



Department for
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Universities &
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SCIENCEWISE PREPARES TO LAUNCH NEW EXPERT RESOURCE CENTRE ON PUBLIC DIALOGUE

Plans are being finalised to launch a major new information and learning resource designed to help policy makers engage more effectively with the public when developing national science and technology policy.

The Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre for Public Dialogue in Science and Innovation (ERC), which was announced by the current Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, in December 2006, is expected to go “live” in May of this year.

At its heart will be a virtual online resource of information, advice and guidance, primarily for all those involved in national policy-making – Ministers, MPs, senior civil servants and other stakeholders, including the public.

The resource will contain a searchable database of national dialogue activities and other information, including evaluations of the dialogue methods and project impacts. It will provide tools to help policy makers commission dialogue, provide a forum to capture and share learning and experiences and serve as a portal signposting to further information.

Bespoke services

The website will be complemented by a range of tailored support services

designed to help build the Government’s ability and capacity to carry out dialogue and to embed the principles of good practice in national policy making.

The services will include one-to-one mentoring for policy makers by dialogue specialists, events, training and information workshops, newsletters and a helpline.

New dialogue projects

Running alongside the ERC will be the development of a new phase of Sciencewise dialogue projects, co-funded by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS).

Priority areas for discussion have been identified from the Wider Implications of Science & Technology (WIST) initiative carried out among expert stakeholders by the Government Office for Science’s Horizon Scanning Centre.

Data was also gathered through Sciencewise’s own sciencehorizons project, which sought public views on the likely impacts of scientific research in the future.

The Secretary of State for DIUS, John Denham, told a recent meeting at the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce,

http://www.dius.gov.uk/speeches/denham_science_society_160108.pdf

that the importance of dialogue across all sections of society had never been greater.



He said “‘Science and society’ used to be an area which was seen as a niche part of science communication.

Today, we have no choice but to see it as a necessary condition for British and global success”.

The Chair of the Sciencewise Strategy Group, Kathy Sykes, welcomed the decision to establish the Sciencewise ERC.

She said: “For the first time, policy makers involved in dialogue with the public on science and technology, will have support and access to a comprehensive suite of resources to help them use dialogue based on good practice for better decision making.

“This has been brought about as a result of Sciencewise listening to what policy makers themselves told us was needed and acting on that advice”.

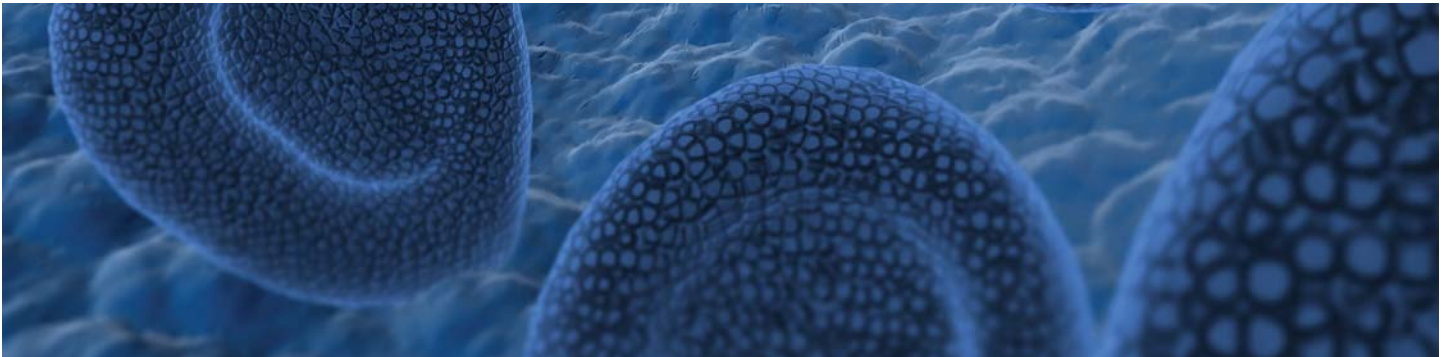
The Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre will:

- Raise awareness and promote the value of public dialogue in science and technology
- Provide a “one-stop shop” of information, advice and guidance
- Develop and spread good practice
- Establish networks to share knowledge and experience
- Build the capacity of government to carry out dialogue
- Embed the principles of good dialogue across all Whitehall departments.

