UK SCIENCE PARTNERSHIP FOR ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH
MINUTES FROM 14th JUNE 2017 MEETING

Date: Wednesday 14th June 2017, 12:00 – 15:00

Venue
Conference Rooms A & B, Defra, Nobel House, Smith Square

Attendees
Chair: Julie Fitzpatrick - Scientific Director, Moredun Research Institute
Dale Sanders - independent member
Deborah Keith – independent member
Ian Boyd – Defra Chief Scientific Adviser (for part of meeting)
Nigel Gibbens – Defra Chief Veterinary Officer
Paul Burrows - BBSRC
Chris Lea - Welsh Government
Linda Pooley - Scottish Government
Louise Heathwaite - Scottish Government
Alistair Carson - Northern Ireland Executive
Jackie Hinton - BEIS (representing Jenny Dibden)
Alan Tollervey – DfID
Roger Coppock – Forestry Commission
Alex Churchill – GO-Science
Javier Dominguez - Food Standards Agency
Guy Poppy - Food Standards Agency
Willem Roelofs – Defra (by phone)
Scott Sellers - Defra
Sadhana Sharma - BBSRC
Secretariat: Chris Jacobs (BBSRC)

Apologies: -
Mike Francis - independent member
Nicola Spence - Defra Chief Plant Health Officer
Melanie Welham - BBSRC
Rachel Lambert - DfID
Jenny Dibden - BEIS
Calum Murray - Innovate UK
Dilys Morgan - Public Health England
Summary of actions

ACTION 4-1: Defra to contact MoD to make links between the organisations’ plans around Cat 4 facilities.

ACTION 4-2: The Government Chief Scientific Adviser (GCSA)/GO-Science to consider reviewing the current position and future plans for Cat 4 facilities across government, in consultation with the Partnership.

ACTION 4-3: Alistair Carson to invite at least one member of the Partnership to join the Northern Ireland Agri-Environment Science Strategy Group.

ACTION 4-4: Members to provide the Secretary and Chair with comments on, and suggested additions, to the Brexit note (to broaden it out from a Defra focus). Subsequently the Chair, Secretary and independent members to update the note, reflecting the discussion and input from members.

ACTION 4-5: Representatives from DfID and Defra to agree a mechanism for ensuring better join-up on animal and plant health issues – perhaps through an annual meeting to consider emerging threats.

ACTION 4-6: Alistair Carson to share details with the rest of the Partnership about how Northern Ireland incorporates emergency response into its planning through a 2 way process between research providers and funders.

ACTION 4-7: DfID, Forestry Commission, Food Standards Agency, and Northern Ireland to put forward nominations to join a task and finish group on rapid response to emerging animal/plant health issues; with a Chair to be subsequently identified. The Partnership Secretary should initiate the first meeting of such a group.

ACTION 4-8: The Partnership Secretary to ensure September’s agenda includes discussion of whether members are ready to commit to a futures sub-group.

ACTION 4-9: The Partnership Secretary to update Paper 4:6 as more Areas of Research Interest are published, and share with any Futures sub-group, if and when established.

ACTION 4-10: The Partnership Chair and Secretary to discuss with Calum Murray whether Innovate UK could lead a piece of work to a) map out the landscape of Internet of Agri-Things initiatives, and b) to provide feedback to participants in the pilot workshops.

ACTION 4-11: The Chair to report back to the Partnership any relevant international findings that come out of the VetBioNet Consortium.

ACTION 4-12: The Partnership Secretary to approach Defra’s Chief Plant Health Officer for views as to who would be best placed to provide GO-Science with data on plant pests/diseases for their International Hazards Forward Look.

ACTION 4-13: Members to contact the Partnership Secretary if they wish to be added to the circulation list for GO-Science’s International Hazards Forward Look (with requests from Roger Coppock and Javier Dominguez already received).

ACTION 4-14: The Partnership Secretary to include open data on a future Partnership agenda.

ACTION 4-15: Partnership members to provide the Chair and Secretary with suggestions of potential new independent members in the area of plant health.

