the UK is closer to the 2.5% target than it is currently.
  - There continues to be a lack of clarity around Horizon Europe and particularly a £400m offset.
  - There are ongoing discussions about the UK’s ongoing involvement in the European Space Agency (ESA).
    - The UK Government wants to continue to work with ESA but the funding mechanisms are more complex now the UK is not a member of the EU.
    - A lot of countries other EU are reluctant to spend as much on the ESA going forward, though the UK is not calling for reduced funding.

5) Any other business

- A new coal mine has been announced and members were asked if and how they are planning to respond:
  - The Geological Society doesn’t comment on individual fossil fuel projects.
  - The Institution of Environmental sciences noted that it is a very important issue for many in their community, but they do not intend to comment specifically.
  - The Royal Society of Chemistry also has no plans to comment.

- **Joseph Lewis** highlighted that the IES has announced new horizon scanning and foresight work (Future of Environmental Sciences 2023) and may engage further with other member organisations on this soon.