“If the public do not have the capacity to understand scientific evidence and risk, they face being unable to make the best decisions for themselves and their families or, in a democracy, put the most appropriate pressure on politicians.”

John Denham,
Secretary of State, DIUS

MINISTER FOR SCIENCE AND INNOVATION BACKS GREATER DISCUSSION ON NANOTECHNOLOGY



The Minister for Science and Innovation, Ian Pearson, has confirmed that the Government is committed

to keeping nanotechnology as a priority – but said there must be much greater discussion between scientists and the public about how the technology can best be used to benefit society.

Speaking at the annual Which? Conference in London, Mr Pearson said that the Government’s aim was for the UK to derive maximum benefit from the new nanotechnologies. But he said it must be done in a way that safeguards health, safety and the environment and addresses the aspirations and concerns of the public.

“Nanotechnologies offer potentially huge benefits to society, industry, the environment and health” said the Minister. He went on: “The UK nanotechnologies industry contributes £23 billion to the economy. And yet over 60% of people in the UK have never even heard of nanotechnology. That is something I want to change”.

The public’s right to know

Mr Pearson told the conference that one of the strong messages that had

come from public dialogue on science was that people wanted to know who was funding what, and why. This was something they clearly had a right to know. This engagement has included two Sciencewise projects on nanotechnology - Nanodialogues and Nanotechnology Engagement Group (NEG).

“It’s also clear that the public have a strong interest in science and technologies that could have a direct impact on their lives... Our ability to facilitate genuine public dialogue and debate will be a measure of our success” he added.

Mr Pearson acknowledged that nanotechnologies may be technically complex, but said their potential applications were too important to be discussed among scientists alone.

He urged scientists to make an effort to find platforms to explain clearly what nanotechnology is, how it works and where it could lead.

New Ministerial initiative

Mr Pearson said that nanotechnologies development cut across a number of Government departments including DIUS. As a result, a Ministerial group had been set up to maintain momentum and ensure that the whole picture was looked at across Government.

He told delegates that its first act had been to produce a Government statement on nanotechnologies, committing the Government to being open and transparent and to helping the country to derive maximum benefit from what he described as these “dazzling” technologies.

“The government has already made a good start on this [getting discussions going] - we learnt a lot from the Nanodialogues exercise, which brought together members of the public with scientists and others with detailed knowledge of nanotechnologies for in-depth discussions. I’m glad to see that others are now picking up the baton.”

Ian Pearson,
Minister for Science and Innovation

Further Information

A summary of Mr Pearson’s speech and the Government’s Statement on Nanotechnologies can be found at: http://www.dius.gov.uk/speeches/pearson_nanotechnology_280208.html

Reports and case studies on Nanodialogues and NEG – can be found on the Sciencewise website: www.sciencewise.org.uk

PUBLIC BECOMING MORE POSITIVE ABOUT SCIENCE SAYS MAJOR NEW SURVEY



Britain is a nation that views science as enriching our daily lives according to the latest national survey, Public Attitudes to Science 2008, published during National Science and Engineering Week. The survey – the third in a series since 2000 - suggests that public interest in science and engineering is more widespread than in previous years and that the population has a positive view of both.

The survey was commissioned by the Research Councils UK (RCUK) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). Its primary purpose is to update information about what the public thinks about science, scientists and science policy in the UK. The survey also addresses new and important issues not previously covered.

Another key finding of this year’s survey is people’s concerns about how science is governed and regulated within the UK. The report says this underlines the importance of all those involved in the funding and delivery of research exploring better ways of ensuring that science policy development processes engage with public priorities and concerns.

New focus

This year, the involvement of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the survey has provided an opportunity to explore attitudes towards social science for the first time. Young people’s attitudes have also been

particularly sought as the Government continues to make engagement with Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) a priority in an effort to attract more youngsters into science and engineering careers.

