

Nurse Review of Research Councils: Call for Evidence

Response Form

Please state whether you are responding as an individual, or on behalf of an organisation:

On behalf of AHDB

Please write here your name/ the name of your organisation and contact details. This would help us to contact you if we have further questions.

Guy Attenborough, Director Of Communications & Legal Services, Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board – guy.attenborough@ahdb.org.uk

Please provide evidence and views in relation to the following themes:

1. Strategic decision-making

The BBSRC Age of Bioscience strategic plan clearly lays out a vision and strategic priorities across 3 broad themes. One of the themes is agriculture and food security which is closely aligned to the vision and mission of AHDB. The support for research addressing the efficiency and sustainability of crop and animal production maps directly onto AHDB Corporate Objectives.

More specifically the BBSRC Plant Science focus on enhancing yield and quality, preventing and combating pests diseases and weeds and multidisciplinary research to maintain the essential functions of soils, link strongly to key priorities defined in the crop sector research strategies.

<http://www.hgca.com/research/funding-and-awards/research-and-knowledge-exchange-strategy.aspx>,
<http://www.hdc.org.uk/over-arching-strategy>,
<http://www.potato.org.uk/sites/default/files/research%20%26%20innovation%20strategy%202015-20.pdf>

Similarly, the priorities identified for Animal Sciences, namely, animal health and welfare, and genetics and genomics for improved production and disease resistance, align closely to AHDB's objectives for improved efficiency and sustainability in animal production. We agree that endemic diseases including zoonoses remain key challenges, as do new and emerging infections, increasing resistance to antimicrobials. Better understanding of gut health and function will underpin development in precision animal nutrition.

<http://www.eblex.org.uk/research/funding-opportunities/>

However, the overview of agriculture and food security research, as presented on the BBSRC website, identifies 4 current focus areas: aquaculture; anti-microbial resistance; wheat; and vaccinology, which represent a relatively narrow range of research opportunities. Whilst the foci do change to cover other areas wider national and regional

interests should be considered. Industry engagement, including consultation with the levy bodies would enable a more representative balance of priorities to be developed.

Research funds available for applied or translational research provided by Defra have declined by approximately 45% over the last 10 years and, whilst the proportion of BBSRC funding for applied projects has increased, the interpretation of applied differs between the two and translational research has been squeezed significantly. The remit of BBSRC and other research councils should be examined closely to see if this funding gap can be closed, at least in part, by reallocation of some of BBSRC funds.

(<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2014-09-26/209587>)

2. Collaborations and partnerships

The research council-sponsored industry clubs (e.g. CIRC, SARIC, IBTI, HAPI) represent good examples of partnerships between industry and research councils, and in some instances the devolved administrations. The governance of these clubs has enabled research council funding for industry-informed objectives. This model could be extended, both in time and scope with a view to delivering greater strategic relevance.

Over the last 10 years Defra funding for predominantly applied agricultural research has declined and as a result a number of research centres have closed or been privatised either before or during that time. The BBSRC Institutes have enabled the continuation of strategically driven agricultural research within the framework of scientific excellence albeit with some loss in core capacity. It is vital that this capacity is maintained and strengthened in order to deliver BBSRCs vision for agriculture and food security.

It is crucial that the research supported by the research councils integrate with the programmes supported by other government research sponsors, particularly the devolved administrations e.g. Scottish Government. The forthcoming Agri-Tech Centres for innovation provide an opportunity to enhance the partnership of BBSRC, industry and researchers, and BBSRC should make every effort to ensure that the underpinning work funded is directly linked into the programmes developed at the centres for more strategic and translational research, and knowledge exchange.

3. Balance of funding portfolio

The balance of funding between the research councils is appropriate so long as there is sufficient collaboration between them to provide efficient support for cross-cutting areas of strategic relevance. Important examples include soils, engineering, aerobiology, socio-economics and bioinformatics. Without coordinated cross-council programmes there is a danger that these areas are over-looked.

4. Effective ways of working

A greater focus on strategic and applied outcomes is possible without compromising the need for scientific excellence. A more consultative approach would enable a clearer definition of strategic priorities that relate back to research opportunities. The research clubs are one mechanism for this that has been successful and opportunities for expanding this could be explored. Other opportunities for working with industry bodies and the developing AgriTech Centres of Innovation on the definition of research priorities and the evaluation of research proposals could further enhance the relevance and efficiency of uptake of research outputs.

5. Any other comments?

The closing date for responses to this call for evidence is **Friday 17 April 2015 at 23:45**.

Please provide your response in Microsoft Word format. In order to be considered, submissions should be no longer than 3000 words.

Please email or post the completed response form to:

Email: nursereview@bis.gsi.gov.uk

Postal Address:

Nurse Review Secretariat

Research Councils Unit

5/ Victoria 1

Department for Business, Innovations and Skills

1 Victoria Street

London SW1H 0ET

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