ACTION 4-16: Partnership members to ensure that they follow-up requests for action/information, passing on to relevant colleagues if applicable, and advising the Chair and Secretary if responsibility is being passed on.

ACTION 4-17: The Partnership Secretary to canvass opinions on possible meeting dates for 2018.
Welcome and previous minutes/actions (Paper 4:1) – 12:00 to 12:15

Welcome:
1.1 The Chair welcomed members and their representatives, in particular welcoming Suzie Daykin and Yvette Bosworth onto the Partnership (although unable to attend this meeting) and thanking Marc Casale for his input to previous meetings of the Partnership.

Minutes of the March meeting:
1.2 These had been previously circulated, with one minor comment received from BBSRC, and so were formally accepted.

Paper 4:1 - actions from March meeting:
1.3 The Chair stressed the importance of all members following up on actions and responding to requests in a timely manner. In discussion the following points were made:
1.3.1 The outstanding action relating to stakeholder event planning will be rolled into the futures group thinking.
1.3.2 Uncertainties brought about by the election and a potential Spending Review had delayed Defra’s plans to consult the Partnership on the APHA Weybridge capital investment business case.
1.3.3 It was suggested that Defra should make links with MoD, whose new Chief Scientific Adviser was interested in rationalisation of their Cat 4 facilities. It was also suggested that the Government Chief Scientific Adviser (GCSA)/GO-Science should have an oversight role, in consultation with the Partnership.

ACTION 4-1: Defra to contact MoD to make links between the organisations’ plans around Cat 4 facilities.

ACTION 4-2: The Government Chief Scientific Adviser (GCSA)/GO-Science to consider reviewing the current position and future plans for Cat 4 facilities across government, in consultation with the Partnership.


2.1 The Chair thanked those who had provided a written update (Defra, Research Councils and the Forestry Commission), and reiterated the importance of others contributing to the update paper in future.

2.2 Alistair Carson set out the background to DAERA’s Science Transformation Programme and how it might benefit from coordination/collaboration with the Partnership. In discussion the following points were made:
2.2.1 The Northern Ireland Agri-Environment Science Strategy Group, which coordinates infrastructure plans and science policies/strategies needs wider UK perspectives, and could usefully include at least one representative from the Partnership.
2.2.2 Northern Ireland colleagues are aiming to improve input into, and benefits from engagement with, the Animal Disease Research Funders Forum (ADRFF). It was suggested that the Partnership could have more explicit links with the ADRFF, and
members noted that the Partnership Chair and Secretary would be attending the next ADRFF in Belfast later in June to discuss such links.

2.2.3 Northern Ireland’s main research provider is the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), but DAERA is increasingly looking to wider research collaborations e.g. with the USA and Dublin, and would like to establish stronger links with the UK Research Councils.

2.2.4 There is scope for better join-up across research funders and providers, with mutually beneficial and flexible business models that allow institutes, Research Councils and agri-tech institutes to work more collaboratively - more effectively utilising joint skills, strengths and capacity. The Partnership could represent a forum where people can share information on a confidential basis about forthcoming research opportunities.

2.2.5 It was agreed that Wales would give the oral update at September’s Partnership meeting. Chris Lea will shortly be leaving his post, so this will be an action for his successor to pick up. Thanks were offered to Chris for his valuable input into Partnership discussions.

**ACTION 4-3:** Alistair Carson to invite at least one member of the Partnership to join the Northern Ireland Agri-Environment Science Strategy Group.

3. **Impact of Brexit: implications of EU exit on animal and plant health science (Paper 4:3) – 12:45 to 13:00**

3.1 The Chair introduced paper 4:3, thanking the independent members for their input to its preparation. In discussion the following points were made:

3.1.1 The note as currently drafted is very Defra-focused, and would benefit from wider input by members, although it’s important to keep the focus on animal/plant health science.

3.1.2 The note should not replicate work done by individual member organisations, but instead focus on whether the UK is collectively losing capability and facing risks that wouldn’t be captured by individual organisations.

