



# CORPORATE STAKEHOLDER RESEARCH

COMRES REPORT FOR BBSRC

OCTOBER 2016

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# CONTEXT

The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) commissioned ComRes to undertake research to gauge stakeholder perceptions of the organisation and measure any change in attitudes since 2014, when an initial wave of benchmarking research was conducted. This report explores the findings from the 2016 research and draws out how BBSRC has progressed in the past two years. The 2016 research consisted of ComRes conducting 31 qualitative interviews between the 11<sup>th</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016, and an online survey of 507 stakeholders administered by BBSRC between 9<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> June 2016, the findings from which ComRes independently analysed.

In terms of the quantitative phase, the majority of surveys were completed by stakeholders from academia, to a greater extent than in 2014, where there was a more even split between participants from academia and industry. It is worth noting that due to the balance of responses, we have included breakdowns of the results for all questions by stakeholder audience in the main body of the report. This is in order to illustrate whether the views of academics differ from those of other groups significantly, and whether the change in the composition of completed responses is the primary reason for any changes in overall perceptions between waves.

The past two years have seen several significant developments with potentially wide-reaching implications across the UK's research landscape, including Brexit and the Government's intention to create UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). In addition, this period has seen the departure of Professor Jackie Hunter, BBSRC's Chief Executive and the subsequent appointment of Professor Melanie Welham as interim Chief Executive.

## AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF BBSRC

Reported levels of awareness of and familiarity with BBSRC are high among stakeholders with 88% saying they know either a great deal or a fair amount about BBSRC, a finding consistent with 2014 (84%). Stakeholders working in academia are particularly likely to be familiar (94% saying they know a great deal or a fair amount about BBSRC), followed by Government / policy (85%), Industry (78%) and Civil Society Organisation (74%) stakeholders. Positively the majority of stakeholders also feel that BBSRC keeps them well informed (74%), as was also the case in 2014 (73%).

Stakeholders are most likely to associate BBSRC with research grants, echoing findings from the previous wave. However, they have become more likely to associate knowledge exchange and innovation with BBSRC since 2014, suggesting communications regarding BBSRC's work in these areas have cut through.

## WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Stakeholders tend to report productive working relationships and high quality interactions with BBSRC. Around two thirds (63%) state that they find working with BBSRC to be easy, an increase of eight percentage points since 2014 (55%). Very few (7%) say they have a difficult working relationship. Similarly, four in five (79%) stakeholders report that they have positive interactions with BBSRC, a proportion in line with the 2014 survey. While these are positive findings, there is significant variation by stakeholder group. For example, while Industry stakeholders seem to have become more satisfied with working relationships, the reverse trend is evident among Government / Policy stakeholders. Tailoring the method and frequency of contact with stakeholders to suit their specific needs is therefore essential.

A majority of stakeholders (66%) report that BBSRC adds value to their organisation, though crucially a similar proportion indicate that the organisation could add more (67%). This suggests that stakeholders have an appreciation of the value added by BBSRC, and a desire to work more closely with the organisation. Qualitative insight highlights that the expertise of BBSRC employees is one of the key

means through which the organisations adds value. Additionally, BBSRC is perceived as having a strong brand which adds legitimacy and credibility to partner organisations, and to provide valuable assistance through bringing together stakeholders with shared interests from different sectors (for instance from industry and academia). Across all stakeholder groups there is a desire for closer working relationships, which presents both a challenge and an opportunity for BBSRC. The challenge is understanding how to engage meaningfully and in sufficient depth to meet stakeholder expectations, while the opportunity is developing diverse relationships and building advocacy for UK bioscience and BBSRC.

## PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT

Spontaneous perceptions of BBSRC stated during qualitative interviews indicate that the organisation is most commonly perceived as ‘innovative’, ‘helpful’ and ‘open’. In the quantitative survey, from a list of words tested, ‘credible’ (48%) is the term which stakeholders are most likely to associate with BBSRC. However, one in four also associate BBSRC with being ‘bureaucratic’, suggesting this is an area in which the organisation may be able to improve (24%), though this is down slightly from 30% in 2014.

The majority (74%) of BBSRC stakeholders say they would speak highly of the organisation. Advocacy is highest among Government / policy (81%), Academic (76%) and Industry (71%) stakeholders, but only 51% of Civil Society Organisation stakeholders report likewise.

Qualitative interviews uncover the following areas to be key drivers of advocacy:

- The helpful nature and professionalism of BBSRC staff;
- BBSRC’s focus on innovation;
- BBSRC’s consultative approach; and
- BBSRC’s focus on the impact agenda and the dissemination of this to stakeholders.

Stakeholders are broadly positive regarding BBSRC’s contribution to social and economic impact. There has been a marked increase in the proportion of stakeholders rating BBSRC’s contribution to social impact favourably (31%, rate it as between 7–10 out of 10, up from 19% in 2014, where 10 is excellent and 1 is very poor). Ratings of BBSRC’s contribution to economic impact has also increased by 6 percentage points (50%, up from 44% in 2014). The qualitative interviews illustrate that stakeholders attribute this to BBSRC making more sustained efforts to promote the impact of the research it funds externally, suggesting this is something that BBSRC should continue to emphasise in communications with stakeholders.

## VISION AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Stakeholders are generally familiar with the mission and vision of BBSRC. In the quantitative survey, three in five indicate familiarity (61% rate themselves as 7 – 10 out of 10, where 10 is very familiar and 1 is very unfamiliar, an increase of six percentage points since 2014). Academics are the most likely of all stakeholder groups to report familiarity with BBSRC’s mission and values (74%). On the other hand, only three in ten (28%) stakeholders from the civil society group say the same, highlighting an opportunity to engage more broadly with this audience.

During in–depth discussions, stakeholders tended to be broadly familiar with BBSRC’s mission but often lacked a detailed knowledge or understanding of the specifics of it. A few stakeholders are able to describe BBSRC’s mission and values in detail, usually because they have attended an event or received communications recently outlining this. Further to this, while more than half (57%) of stakeholders feel that BBSRC achieves its vision, more than four in five (83%) feel there is scope for BBSRC to work more closely with them in achieving it. As such, the research suggests that there is desire among stakeholders to work more closely with BBSRC to deliver its strategic goals.

BBSRC's contribution towards Bioscience and the bioeconomy is universally viewed as extremely important. As in 2014, 88% of stakeholders agree that the UK has a world leading position in bioscience, and 79% of stakeholders think that the UK's international position is due to BBSRC. Within this, 18% feel this is *a great deal* down to BBSRC, with 61% believing the UK's position in bioscience is due to the BBSRC to *a fair amount*. Qualitative insight supports this – overall, there is a consensus among stakeholders that BBSRC is a good representative of UK bioscience, with many citing its credibility internationally as especially important. However, several feel that BBSRC could be more visible.

A new area explored in the 2016 research was that of the 'bioeconomy', a concept that BBSRC has built into its narrative over the past two years to help illustrate the economic and social impact of UK bioscience. The quantitative survey illustrates that familiarity with the concept of the bioeconomy is high (78% report that they are familiar), particularly among Government / policy stakeholders (91%). However, during qualitative interviews it emerges that while many stakeholders are convinced of the relevance of the bioeconomy to economic growth and are aware of BBSRC's contribution to it, the term itself is criticised by several respondents who view it as a buzzword lacking in true meaning.