A joint foreword to the survey by the Science and Innovation Minister, Ian Pearson and Professor Alan Thorpe, RCUK Science in Society Champion, says: “At a time when Research Councils UK, the UK higher education funding councils and the Wellcome Trust have just launched a £multi-million network of Beacons for Public Engagement, it is particularly interesting to note that people feel that there is a genuine need for scientists to communicate their processes and research at an earlier stage than is happening currently.

“The appetite for public engagement with science research and research processes is obviously there, and we must continue to work to maintain and develop access to that engagement in different ways across the board”, they said.

“If we are to continue moving toward a future where science is viewed increasingly as part of culture, it is important to continue to assess whether and how public attitudes are evolving”.

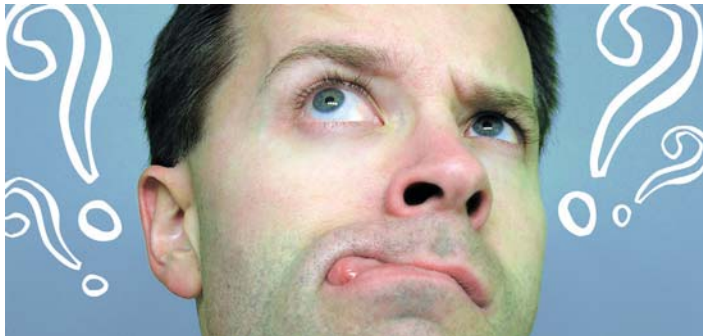
The full Public Attitudes to Science 2008 survey can be accessed online via the Science and Society section of the DIUS website: www.dius.gov.uk and www.rcuk.ac.uk

“It is interesting in this context to see that another survey finding is an expressed lack of knowledge and sometimes cynicism about the governance of science.”

Foreword:

Ian Pearson MP, Science and Innovation Minister, DIUS
Professor Alan Thorpe, RCUK Science in Society Champion

THOUSANDS OF EVENTS TAKING PLACE IN NATIONAL SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING WEEK



National Science and Engineering Week (NSEW) takes place from March 7th to 16th, packed with exciting events for people of all ages. This year, the Sciencewise Programme itself is holding its own celebration to showcase the successful dialogue projects that have been funded since Sciencewise began.

A big highlight of NSEW 2008 is The Big Question, an arena where members of the public get the chance to submit questions. The most popular or unusual questions are answered by influential scientists including our own

Sciencewise Strategy Group Chair, Kathy Sykes. Questions submitted so far by the public include: **Why does different music trigger different emotions? If I went into a black hole, where would I go? and Can we really solve global warming?**

Other events include the 'Why Wash' Tour in Birmingham, which looks at a variety of microbes that are just waiting to infect you! A 'Kitchen Chemistry' cookery competition takes place in Durham. Will the contestants manage to unlock the science behind soufflés, the chemistry behind curries and the theory behind Tiramisu?

Mothers in Somerset can take part in a 'Juggling Genes' discussion on genetic engineering, clones, DNA and designer babies. The talk is followed by a 'how and why' session on modern genetic health issues.

Further information on events can be found at: <http://www.the-ba.net/the-ba/Events/NSEW/>

BA SCIENCE COMMUNICATION CONFERENCE 2008

Sciencewise will be offering a unique insight into public dialogue and policy making at this year's BA Science Communication Conference, which takes place in London.

The Sciencewise session is one of a range of opportunities for science communicators to address current issues. The conference takes place on 19 and 20 May at the Institution of Engineering and Technology. Each day it will run sessions in three strands - engaging to inspire and educate, engaging to involve and engaging through the media and PR.

The conference aims to:

- Discuss the contribution science communication activities are making to public engagement
- Raise awareness of new developments
- Promote greater understanding and cohesion amongst science communicators
- Provide opportunities to share ideas and good practice

The keynote conference speech on 20 May will be given by the Science and Innovation Minister, Ian Pearson, and there will be sessions linking a number of science and society strands.

These include a Sciencewise projects presentation on sciencehorizons and the parallel Wider Implications of Science and Technology work being undertaken by the Government Office for Science's Horizon Scanning Centre.

There will also be a plenary session on the new Beacons for Public Engagement (funded by the Research Councils UK, the UK higher education funding councils, and the Wellcome Trust), and led by Kathy Sykes, who heads the Sciencewise Strategy Group as well as leading the Beacons National Co-ordinating Centre in Bristol.