3.1.3 The note should include a section on opportunities and what the Partnership can do to make sure the UK is well positioned as Brexit proceeds. It could also touch on how risks are being/will be mitigated.

3.1.4 The note is intended for internal use by member organisations, and not for publication. It was noted that the Welsh Government has already circulated the note to key policy officials for consideration, and others might do likewise.

3.1.5 If the Partnership wants to use the note to influence future government spending through the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, then it will need to incorporate industry views, demonstrate the industry pull, and clearly set out what challenge needs to be addressed.

3.1.6 The Research Councils have a workstream looking at the impact of Brexit. Any revised note could potentially feed in to that workstream and help influence UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) plans.

3.1.7 The Royal Society is looking into the impact of Brexit on UK science, which could usefully be referenced in the note.

3.1.8 The note should highlight the importance of European networks to intelligence gathering and early warnings in animal and plant health.
3.1.9 Once the note has been updated to reflect the discussion, it should be given to partners and key stakeholders for their own use, and to influence their own planning for engagement with the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund.

**ACTION 4-4:** Members to provide the Secretary and Chair with comments on, and suggested additions, to the Brexit note (to broaden it out from a Defra focus). Subsequently the Chair, Secretary and independent members to update the note, reflecting the discussion and input from members.

4. Emergency responses to animal and plant health threats (Paper 4:4) – 13:00 to 13:15

4.1 Dale Sanders introduced paper 4:4, noting that it’s work in progress and needs to incorporate animal aspects. In discussion the following points were made:

4.1.1 The focus of the paper is on rapid response (within weeks) to emerging issues which arise before emergency statutory disease response becomes necessary.

4.1.2 There was little collaboration between agencies on the plant side before the Tree Health Taskforce was established. This has changed with the development of a risk register which is monitored on a monthly basis by a plant health risk group, which feeds into the commissioning of plant health risk analyses, which in turn feed into contingency planning.

4.1.3 The Food Standards Agency has run an emergency planning exercise focused on increasing amounts of mycotoxins imported into the country through trade in maize and oats. This demonstrated that the UK can be quickly impacted by developments abroad, and that an emergency fund could help address that.

4.1.4 There was discussion about what is meant by “emergency response” i.e. the need to address pest and disease issues once they have arrived in the UK, rather than conduct intelligence/surveillance and subsequent diagnostics.

4.1.5 DfID focuses on global drivers such as climate change, urbanisation, population growth, and globalisation of trade rather than animal/plant health specifically, but does recognise the need for more join-up with Defra – perhaps through annual meetings to consider emerging threats.

4.1.6 It was noted that Defra has been able to mobilise funds quickly in response to individual pests and diseases such as the outbreaks of Asian Hornet and Sweet Chestnut Blight, but that there is a greater risk if multiple pests/diseases occur at the same time.

4.1.7 It was recognised that establishment of a contingency funding pot for rapid response is unlikely. Attention should focus more on innovation in public funding, ensuring research funding is directed towards building capability which allows access to the right scientists, and has the flexibility to allow re-purposing of funds at speed – somewhat easier for institutes than for universities.

4.1.8 Northern Ireland has emergency response built into its planning through a 2 way process between research providers and funders. It was agreed that they would set out the process in writing and share with the Partnership to see if there’s the potential for wider application.

4.1.9 It was agreed that a task and finish group should be established to come up with a plan/strategy paper on how rapid response to emerging issues should be taken forward. Whilst some volunteers have already been nominated, further nominations are needed from DfID, FC, FSA (on mycotoxins), and Northern Ireland; with a Chair to
be identified who would lead and steer discussions. GO-Science could offer advice on the SAGE process (Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies).

**ACTION 4-5:** Representatives from DfID and Defra to agree a mechanism for ensuring better join-up on animal and plant health issues – perhaps through an annual meeting to consider emerging threats.

**ACTION 4-6:** Alistair Carson to share details with the rest of the Partnership about how Northern Ireland incorporates emergency response into its planning through a 2 way process between research providers and funders.