## QUANTITATIVE METRICS WITH SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

This year's quantitative survey was completed by a total of 507 respondents, compared to 383 in 2014. As a result, changes of less than seven percentage points should be treated as an indicative trend, rather than a definitive change in attitude. Below, we have indicated the occasions in which metrics have shifted by more than this, representing a significant change in stakeholder perceptions:

- Ease of working relationship with BBSRC: More than three in five (63%) stakeholders report that working with BBSRC is easy, an increase of seven percentage points since 2014.
- BBSRC adding value: Two thirds (66%) of respondents rate BBSRC's value add as 7–10 out of 10, an increase of seven percentage points since 2014. In addition, only 20% feel BBSRC could not add any more value, a decrease of nine percentage points since 2014.
- Contribution to economic and social impact: Half (50%) of stakeholders rate BBSRC's contribution to economic impact as between 7 – 10 out of 10, a rise of eight percentage points since 2014. One in three (31%) rate BBSRC's contribution to social impact as between 7 – 10 out of 10, a rise of ten percentage points since 2014.
- Achievement of its vision: 57% of stakeholders rate BBSRC's achievement of its vision as between 7 – 10 out of 10, an increase of twelve percentage points since 2014.
- The proportion of stakeholders associating BBSRC with science policy has decreased from 52% in 2014 to 43% in 2016.

## FUTURE PRIORITIES

When asked to reflect on future priorities for BBSRC, several topics emerged consistently:

- Securing a level of funding that will enable BBSRC to fund a wide range of research – which is likely to be challenging in the current economic climate, particularly given the breadth of BBSRC's remit;
- Continuing to demonstrate the tangible impacts of BBSRC funded work;
- Ensuring a smooth transition to new leadership;
- Championing fundamental research and bioscience, and making sure the UK is as competitive as possible in bioscience and scientific research; and
- Engaging the public in science.

Overarching this, the transition to UKRI<sup>1</sup> was mentioned by most stakeholders as a real challenge for BBSRC and bioscience in the UK more broadly. Stakeholders feel it is important that BBSRC's expertise is retained and that it maintains sufficient autonomy to be able to maintain and build upon the UK's international position in bioscience.

## EMERGING THEMES

Reflecting on the main findings from this report, a number of consistent themes emerged during the research that may be beneficial for BBSRC to consider to further develop the strong relationships it has with stakeholders and ensure they are fully aware of the breadth and impact of BBSRC's work:

- Tailoring the method and frequency of contact with stakeholders to deepen relationships;
- Continuing to emphasise the impact of bioscience and BBSRC's role;
- Defining and communicating the purpose of the bioeconomy;
- Proactively engaging with stakeholders throughout the transition to UKRI; and
- Exploring Government / Policy and Civil Society landscape in the context of BBSRC's remit to maximise engagement opportunities

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/john-kingman-to-lead-creation-of-new-6-billion-research-and-innovation-body>

# 1. INTRODUCTION



## 1.1 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

BBSRC celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> year in 2014. To mark this anniversary, BBSRC engaged in an extensive range of stakeholder facing activities, including the launch of publically available online resources demonstrating the impact and value of bioscience, alongside the Great British Biosciences Festival in London. Just prior to this, BBSRC conducted their first major stakeholder engagement study. This research study revealed that stakeholders were generally positive about their interactions with BBSRC, and a majority across audiences felt BBSRC was easy to work with.

Since the 2014 Benchmarking survey, there have been several significant developments with potentially wide-reaching implications across the UK's research landscape, in particular Brexit and the Government's intention to create UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to include BBSRC, the other six research councils, Innovate UK and parts of HEFCE.

In addition, the period has also seen the departure of Professor Jackie Hunter, BBSRC's Chief Executive and the subsequent appointment of Professor Melanie Welham as interim Chief Executive.

In this context, 2016 is a crucial time for BBSRC to review its corporate stakeholder engagement strategy, and measure any changes in perceptions or relationships in the past two years. To do this, BBSRC commissioned ComRes to conduct its 2016 stakeholder engagement survey, mirroring the benchmarking research conducted by Ipsos MORI in 2014, to enable comparisons. ComRes undertook 31 in-depth qualitative interviews with stakeholders, and provided BBSRC with support and advice on a quantitative survey of 507 stakeholders, conducted in house by BBSRC and analysed independently by ComRes. This report synthesises the findings from both strands of the research and compares the findings with the 2014 benchmarking research.

## 1.2 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of this research was twofold: to help BBSRC understand how it is perceived externally, and assess BBSRC's performance since the 2014 benchmarking research.

Within this, the specific objectives were:

- Measuring BBSRC's success in increasing engagement with key stakeholders over time in delivering key objectives set out in its corporate communications and engagement strategy;
- Giving a clear picture of how key stakeholders currently view their relationships with BBSRC;
- Identifying areas where current relationships can be developed, strengthened and maintained;
- Understanding why key stakeholders want to engage with BBSRC and what deliverables they expect from BBSRC;
- Identifying areas where attitudes have shifted and understand how BBSRC activities have affected this; and
- Identifying other stakeholders with which BBSRC should be better connected.

## 1.3 METHODOLOGY

As in 2014, the research consisted of two distinct phases: qualitative in-depth interviews and a quantitative online survey.

### 1.3.1 DESIGN OF QUALITATIVE PHASE

Following commission, the project teams from BBSRC and ComRes met and held discussions on the key themes and objectives for the research, and how this would advance upon the findings of the 2014 study. ComRes and BBSRC then worked in collaboration to update the discussion guide, retaining many key themes from the original research, to enable, where possible, changes to be measured. This guide was used as the framework for the interviews, with ComRes interviewers facilitating a free-flowing discussion, led by the expertise and interests of the stakeholder participating.

### FIELDWORK

ComRes interviewed stakeholders across academia, industry, Government / policy, and civil society. This follows the same structure as in 2014, though the NGOs respondent group has been renamed 'Civil Society Organisation', to provide a more accurate description of the included stakeholders. To ensure BBSRC was able to get detailed insights into how it is perceived by stakeholders, a list of 56 potential respondents was provided to ComRes, with the intention of securing 30 interviews. The total number of interviews completed came to 31.

The stakeholders chosen were identified by BBSRC, based on their relationship and area of expertise. This followed the approach taken in 2014, to ensure a range of views were received from across BBSRC's stakeholder base, providing a representative picture of BBSRC's stakeholder environment.

The sample was divided into the following categories, and targets were set across the stakeholder groups to ensure responses were not too skewed across particular groups. There was a particular emphasis on increasing the participation of Government / Policy and Civil Society Organisation contacts from 2014.

- Government / Policy: 15 contacts in total;
- Academic: 14;
- Industry: 12
- Civil Society Organisation: 7

A total of 31 interviews were conducted from this sample, each lasting between 30 and 40 minutes. All interviews were conducted over the telephone. Prior to fieldwork commencing, stakeholders were sent an email signed by BBSRC interim chief executive Professor Melanie Welham, which outlined the purpose of the research, recruitment method and gave them the opportunity to opt out of being contacted. Those who indicated that they were willing to participate were then contacted by a member of the ComRes project team, confirming whether or not the stakeholder could take part and, where possible, arranging a convenient date and time for an interview.

