

Notes of the External Geophysics Forum
held on
15th March 2013 at the Royal Astronomical Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly

Attendees:

David Southwood (RAS President, Chair)
Duncan Wingham (NERC)
Vicky Jones (HEFCE)
Valerie Dennis (RAS, Minutes Secretary)
Ed Hill
Gareth Chisholm (BAS)
Jolyon Reburn (STFC)
Tim Horbury (Imperial)
Mark Lester (Leicester)
Peter Read (Oxford)
Paul Monks (Leicester & NERC)
Tavi Murray (Swansea)
Harry Brydon
Xiaoming Zhai (UEA)
Jon Bull (NOC)
Robert Massey (RAS Deputy Executive Secretary)

Apologies received:

Tony Owen (UCL)
Anasuya Aruliah (UCL)
Joanna Haigh (Royal Met Soc)
Julia Slingo (Met Office)
Dr Adrian Matthews (UEA)
Mervyn Freeman (BAS)
John Pyle (Cambridge)
Bob Sargent
Christopher Mutlow (RAL)
David Kerridge (BGS)
Mat Collins (Exeter)

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair gave a brief background of the two Geophysics Forums explaining that they had been set up following the success of the Astrophysics Forum. The new bodies are an attempt to establish trust and a communications pathway between the scientific community, the research councils and other organisations such as HEFCE. The forums would not replace advisory committees; all comments would be unattributable i.e. Chatham House rules would apply.

There would also be a Solid Earth Geophysics Forum on May 14th and all present were welcome to attend. Contact should be made via Robert Massey.

Delegates and visitors then introduced themselves.

2. Update on political activity

The Chair gave an update on recent political engagement:

- The RAS had submitted a response to the triennial review of the research councils being carried out by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Francis Maude MP, Cabinet Office Minister, had oversight of the review.

- In the RAS response, the Society had drawn attention to provision for schools and outreach programs. STFC has a strong reputation at the schools and outreach level in contrast to NERC who could do more to actively engage with and excite the public about its science.
- The Chair also explained that the RAS was preparing input to the House of Commons Science & Technology Select Committee inquiry into the European and UK Space Agencies.
- Open Access. The RAS is committed to the Gold Open Access model. The Chair, Robert Massey and Pamela Mortimer (RAS Executive Secretary) had met with an Giles Chichester MEP, who had tabled a question to the European Commission re international adoption of Open Access. Most other EU countries were in favour of the Green Open Access model. The argument being that publicly funded research should be in the public domain.
- A wide ranging discussion on Open Access followed:
 - David Willets, the Science Minister, should aim to remain in step with Europe-wide developments
 - There were many voices in the discussion but HEFCE had not yet declared their position.
 - In the current technical revolution, preventing non-progress is not sustainable. Costs are so much smaller that a change in publishing models is inevitable.
 - Astronomy journals have a mixed solution, Arxiv, which is unrefereed. Major astronomy journals permit authors to publish through Arxiv which effectively acts as (embargo free) green Open Access.
 - Publishing in peer reviewed journals is still the standard by which research is judged.
 - Technical change has transition costs associated with it. In 10 years times all journals would be delivered electronically and learned societies must change their publishing model to reflect this.
 - It was essential however to maintain the quality of the peer review process which is currently free and based on the voluntary contributions of academics.
- The Chair concluded the discussion on political engagement by noting David Parker's appointment as CEO of the UK Space Agency. It would be useful to invite him to speak at the next Forum.
Action: Robert Massey

3. Update from NERC

Prof. Duncan Wingham, CEO of the NERC, presented this item. He welcomed interaction and initiative with the Forum, explaining that NERC had experienced difficulty with dialogue with Learned Societies as there were so many of them.

He then discussed the 'mini' Spending Review (SR). The results of the SR will be announced in June with the individual Research Council allocations agreed in September / October. He felt a likely outcome, although one that was by no means certain, was little change in revenue and capital funding in cash terms..