**ACTION 4-7:** DfID, Forestry Commission, Food Standards Agency, and Northern Ireland to put forward nominations to join a task and finish group on rapid response to emerging animal/plant health issues; with a Chair to be subsequently identified. The Partnership Secretary should initiate the first meeting of such a group.

5. **Potential scope/purpose of Futures sub-group (Paper 4:5) – 13:15 to 13:30**

5.1 The Chair introduced Paper 4:5 setting out the potential scope of a Futures sub-group. In discussion the following comments were made:

5.1.1 Any such sub-group would need to align with other relevant animal/plant health futures work, so a key role for the group would be to collect/synthesise existing futures information, ensuring that the sub-group aims to add value and build on what others are doing.

5.1.2 There were mixed views on whether the long list of potential topics was helpful or was too broad, although there was agreement about the need to focus on one or two key topics at any one time e.g. trade and future trade pathways, the potential impact of technological change, and/or the future of food supplies, with the sub-group focusing on a collective strategic approach to prepare for that future.

5.1.3 Members considered the best approach would be to start with a desk exercise of existing futures information, including progress to date on meeting the objectives of the ‘Vision and High-Level Strategy for UK Animal and Plant Health’. This could be followed by a brainstorming workshop of partners and other key stakeholders, perhaps using a scenario analysis approach focused on a simple clear question. Such a workshop would need excellent facilitation.

5.1.4 Whilst it was recognised that sub-group success was dependent on the commitment of, and significant input from, Partnership organisations; members felt that they were not yet in a position to offer that commitment. The issue should be revisited at the September quarterly meeting.

**ACTION 4-8:** The Partnership Secretary to ensure September’s agenda includes discussion of whether members are ready to commit to a Futures sub-group.
6. **Links between Departmental Areas of Research Interest and research priorities in the Vision/High Level Strategy (Paper 4:6) – 13:30 to 13:45**

6.1 Chris Jacobs introduced paper 4:6 with further background to Areas of Departmental Interest provided by Alex Churchill - there will be a Cabinet Office webpage providing links to all completed ARIs. In discussion the following points were made:

6.1.1 The synopsis was a helpful summary, and it was good to see so many links between the ARIs and the themes in the Partnership’s Vision/Strategy.

6.1.2 Given the tight timeframe for producing ARIs, the FSA’s drew primarily on organisational strategic plans, and didn’t use the Partnership Vision/Strategy.

6.1.3 Scotland would be interested in doing something similar, but as part of a jigsaw of relevant initiatives linked to promoting greater science understanding.

6.1.4 As more ARIs are published, it would be helpful to update Paper 4:6, if possible drawing out opportunities where there are shared interests, or flagging gaps; but recognising that the high-level nature of ARIs may make this difficult. The paper could then feed into any Futures sub-group work.

**ACTION 4-9:** The Partnership Secretary to update Paper 4:6 as more ARIs are published, and share with any futures sub-group, if and when established.

7. **Internet of Agri-Things (Paper 4:7) – 13:45 to 14:15**

7.1 Sadhana Sharma introduced paper 4:7 explaining recent developments on the Internet of Agri-Things. In discussion the following points were made:

7.1.1 Innovate UK, the Agri-tech Centres, and the Digital and Satellite Catapults were identified as leads in this area. It was suggested that the Chair and Secretary should discuss with Calum Murray whether Innovate UK would be willing to lead a piece of work (perhaps with the help of a small task and finish group including EPSRC) to map out everything that’s happening on the Internet of Agri-Things (including FSA’s work linked to traceability and surveillance and on sensor technology in the supply chain and in homes). This could then lead to discussions about whether the Partnership has a role in facilitating/joining things up, recognising that there does not appear to be a need to stimulate action in this area.