## BREAKDOWN OF INTERVIEWS

While the named stakeholders provided by BBSRC were contacted in the first instance, as in 2014 referrals to an individual of similar seniority were accepted where appropriate. Five referrals were taken in total. The table below shows the number of interviews completed for each stakeholder group:

Stakeholder group	Number of interviews conducted
Academic	6
Government / Policy	10
Industry	10
Civil Society Organisation	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>

## INTERPRETING THE DATA

Qualitative research is not designed to provide statistically reliable data on what participants as a whole are thinking. It is illustrative, exploratory and based on perceptions. Qualitative research is intended to shed light on why people hold particular views and how these views relate to the experiences of the participants concerned. One to one interviews, such as those conducted in the project, enable respondents to participate in an informal and interactive discussion and to allow time for complex issues to be addressed in some detail. It also allows project team consultants to test the strength of respondent's opinions and probe for specific examples and anecdotes. This approach facilitates in-depth insight.

The depth interviews and quantitative survey with senior stakeholders generated a vast amount of data. Condensing this much information into clear themes that BBSRC can act on with confidence requires a rigorous approach to analysing the data collected. A solid foundation for the analysis in this report was built through dynamic brainstorming and reporting throughout fieldwork, as well as rigorously validating and prioritising the data once fieldwork was completed, so that the final deliverables are robust.

At ComRes we understand that not all insights are equal; a memorable point raised by one stakeholder in a depth interview, for example, should not override a consistent opinion communicated by many others. However, a standalone perception is not ignored if it adds an idea or raises a concern of critical importance to the formulation of BBSRC's strategy. ComRes consultants recognise this complex balance in conducting analysis and the importance of accurately representing the data collected from stakeholders throughout the research at the reporting stage. For this reason, all ComRes consultants are trained and experienced in filtering and prioritising findings in their analysis, and there has been a consistent team working on the project from inception to reporting.

Verbatim comments from the interviews have been included within this report. These should not be interpreted as defining the views of all participants, but have been selected to provide specific insight and act as additive to points made.

All participants were assured that their responses would be anonymous as per the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, and that information on individual cases would not be passed on to BBSRC.

### 1.3.1 DESIGN OF QUANTATITVE PHASE

As in 2014, the start of the quantitative phase took place following the completion of the qualitative interviews in order for questionnaire design to be informed by qualitative insights. While the qualitative phase was in progress, the BBSRC project team reviewed the 2014 questionnaire and added in four new questions specific to the 2016 research. These were then reviewed by ComRes consultants, and implemented. The survey itself utilised an online, self-completion methodology and was hosted and scripted by BBSRC using the Word App 'Key Survey' tool. While the survey was administered by BBSRC, individual responses were not viewed by BBSRC staff. Instead data were processed and analysed by ComRes.

### SAMPLING AND FIELDWORK

Hosting the survey in-house, BBSRC sent a survey link to a total of 2,116 stakeholders. Of this, 88 failed to send and 10 respondents opted out of receiving further updates. As such, 24% of stakeholders approached took part.

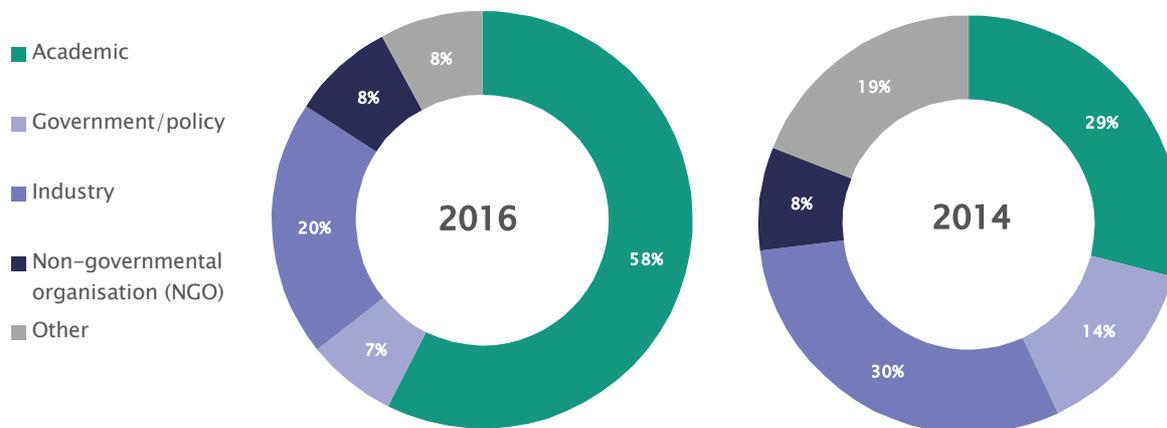
### NUMBER OF SURVEY RESPONSES

As per the 2014 research, the survey asked respondents to self-classify which of the four key stakeholder groups they fell within, what kind of role they have within their organisation and where their work overlaps with BBSRC's remit. The below tables outline respondents answers to these questions.

Stakeholder group	Number of surveys completed
Academic	293
Government and policy	33
Industry	102
Non-governmental organisation (NGO)	39
Other	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>507</b>

This table displays that the largest stakeholder group represented in the quantitative survey is academia (58% of the total sample), followed by industry stakeholders (20%). This can be seen in the following chart.

Figure 1.1: Stakeholder classification

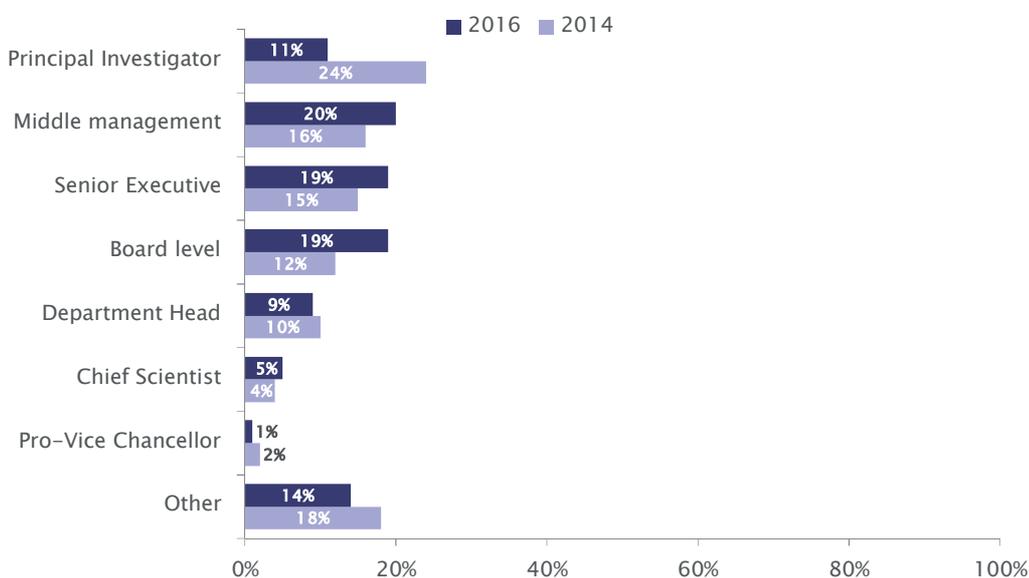


Q1. Which of the following classifications best describes the organisation you work for? Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=383)

1

The following chart displays the organisational roles held by those responding to the survey.