Prof. Wingham then explained NERC's range of options. Generally, non-ringfenced Departments which includes BIS could be under considerable pressure as it remains a difficult funding climate. On the whole however, the Treasury appears to see science as a positive thing and acknowledges that the UK needs to 'think its way out of trouble' by maintaining the calibre of its science. The Chair commented that NERC's strategy was clear and the battles would start in 2-3 months.

An extensive discussion followed and points raised and questions asked included:

Q: What can the Forum do to assist NERC's case?

DW: Government and MPs need to know the connection between science and its impact.

The Chair drew the forum's attention to the geophysics impact booklet currently in preparation by Robert Massey and Sue Bowler. They were collating examples of high impact geophysics from

across the geophysics community. The RAS expects to publish this later in the year. The Forum was invited to forward as many examples of stories highlighting the positive impact of research to Robert Massey & Sue Bowler.

Action: All

Q. The triennial review was regarded as a two stage process:

A) Do these bodies (research councils) deserve to exist?

B) Are they in the right form or can they be made more efficient?

DW responded to the various other discussion points:

- *Research councils dominate the research agenda, if not total UK research expenditure. If Research Councils were changed it would have a profound effect on research in the UK. The Research Councils are also 'run light'. For example, NERC manages a £300 million budget with circa 150 employees.*
- *NERC is considering 'top-slicing' its budget so that cross-disciplinary research could be conducted in collaboration with EPSRC and BBSRC*
- *NERC must work more closely and in partnership with other research councils. It should continue to open up co-funding from non-BIS sources.*
- *On the partnership between NERC and the Met Office, the latter has modelling expertise and technology which should be exploited in the development of environmental data provision to the wider world. (Delegates felt that NERC needs to be distanced from the MO as their approach might not always be appropriate).*
- *NERC needs to grow its 'customer' focus and this is very much on our agenda.*

4. **Research Excellence Framework (REF) (Vicky Jones, HEFCE)**

Vicky Jones gave an update on the Research Excellence Framework (her presentation can be seen at [this link](#)).

Forum members made the following points in the discussion that followed:

Q: If an output is a refereed paper can this be included twice if co-authors are at the same institution?

A: *Yes. And where an output is listed against two members of staff in the same submission, panels have requested additional information be supplied to outline the author's contribution to the output. More details can be found in the 'panel criteria' document.*

Q: Would this not be regarded as a detriment?

A: *No. The panel would assess it. No half marks would be allocated. It is significant that the emphasis is on "per individual output". Once the sub-panel has accepted that the author has made a substantial contribution to the output, the sub-panel will assess the quality of the output taking no further regard of the staff member's individual contribution. The quality of the output will be judged on its merits independent of authorship arrangements.*

Q: How is self-citation regarded?

A: *The Scopus bibliographic database allows for this.*

Q: How will comparisons of case studies be made? Weighting or linear/pro-rata?

A: *All weighted equally to make up 80% of impact measure.*

Q: Can guidance be given on cross-disciplinary case studies?

A: *These are not discouraged if there is a good level of impact. Other assessment panels can be consulted and different panels may assess impact differently.*

Q: There is a feeling that some disciplines are hard done by.

A: *That is not the case.*

Q: Are additional assessors recruited by sub-panels?

A: *Nominating bodies have provided nominations of individuals to fill the positions of panel members and impact and output assessors. The REF team are currently in the process of recruiting approximately 300 additional assessors based on gaps identified by the survey of submission intentions. Where suitable nominations have not been received, the sub-panels can exceptionally co-opt an individual to join the panel.*

Q: Is the reward for participating clear given the cost of the exercise?

A: *The reward is the allocation of QR funding which is circa £1.6 billion per annum. The cost of the exercise is very small in comparison.*

Q: Is this (QR) funding ring-fenced in the SR?

A: *QR funding and Research Council funding income will be decided in October as part of the SR process.*

The Chair thanked Vicky Jones for her contribution.

5. AOB

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking external contributors and their level of effort. It is anticipated that the Forum would not be convened too often; circa twice per year perhaps as issues arise. The Forum is not owned by any single organisation but the RAS happen to be the operating secretariat.

The meeting closed at 17:10.