7.1.2 Participants in the pilot workshops need feedback on what has happened since. This could perhaps be in the form of a statement developed in discussion with the Agri-tech centres and Innovate UK setting out how they’re taking the work forward and how they may have used outputs from the workshops. There was some discussion about whether such a statement could be circulated to attendees by the Partnership. However, subsequent discussion between the Secretary and Chair agreed that this could involve some reputational risk for the Partnership, and that the first communication to be issued by the Partnership ought to be a more positive piece.

**ACTION 4-10:** The Partnership Chair and Secretary to discuss with Calum Murray whether Innovate UK could lead a piece of work to a) map out the landscape of Internet of Agri-Things initiatives, and b) to provide feedback to participants in the pilot workshops.
8. International animal and plant health strategies and facilities (Paper 4:8) – 14:15 to 14:30

8.1 The Chair introduced paper 4:8, noting that the current emphasis in the paper is on animal health international organisations, but that this needs to be widened to include plant health. In discussion the following points were made:

8.1.1 Whilst it might be interesting to know the history of how different countries set up their animal/plant health systems in the way that they did, there would be questionable value given the individual bespoke circumstances. It might be useful if we had identified systems which are noticeably better than ours, where we could learn lessons, but this was not the case. More value might come from a review of their governance - how they decide research priorities, the extent of links between animal and plant health, and how they’d respond to emergencies.

8.1.2 The Chair noted there could be value from keeping an eye on the VetBioNet Consortium and reporting back if they capture information which might be of use to the Partnership.

ACTION 4-11: The Chair to report back to the Partnership any relevant international findings that come out of the VetBioNet Consortium.

9. International Hazards Forward Look (Paper 4:9) – 14:30 to 14:45

9.1 Chris Jacobs introduced paper 4:9 explaining the background to GO-Science’s circulation of an international hazards forward look. In discussion the following points were made:

9.1.1 Nicola Spence should be able to advise who would be best placed to provide GO-Science with data on plant pests and diseases.

9.1.2 Members should contact the Partnership Secretary if they want to be included in future circulations of the forward look.

9.1.3 GO-Science are likely to be conducting a future SAGE table-top exercise on animal/plant health in which the Partnership could usefully be involved.

ACTION 4-12: The Partnership Secretary to approach Defra’s Chief Plant Health Officer for views as to who would be best placed to provide GO-Science with data on plant pests/diseases for their International Hazards Forward Look.

ACTION 4-13: Members to contact the Partnership Secretary if they wish to be added to the circulation list for GO-Science’s International Hazards Forward Look (with requests from Roger Coppock and Javier Dominguez already received).

10. Any other business

10.1 Allan Tollervey explained that DfID had received a useful presentation from the Open Data Institute on open data policies and the extent to which those policies are developed to ensure open data adds value to agricultural research. Sadhana Sharma commented that BBSRC will shortly be initiating a Newton call on the use of data. It was suggested that open data should be the subject of a future agenda item.

ACTION 4-14: The Partnership Secretary to include open data on a future Partnership agenda.
10.2 Dale Sanders announced that he would reluctantly be standing down from the Partnership due to other work commitments. All members joined in thanking him for his valuable input and contributions.

**ACTION 4-15:** Partnership members to provide the Chair and Secretary with suggestions of potential new independent members in the area of plant health.

10.3 The Chair advised that the Chair and Secretary have been having difficulty securing responses from partners to their communications, and that the Partnership will only work if everyone contributes and takes responsibility for engaging and taking forward actions. If Partnership members are too senior to carry out actions, then they should pass them on to relevant colleagues and advise the Chair and Secretary who would be taking them forward.

**ACTION 4-16:** Partnership members to ensure that they follow-up requests for action/information, passing on to relevant colleagues if applicable, and advising the Chair and Secretary if responsibility is being passed on.

11. **Next meeting:**

11.1 The next quarterly meeting will be on Thursday 14th September at 12:00 – 15:00 in Defra’s Nobel House office. In the meantime the Partnership Secretary will canvass opinions on possible meeting dates for 2018.

**ACTION 4-17:** The Partnership Secretary to canvass opinions on possible meeting dates for 2018.