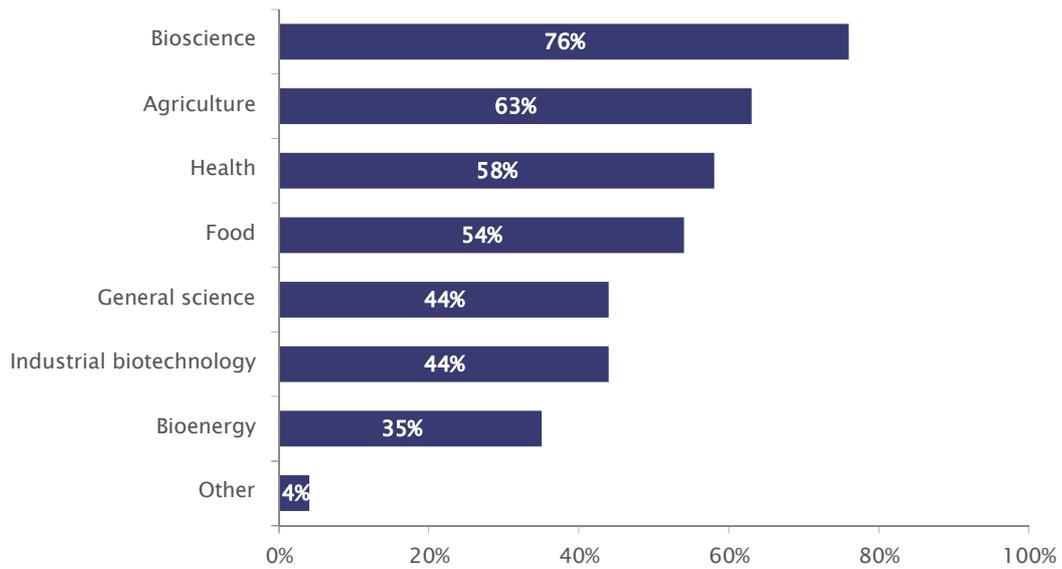
Figure 1.2: Stakeholder role



Q2. In your organisation, what kind of role do you have? Please select one answer only Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=383)

The graphic below shows the areas in which stakeholders feel the remit of their organisation overlaps with BBSRC. Three quarters (76%) identify bioscience as one of these areas, the highest proportion for any area tested.

Figure 1.3: Work of stakeholders overlapping with BBSRC



Q3. In which, if any, of the following areas does your organisation's work overlap with BBSRC's remit? Please select all that apply. Base: all respondents (n=501)

Tested areas in which work overlaps have been altered since 2014, and therefore are not directly comparable to the previous research. However, for comparison purposes, the 2014 breakdown is provided below.

Work of stakeholders overlapping with BBSRC	%
Agriculture / food security	65%
General science	56%
Health	52%
Industrial biotechnology and bioenergy	46%
Our work doesn't overlap with BBSRC's remit	1%
Don't know	1%
Other	9%

*In which, if any, of the following areas does your organisation's work overlaps with BBSRC's remit? all respondents 2014 (n=383)*

## INTERPRETING THE DATA

As in 2014, data have not been weighted, as the full sample profile of BBSRC stakeholders is unknown. It should also be kept in mind that this is a sample of BBSRC stakeholders, rather than the entire population. Subsequently, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant.

When comparing 2016 to 2014, it should be kept in mind the difference in the number of stakeholders who took part in each year. For example, with a sample of 507, and 501 for the majority of questions, compared to 383 in 2014, changes of less than seven percentage points should be treated as an indicative trend, rather than a definitive change in attitude. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is chosen to be 95% – that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the “true” value will fall within a specified range.

It is also important to note that owing to the low bases sizes for stakeholders in the Government / Policy and Civil Society Organisation, findings for these groups should be taken as indicative of opinion, rather than representative of this audience’s opinion.

## 1.4 LIMITATIONS

When reviewing the findings of this research, as with any report of this nature, it is important to keep limitations in mind. In terms of the quantitative phase, the majority of surveys were completed by stakeholders from academia, to a greater extent than in 2014, where there was a more even split between participants from academia and industry. It is worth noting that due to the balance of responses, we have included breakdowns of the results for all questions by stakeholder audience in the main body of the report. This is in order to illustrate whether the views of academics differ from those of other groups significantly, and whether the change in the composition of completed responses is the primary reason for any changes in overall perceptions between waves.

In addition, the survey’s online methodology means it was self-selecting, and quotas were not set on ensuring a particular number of responses per respondent group.

Despite these limitations, the research provides BBSRC with a valuable picture of its stakeholder community. The qualitative interviews deliver valuable, in-depth insight while the quantitative survey offers statistical metrics and updates on benchmarks set in the 2014 research.

## 1.5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks go to the stakeholders who took part in the research. We would like to thank Tracey Jewitt, BBSRC’s Engagement and Communications Manager, and Patrick Middleton, Associate Director of Communications and External Relations, for their support throughout the project.

## 2. AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING



This section details stakeholder awareness and understanding of BBSRC across stakeholder groups, and compares these results to 2014. It begins with stakeholder familiarity with BBSRC, followed by the extent to which stakeholders feel BBSRC keeps them informed. It concludes by considering stakeholder associations with BBSRC.

## 2.1 FAMILIARITY

The majority of stakeholders say that they know either a great deal or a fair amount about BBSRC (88%). Around a third (35%) report knowing a great deal, while more than half (53%) report a fair amount of knowledge. This high level of knowledge is consistent with 2014, when 84% of stakeholders reported that they knew either a great deal or fair amount about the organisation. Also akin to 2014, the proportion of stakeholders reporting a low level of familiarity are in the minority. One in ten (11%) say they know just a little about BBSRC, with around 1% of stakeholders saying they have never heard of the organisation. This is again in line with 2014, when just 2% of stakeholders reported never having heard of BBSRC.

Figure 2.1 : How much stakeholders know about BBSRC



Q4. How much, if anything, would you say you know about BBSRC? Would you say you know it... Please select one answer only. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=383)

Academic stakeholders are the most likely to say they know either a great deal or a fair amount (94%) about BBSRC. This proportion is consistent with 2014 (96%). Beyond academia, 85% of Government / Policy stakeholders say they know a great deal or fair amount, alongside 78% of Industry, and 74% of Civil Society Organisation stakeholders. As mentioned in the introduction, owing to the low bases size for stakeholders in the Government / Policy and Civil Society Organisation, findings for these groups should be taken as indicative of opinion, rather than representative of this audience's opinion

	Academic	Civil Society Organisation	Government / Policy	Industry
<b>Know a great deal / fair amount</b>	94%	74%	85%	78%
	(-2)	(+1)	(+4)	(+2)

% change from 2014 in brackets. Base 2016: Academics (n=293), Industry (n=100), Government / policy (n=32), Civil society (n=37). Base 2014: Academics (n=111), Industry (n=112), NGO (n=29), Government / Policy (n=51).