More details on the conference can be found at: <http://www.the-ba.net/the-ba/ScienceinSociety/ScienceCommunicationConference/index.html>

SCIENCEWISE PROJECT UPDATES

HGC Citizens' Inquiry into the forensic use of DNA

The national DNA database has expanded substantially over the last few years - currently holding over four million DNA profiles. However, the Human Genetics Commission (HGC) feels strongly that the forensic use of genetic information has not yet been subject to significant public debate.

In partnership with the Sciencewise programme, the Wellcome Trust, the ESRC Genomics Forum and the Policy, Ethics and Life Sciences Research Centre (PEALS), the HGC have commissioned Vis-à-vis RC Ltd to facilitate a Citizens' Inquiry into the forensic use of DNA and genetic information.

The key discussions centre around thirty people in two linked panels in Glasgow and Birmingham, who met for six consecutive weeks in February and March. They were able to take evidence and direct their own research, calling on experts in forensic science, policing, the law, social science and human rights. The panels were reinforced by an audience of up to 50 observers on any one occasion, drawn from all over the country, who were also able to put questions and take part in discussions.

Stem Cell Dialogue

Work has begun in earnest on a Sciencewise-funded project looking at public attitudes towards the science, and social and ethical issues of stem cell research. The project is being managed by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Medical Research Council (MRC) on behalf of Research Councils UK and is being delivered by the British Market Research Bureau (BMRB).

The project will run until December 2008 and involves a nationwide series of public dialogue activities with the aim of engaging a two hundred participants from a diverse range of the public. The first public workshop will be held in London on March 15, 2008 and will look at people's 'visions for stem cell research'. Participants views will be taken into account when the research councils formulate their policy recommendations to the Government. The two research councils are also hoping that the project will help create an environment that will sustain dialogue in the future on issues relating to developments in stem cell research and their clinical applications.

Risky Business Case Study

Project delivery organisations: Centre for Science Education, Sheffield Hallam University (CSE), Isinglass Consultancy Ltd, Y Touring Theatre Company, Thin air Productions Ltd., ThinkLab, People, Science and Policy Ltd.

Core objectives:

- Increase young people's awareness of risk in science
- Increase their ability to take part in risk discussions
- Enable schools to contribute to policy debate
- Encourage innovative teaching practices.

Key Impacts:

- Met national curriculum requirements
- Performance held at Defra attended by 40 staff
- Data collected on youngsters' views about climate change.

For full case study visit: www.sciencewise.org.uk

community x-change Case Study

Project delivery organisations: The BA (British Association for the Advancement of Science), the Policy, Ethics and Life Sciences (PEALS) Research Centre, Newcastle University and local partners.

Core objectives:

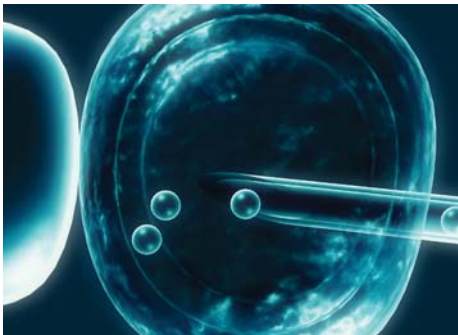
- Provide opportunities for publics to discuss science
- Pilot processes that build mutual respect
- Develop ways of including marginalised groups
- Build capacity locally to increase interaction
- Create a meaningful process to involve policy-makers.

Key Impacts:

- The BA and PEALS used evaluation to improve design of the second stage
- Marginalised groups spoke directly with policy makers
- Scientists embraced two-way engagement.

For full case study visit: www.sciencewise.org.uk

HYBRID AND CHIMERA EMBRYOS FOR STEM CELL RESEARCH: PROJECT EVALUATION



In April 2007, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) launched a major public consultation on the creation and use of human-animal embryos for research, a highly contentious subject that elicits very strong views. The evaluation of the Sciencewise-funded dialogue project conducted as part of the consultation has now been completed.

