

## BBSRC Impact Workshop, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015

In December early career researchers from both the University of Cambridge and the Babraham Institute gathered for an Impact Workshop. This was the first time a joint workshop had been held between the two institutions with welcomes from both Abby Fowden, Head of the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Cambridge and Professor Michael Wakelam, Director of the Babraham Institute. Both set the tone for the day emphasizing how the impact agenda is here to stay, the support available to researchers to help them take their research to the next stage and the measures already being put in place for the next Research Excellence Framework.

Catriona Manville from RAND, gave a presentation about Articulating and Evidencing Impact after RAND's involvement with evaluating and analysing the results of REF2014. Delegates learned that measuring impact is not always easy, but it certainly isn't impossible! A little bit of serendipity often helps with generating impact – but you can facilitate this by being in the right place at the right time and by being ready to recognise the opportunity. Catriona's data suggests it takes an average of 17 years to take a basic scientific discovery through the development stages and to become a useful treatment within the health system, however the REF2014 case studies 'only' averaged 7 years from research to impact. This may be evidence of a switch to impacts that are easier to evidence and prove in a shorter time-frame.

Adam Bowen and Daniela Hensen from BBSRC gave a well-received talk keenly listened to by the BBSRC-funded attendees. They emphasized the importance of researchers writing strong pathways to impact. Committee members evaluating grant applications may not be from the same field of research so it is important to be aware of this, but they get excited by good pathways to impact. Daniela gave further advice on the types of things researchers can do to strengthen their case – think about it from the very start, make it relevant and appropriate to your research, and be clear, structured and precise. Things not to do are being vague, narrowly focussed, relying on track record, using routine activities and events that are more for information dissemination than engagement. Adam pointed out the support and funding available from BBSRC and others to enable impact and innovation such as Follow-on-funds, Flexible interchange Programmes (FLIP) and other sources of funding such as InnovateUK. Adam finished with some case studies and a caveat to always read the current grants guide when applying for funding.

Two researchers presented on their perspectives of impact during their careers. Dr Len Stephens from the Babraham Institute gave us the benefit of his past experiences trying to commercialise his research. He gave lots of tips for researchers just starting along the path - such as following up on contacts and establishing a reputation of being open to collaboration, and being mindful that if a company wants to use an output of your research it might be of benefit to maintain a relationship for future projects.

Professor Alison Smith from the University Cambridge gave a very different perspective on her experiences with impact. Her research on algae and biosynthetic pathways has generated not only commercial but also policy and public engagement impacts. These have sometimes taken a disproportionate amount of time but were often stimulating and working with others from outside your field can be of immense benefit. Alison ended with her research philosophy – attempt to do something useful, collaborate, and have fun!

We then had a short panel question and answer session including all the morning speakers. As expected, many questions were directed towards BBSRC and regarded writing pathways to impact – especially how can you be precise when you don't know what the outcome of your research is yet?

Adam and Daniela pointed out that having a clear structure, and showing that you had taken the time to consider the potential beneficiaries of your research and the ways of connecting with them was a good starting point. Another question regarded the varying roles regarding impact for the Principal Investigator and postdoctoral researcher - as the postdoc is focussed on generating papers to be able to apply for their own grants, should the PI take on more of the impact generation work?

In the afternoon we switched focus a little and involved the delegates in hands-on sessions focussing on either generating Impact through Policy, Impact through Public Engagement, or Impact through Commercialisation. Delegates could choose to go to two of these sessions.

The Impact through Commercialisation workshop was facilitated by Amada Wooding from Cambridge Enterprise, alongside Tamsin Sayer from the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Cambridge and Katy Evans-Roberts from the Babraham Institute. They started by introducing technology transfer, the role of intellectual property and the ways of identifying and furthering good opportunities. The delegates were then broken down into smaller groups and presented with different case studies – they then had to identify what the offering was and the best route of commercialisation and present that back to the group. We then found out what really happened in each case and gave delegates the chance to discuss their own research commercialisation potential and the ways to make it happen.

Impact through Policy was facilitated by Miles Parker and Ben Earley from the Cambridge Centre for Science and Policy (CSaP) alongside Mariana Fazenda, Innovation and Enterprise Officer in Plant Sciences, and Linden Fradet from the Babraham Institute. This also started with a presentation helping delegates understand the importance of advocacy for research, researchers and evidence in policymaking. The facilitators gave an introduction to the policymaking process in Westminster and discussed how to achieve impact through policy and where to get support. Again, delegates were split into smaller groups and given different scenario-based case studies and discussed the short, medium and long-term solutions to policy issues that researchers could adopt. We then fed our thoughts back to Miles, who more often than not pointed out where we had gone wrong, and gave a fascinating insight into how Westminster works.

The Impact through Public Engagement session benefited from Charlotte Carroll (University of Cambridge, Public Engagement Team) and Tacita Nye's (Babraham Institute) expertise. After a useful icebreaker activity introducing ourselves to a partner and then introducing them to the rest of the group, Charlotte and Tacita introduced what public engagement is. We then viewed some examples and used voting cards to decide whether they were public engagement or science communication activities. After this we worked in small groups to plan a public engagement event for one of the groups' research before presenting this and getting useful feedback from Charlotte and Tacita.

At the concluding wine and nibbles session we were already looking forward to planning the next workshop utilising the lessons learned this time around. Delegates stated they would like practical support for writing pathways to impact and the opportunity to have one-on-one meetings with facilitators and impact professionals to help with their own particular queries. We had lots of very positive feedback from the workshop and are hopeful that not only have the researchers learned how best to generate impact from their research, but we learned how best to help researchers gain that impact.

*Kate Parsley, December 2015.*