The qualitative phase highlighted that a key driver of familiarity appears to be personal relationships with senior BBSRC staff, including former Chief Executive Jackie Hunter. This does not appear to have been adversely impacted by the departure of senior BBSRC figures, suggesting BBSRC has been good at managing transitions and making sure stakeholders have clear, senior points of contact.

*"[Is your working relationship positive or negative] Oh, positive. We've had a visit not too long ago from senior staff from BBSRC. I knew Jackie Hunter personally very well... I've known them all [previous Chief Executives] and I've known the chairs usually, quite well."*

**Academic stakeholder**

Other drivers identified include applying for BBSRC funding, receiving BBSRC email and hard copy newsletters, receiving communications materials and engaging with contacts at events.

*"I have strong interactions with various different parts of the organisation including the chief executive and some of their senior officers, so I think I'm as familiar as I could be, or need to be."*

**Academic stakeholder**

Industry stakeholders, noted in the 2014 research to have mixed levels of familiarity, report seeing a more consistent approach to engaging them in the past two years. Several note that BBSRC's external relations team have sought to engage more regularly with industry and better explain their role and purpose, which has engendered greater levels of familiarity among these stakeholders.

*"I think their willingness to engage with industry in more recent years, compared to the struggles we have with some of the other research councils, is a real strength."*

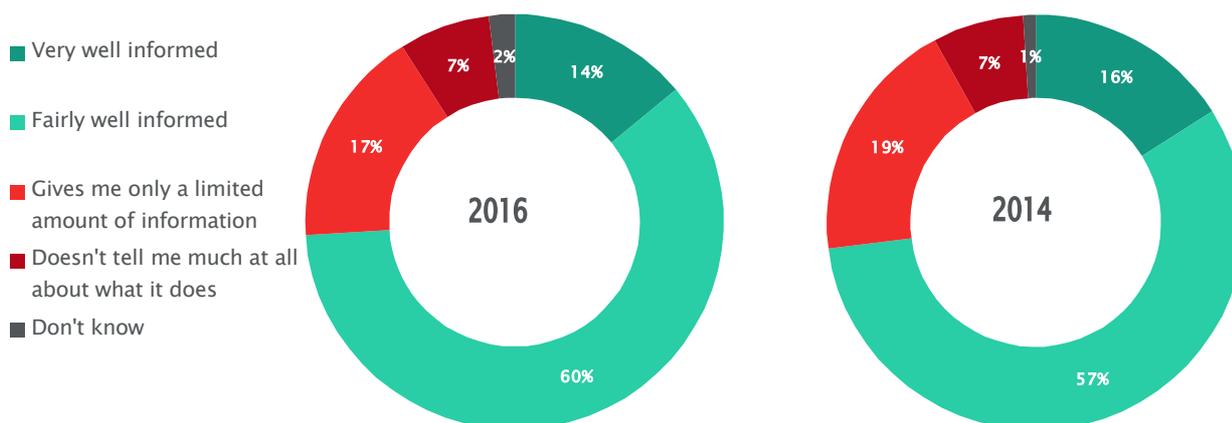
**Industry stakeholder**

## 2.2 KEEPING STAKEHOLDERS INFORMED

Three quarters (74%) of stakeholders feel that BBSRC keeps them well informed about their work. While this is a very positive finding for BBSRC, it is worth noting that the majority (60%) state that BBSRC keeps them *fairly* well informed, with 14% saying BBSRC keeps them *very* well informed, suggesting there is still room for improvement. Indeed, the proportion of each stakeholder group saying BBSRC keeps them well informed has decreased, though the change is only significant for Civil Society Organisation stakeholders. Just over half (54%) of this group feel BBSRC keeps them well informed, down from 63% in 2014. In addition, significant minorities across audiences report not feeling well informed. This feeling is most prevalent among Civil Society Organisation (41%) and Government / Policy (34%) stakeholders.

Relatively few stakeholders surveyed say they receive little information from BBSRC. Less than two in five (17%) report that BBSRC gives them only limited information, and a further 7% say BBSRC doesn't tell them much at all about what it does.

Figure 2.2: BBSRC keeping stakeholders informed



Q10. How well informed, if at all, do you think BBSRC keeps you about its work? Please select one answer only. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

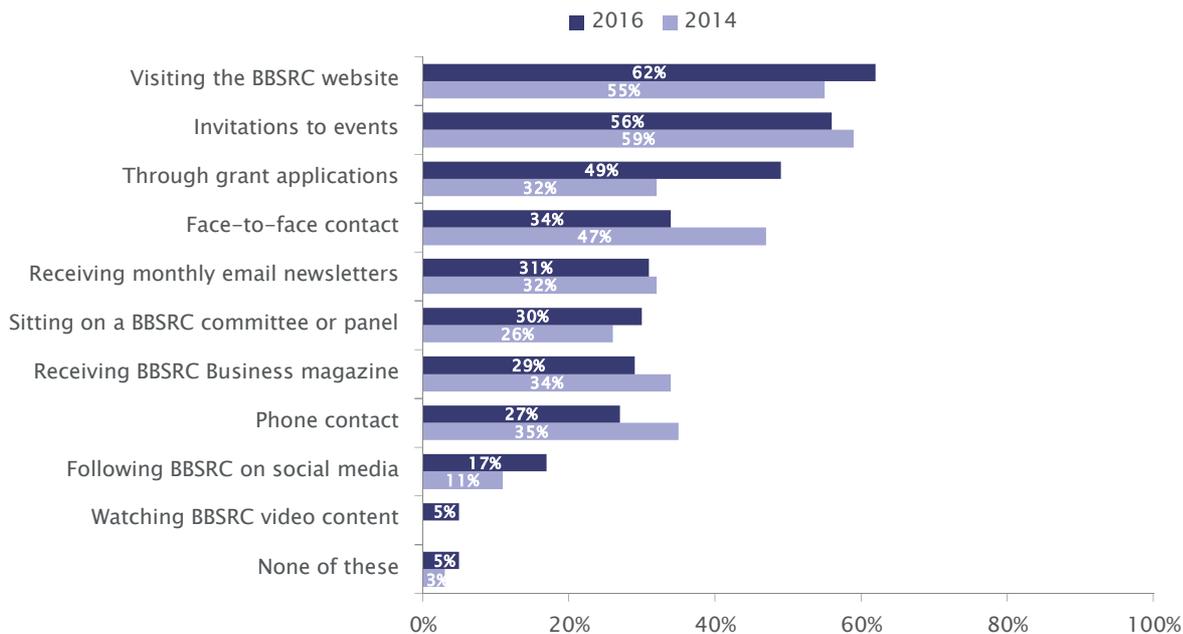
By stakeholder group, Academics feel the most informed, with four in five (79%) indicating that they are either very or fairly well informed – this links with the previous finding that academics are more likely to know a great deal or a fair amount about BBSRC as an organisation. Industry (69%) and Government / Policy (66%) stakeholders also consider themselves to be well informed, with a little over half of Civil Society Organisation stakeholders (54%) reporting likewise.