It concluded that the dialogue had been a significant success as a public engagement exercise on a complex scientific issue. Public attitudes, which had previously been negative on this area of research, were still found to be divided. However, those who did not

fundamentally oppose all embryo research were prepared to accept that some sort of human animal research might have value provided there was strong regulation and control by the Government.

As a result of both the public and expert stakeholder feedback, the HFEA has decided to allow the research in principle and is considering a number of licence applications from researchers.

The mix of methods used to deliver the dialogue project was particularly valuable and brought together members of the public and scientists on a number of occasions, providing time for participants to learn new information, discuss the issues and come to a considered view.

The evaluation concluded that:

- All objectives were fully met – these included engaging with stakeholders in the development of the dialogue process, undertaking a deliberative process with a diverse group of the

public, and capturing and analysing the results so they could be easily understood by policy makers and could inform the HFEA's policy

- The process fully met the agreed principles of good practice set out in the Sciencewise Guiding Principles
- The process had significant value for the public participants, stakeholders, and the HFEA.

“This has been far more than just opinion polling and has involved a series of detailed deliberative sessions where the full range of issues raised by such research were discussed. This enabled participants to make their own informed judgements, asking questions and challenging their own views” – HFEA statement, September 2007.

The independent evaluator concluded that this project, and in particular its methodology, provided a good model for doing public engagement on these sorts of contentious issues.

What worked well?

- Mix of methods - valuable in gaining the maximum diversity of views from different constituencies
- High quality design and delivery - the process was appropriate to deliver the objectives and to engage the participants
- Openness and transparency - keeping as much information as possible in the public domain, to help reduce cynicism and distrust of the process
- Clear impact on the final decision - deliberative public engagement can deliver particular value even on a complex, highly technical and highly controversial scientific topic.

What worked less well?

- Lack of clarity about the role of the Stakeholder Advisory Group - effective involvement requires clarity and should start as early as possible in the planning process
- Delayed feedback to public participants - this should take place as soon as possible to provide a summary of the conclusions and the final decision made

DIUS DEVELOPS NEW VISION AND PURPOSE FOR SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

The Government is refreshing its vision and strategy for Science and Society. The Secretary of State, John Denham, and the Minister for Science and Innovation, Ian Pearson have set out their aim to achieve “a society that is excited about science, values its importance to our economic and social well-being, feels confident to use science and in its use by other, and supports a representative, well-qualified scientific workforce”.

Since the autumn of last year, the Department has undertaken a significant amount of stakeholder engagement and consultation, and is currently preparing for a wide-ranging consultation on a draft strategy. An agreed strategy will be published in the Autumn, along with an implementation and delivery plan that maximises the enormous potential in the wider science and society community.

The strategy will build on the current pro-science culture in the UK and seek to develop a mature relationship between the groups involved – society, science and policy – challenging them to help achieve the vision in a more collaborative way. It aims to find innovative ways to address the three core elements of the vision - the excitement and relevance of science, the confidence in its use and ensuring stability and growth of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) workforce.

The strategy is likely to centre on Government’s role in providing an environment and strategic framework within which this relationship can evolve. Following publication of the draft strategy, further details of the consultation will be available on the DIUS website at:

<http://www.dius.gov.uk/consultations/index.html>

Further Information

Sciencewise is managed on behalf of DIUS by Momenta. For more information about Sciencewise or any of the articles in this newsletter, please contact Sciencewise:

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W: **www.sciencewise.org.uk**

Top tips for Dialogue

“Building trust is important. Spend time at the start of the event explaining who is involved in the project, why, and how their views will be used.”

drugsfutures

“Organisations new to dialogue need to spend as much effort embedding the values of participation internally as they do on external engagement initiatives.”

community x-change

“All public engagement activities need a clear objective, with all involved fully understanding how the exercise is going to make a difference.”

Nanotechnology Engagement Group

“Scientists who can communicate well with the public are invaluable to have on hand to answer queries.”

Hybrid and chimera embryos research

“Scientists and policy makers should not be scared of saying ‘we don’t know’. Conversations about uncertainty are far more interesting than conversations about facts.”

Nanodialogues

“The public are very able to engage with complex issues and provide policy makers with meaningful insights.”

sciencehorizons