	Academic	Civil Society Organisation	Government / Policy	Industry
<b>Well informed</b>	79% (-6)	54% (-12)	66% (-5)	69% (+2)
<b>Not well informed</b>	19% (+4)	41% (+7)	34% (+5)	30% (-3)
<b>Don't know</b>	1% (+1)	5% (+5)	0% (NC)	1% (+1)

% change from 2014 in brackets. Base 2016: Academics (n=293), Industry (n=100), Government / policy (n=32), Civil society (n=37). Base 2014: Academics (n=111), Industry (n=112), NGO (n=29), Government / Policy (n=51). \*NC = no change from 2014

As in 2014, we also asked stakeholders about the manner in which BBSRC keeps them informed. Visiting the BBSRC website has seen a seven percentage point increase since 2014 (62%, from 55%). This interaction has overtaken invitations to events as the most common main stakeholder interaction with BBSRC. Invitations to events was the most common method of interaction in 2014 (59%) and has remained consistent this wave (56%). Face-to-face contact has seen a marked decline as a reported method of interaction since 2014, where nearly half (47%) of stakeholders indicated that this was a main interaction they have with BBSRC, compared to only a third (34%) of stakeholders in 2016. Another major shift since 2014 is the proportion of stakeholders indicating that they interact with BBSRC through grant applications, which has risen to 49% from 32% in 2014. However, this change is likely to be accounted for by a greater proportion of academics taking part in this wave of the research compared to 2014.

Figure 2.3: Interactions with BBSRC



Q7. Which, if any, of the following are the main interactions you currently have with BBSRC? Please select all that apply. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

During the qualitative interviews, stakeholders across audiences indicated that BBSRC generally keeps them well informed of their activities. Stakeholders appreciate the difficulty for BBSRC in covering a diverse range of scientific topics and often working to the changing priorities of the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills<sup>2</sup>, and therefore express goodwill towards BBSRC employees.

*“I do think that sometimes, because of government drives and BIS, I do think they’re pulled in lots of different directions and they have to run various initiatives just to appease their master.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

Most stakeholders are satisfied with the manner in which BBSRC interacts with them, which as seen in the chart on page 19 is primarily face-to-face at meetings and events, and email newsletters. Several Academic stakeholders note an increase in contact over the last few years. These stakeholders have annual or biannual face-to-face meetings with senior BBSRC figures, and periodic phone conversations with those in charge of specific programmes or calls for research. In addition, for more senior academics, their staff members may have their research principally funded by BBSRC, and they therefore are regularly in direct contact with BBSRC or hear anecdotally about their activities.

*“I’ve been in my job for nine years, so in the last couple of years, they’ve [BBSRC] taken steps to contact the HE sector more.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

Industry stakeholders also report an increase in contact from BBSRC in the last couple of years. This is often attributed to a desire to build stronger relationships with industry and to increase BBSRC’s visibility across the sector, rather than collaboration on specific projects.

<sup>2</sup> In July 2016 the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) became the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

*“In more recent years, you know, you start to see BBSRC and the other research councils working alongside people that are supporting industry, attending some sorts of events and generally raising their profile.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

Indeed, several stakeholders feel that BBSRC is ahead of other organisations in this regard. Despite this, some Industry stakeholders feel the level of engagement they receive is somewhat superficial, and are keen to see points they have raised actioned or discussed in greater depth.

*“I think the downside of those types of meetings though, not wanting to contradict myself, is a lot of the actions that came out were, ‘We might be interested in X, Y or Z,’ and the person at the meeting will forward on a contact person from elsewhere within BBSRC and say, ‘This is who you need to speak to.’ Then there’s no follow up from that.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

Some stakeholders commented that they would like to receive a broad overview of BBSRC’s work in ‘laymen’s terms’. This was especially the case among stakeholders in the Government / Policy and Civil Society Organisation audiences, as they are less likely to be familiar with the technical / academic side of BBSRC.

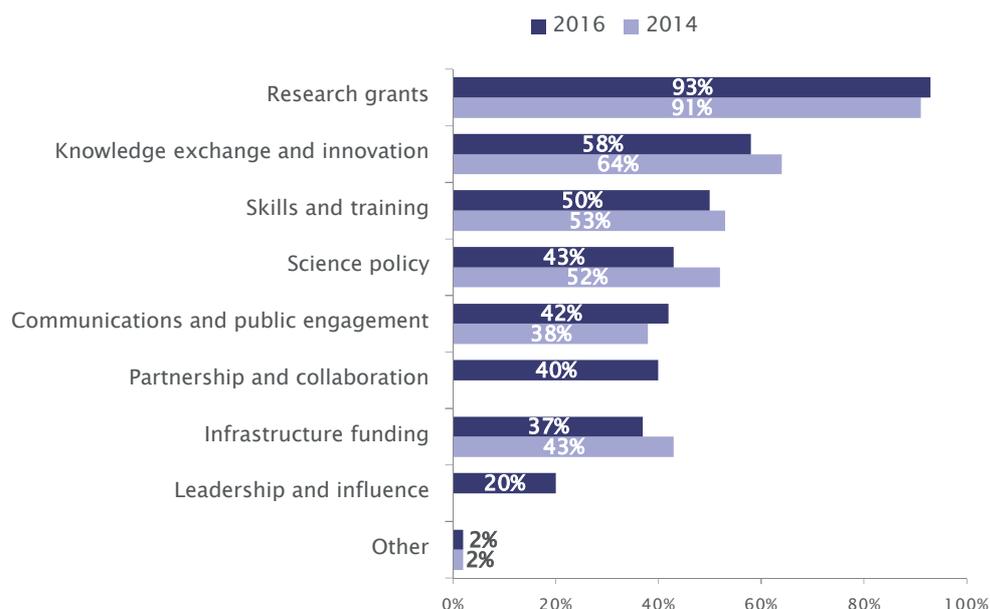
*“I guess some sort of keynote communication about what they do, what the opportunities are, a layman’s introduction to what they do and how they could, how they see themselves potentially collaborating with us. That information sharing might be quite helpful in a kind of general sense.”*

**Government / Policy stakeholder**

## 2.3 ASSOCIATIONS WITH BBSRC

Stakeholders appear to have variable awareness of BBSRC activities across its remit. When asked which of several areas they associate with the research council, more than nine in ten (93%) stakeholders surveyed report that they associate BBSRC with research grants, on par with 91% in 2014. A notable swing occurs in terms of science policy, which 43% of stakeholders say they now associate with BBSRC, down from around half (52%) in 2014. In this wave of research, we tested two new areas of work: partnership and collaboration and leadership and influence. The former was associated with BBSRC by two in five (40%) stakeholders. However, only one in five (20%) report that they associate the organisation with leadership and influence, suggesting this could be a priority area to focus on.

Figure 2.4: Associations with BBSRC



Q9. Which of the following areas, if any, do you most associate with the role of BBSRC? Please select all that apply Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

Among stakeholders interviewed qualitatively, there is widespread agreement that BBSRC has an extensive remit, covering areas of science from food and waste to health. Awareness of specific scientific areas is, unsurprisingly, highest among Academics. Non-academic stakeholders, are more likely to refer to broad purposes of the organisation, such as providing grants, involvement in studentships, and influencing as work relating to BBSRC.

*“[BBSRC’s work covers] Grant giving, and probably Government lobbying, and partnerships with business, to try to fashion policy and optimise the impact of research in the bio-sciences, in terms of the UK economy and also overseas.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

An encouraging sign for BBSRC that emerged during the qualitative phase is that a broad cross-section of stakeholders highlight promoting economic growth through the research its funds as a role of BBSRC. This indicates that the organisation is not seen simply as a provider of funds, but as an organisation with buy-in and interest in the practical results and implications of the research it funds.

Given that awareness and familiarity are the foundations of positive stakeholder relationships, the findings in this chapter highlight that BBSRC is well placed to work effectively with its stakeholder community. The next chapter will explore the specifics of these relationships in detail.

# 3. WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

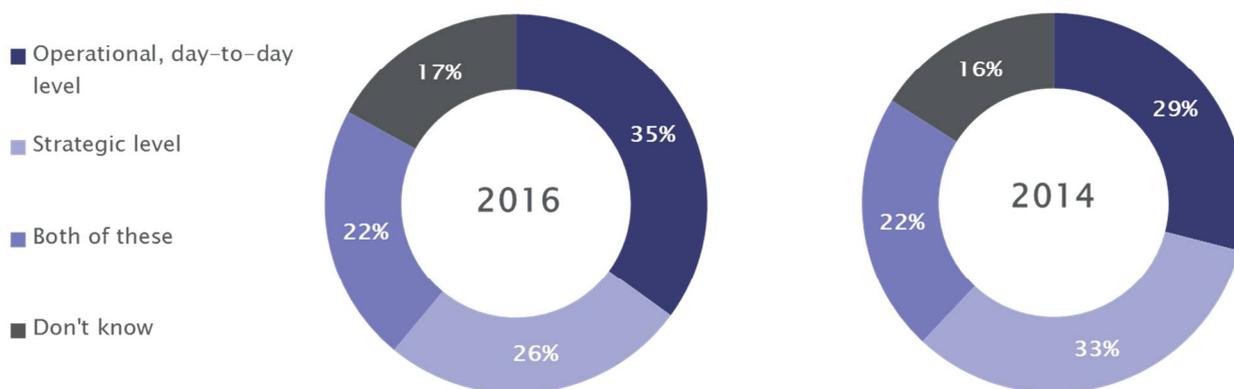


This section analyses in detail working relationships with stakeholders, providing a clear picture on attitudes toward BBSRC’s stakeholder engagement, and how this has changed since 2014. Firstly, it will focus on contact with BBSRC and what this looks like, followed by the nature and efficacy of working relationships.

### 3.1 CONTACT WITH BBSRC

The nature of stakeholder contact with BBSRC has shifted slightly since 2014. However, the growth in those engaging with BBSRC on an operational, day-to-day level (35%, up from 29% in 2014) may reflect the increased number of academics taking part in this year’s survey.

Figure 3.1: Method of engagement

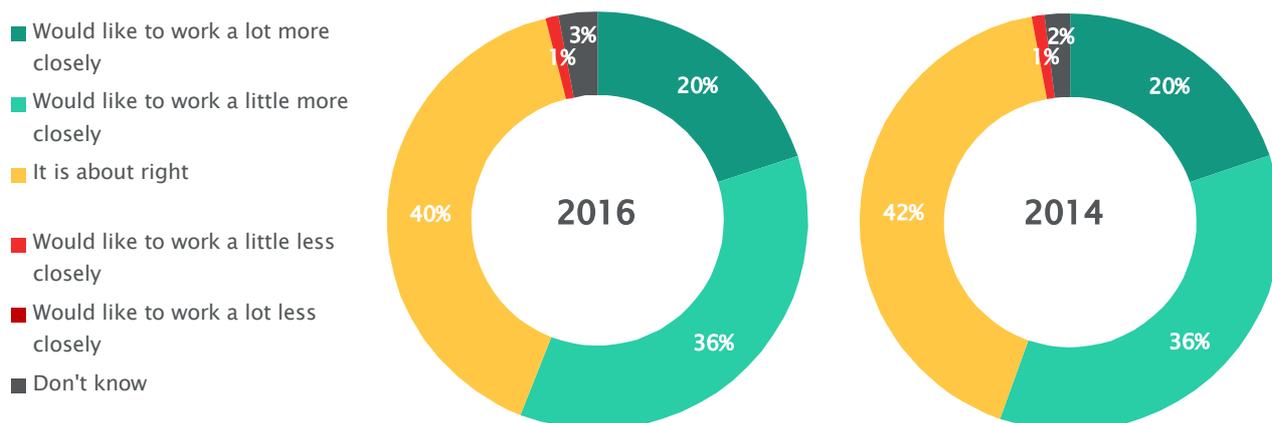


Q5. How do you mainly engage with BBSRC – at a strategic level or a day-to-day operational level? Please select one answer only Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376).

### 3.2 CLOSENESS OF WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

A majority of stakeholders (56%) say they would like to work more closely with BBSRC, the same proportion as in 2014 (55%). A fifth (20%) say they would like to work *a lot* more closely and just over a third (36%) say they would like to work a *little* more closely. Two in five stakeholders (40%) who say that their working relationship with BBSRC is just about right. This is very similar to the proportion who stated this in 2014 (42%), indicating that a significant section of BBSRC stakeholders are satisfied with their relationship and BBSRC’s efforts in this regard.

Figure 3.2: Closeness of working relationships



Q13. Overall, thinking about your relationship with BBSRC, would you say that you would like to work more or less closely with them, or is your relationship about right? Please select one answer only. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

By stakeholder audience, engagement activities with Civil Society Organisation stakeholders appear to have paid dividends for BBSRC, with the proportion reporting that they would like to work more closely with BBSRC down from 83% in 2014 to 65%. The fact that the proportion saying their relationship is about right has doubled to 35% from only 17% in 2014 reflects positively on BBSRC's engagement with these stakeholders. Government / Policy and Academic stakeholders are most likely to report that they would like to work more closely with BBSRC, while Industry stakeholders are particularly likely to feel their relationship is about right. The proportion of these stakeholders who want to work more closely with BBSRC has decreased from 53% to 44%, with the plurality from this audience (49%) saying the relationship is just right. This reflects findings from the qualitative interviews that many Industry stakeholders generally feel they have been engaged more consistently and meaningfully in the last two years than they were in the past. However, with more than two in five still wanting to work more closely with BBSRC, there is still room for improvement.

	Academic	Civil Society Organisation	Government / Policy	Industry
Would like to work more closely	58% (+3)	65% (-18)	59% (+14)	44% (-9)
It is about right	39% (-2)	35% (+18)	38% (-15)	49% (+4)
Would like to work less closely	1% (-2)	0% (NC)	0% (NC)	1% (+1)
Don't know	2% (NC)	0% (NC)	3% (+1)	6% (+3)

% change from 2014 in brackets. Base 2016: Academics (n=293), Industry (n=100), Government / policy (n=32), Civil society (n=37). Base 2014: Academics (n=111), Industry (n=112), NGO (n=29), Government / Policy (n=51). \*NC = no change from 2014

However, these findings also illustrate the difficulty of maintaining effective relationships across a diverse stakeholder base. For example, Government / Policy stakeholders are less satisfied than other audiences. Only around two in five (38%) of these stakeholders say that their relationship with BBSRC is about right, down from more than half (53%) in 2014. In addition, three in five (59%) say that they would like a closer relationship with BBSRC, an increase of 14 percentage points from 2014. The qualitative phase offers a number of possible explanations for this. Primarily, there is a feeling among Government / Policy stakeholders that BBSRC funded research could have a greater impact on public policy, and as such they would like closer collaboration. Additionally, several stakeholders state that BBSRC's resources are fairly stretched, meaning its representatives may not always have sufficient time to engage all stakeholders to the degree they would like.

*"I think government departments are key stakeholders, but it could be moved up a notch, because a lot of the research we need for our policy overlaps with BBSRC."*

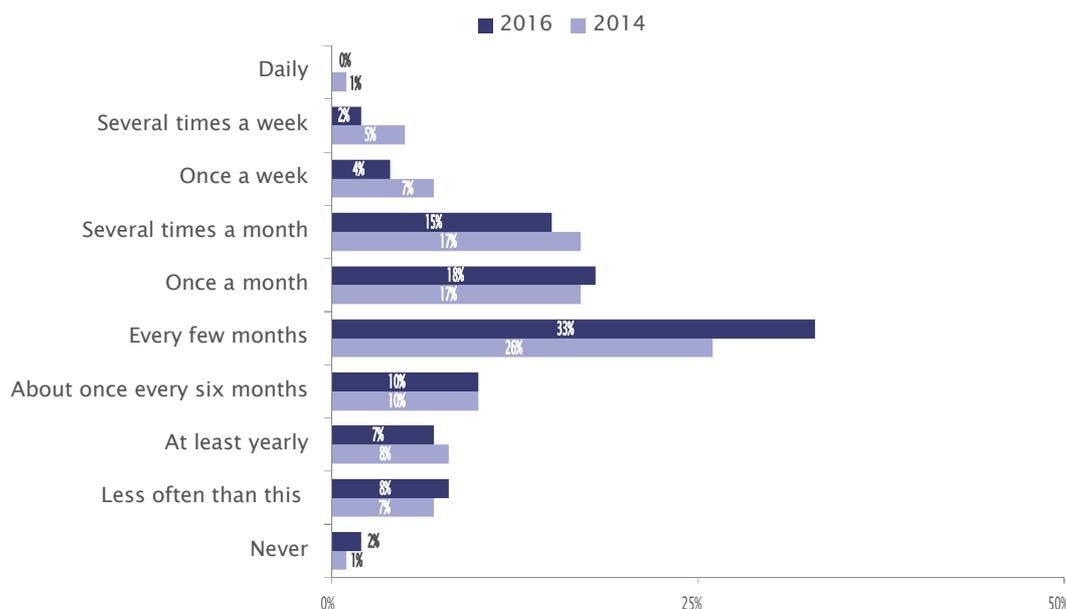
**Government / Policy stakeholder**

*"It's periodic, monthly, six weekly, telephone call with their director of research, I think his title is. Institutionally we have annual or biannual visits from various groups of their senior team... we appreciate they're stretched but we'd ideally like to see them more often."*

**Academic stakeholder**

While stakeholders desire a closer relationship, frequency of contact with BBSRC has remained largely consistent since 2014. The plurality of stakeholders (33%) report that they are in contact with BBSRC every few months. Only 6% of stakeholders surveyed say they are in contact with BBSRC at least weekly, a decrease from the 13% who reported this level of contact in 2014. These findings suggest there may be scope for BBSRC to make its engagement across audiences more frequent, given the proportions indicating that they would like to work more closely with the organisation.

Figure 3.3: Frequency of engagement



Q6. How often, approximately, would you say you are in contact with BBSRC? Please select one answer only. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

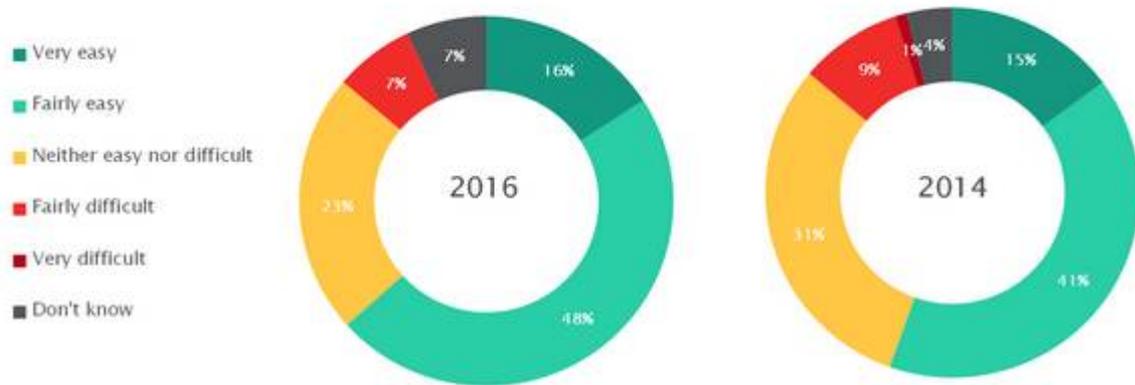
	Academic	Civil Society Organisation	Government / Policy	Industry
<b>Daily</b>	1% (NC)	0% (NC)	0% (+2)	0% (NC)
<b>Several times a week</b>	2% (-4)	0% (-3)	3% (-1)	0% (-4)
<b>Once a week</b>	4% (+4)	0% (-10)	3% (+5)	3% (-5)
<b>Several times a month</b>	15% (-1)	14% (+7)	19% (+1)	10% (-5)
<b>Once a month</b>	21% (-3)	5% (+5)	19% (+1)	14% (+3)
<b>Every few months</b>	34% (+5)	38% (+17)	19% (-6)	34% (+5)
<b>About once every six months</b>	9% (-2)	11% (+1)	6% (-2)	15% (+1)
<b>At least yearly</b>	7% (+3)	14% (NC)	9% (-1)	6% (-9)
<b>Less often than this</b>	5% (+5)	14% (-7)	19% (+15)	14% (+6)
<b>Never</b>	1% (NC)	5% (+5)	0% (-2)	5% (+3)

*% change from 2014 in brackets. Base 2016: Academics (n=293), Industry (n=100), Government / policy (n=32), Civil society (n=37). Base 2014: Academics (n=111), Industry (n=112), NGO (n=29), Government / Policy (n=51). \*NC = no change from 2014*

### 3.3 EASE OF WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Approaching two thirds (63%) of stakeholders feel that BBSRC is easy to work with. This is an encouraging finding, representing an eight percentage point increase since 2014. Indeed, only 7% of stakeholders say that they find working with BBSRC fairly difficult, and none report finding it very difficult.

Figure 3.4: Ease of working relationships



Q12. How easy or difficult do you find working with BBSRC? Please select one answer only. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376).

Despite the overall very positive response to this question, the sub-group analysis mirrors the differing levels of contact and engagement by audience seen in previous questions:

- Positive responses from Industry and Civil Society Organisation stakeholders can be seen, with an increase in the proportion saying BBSRC are easy to work with (57%, from 48% in 2014, and 46%, from 41% in 2014 respectively);
- A quarter (25%) of Government / Policy stakeholders report not knowing how easy or difficult their working relationship with BBSRC is, a rise of seventeen percentage points since 2014. In line with previous findings in research, this suggests less effective engagement with this stakeholder group.

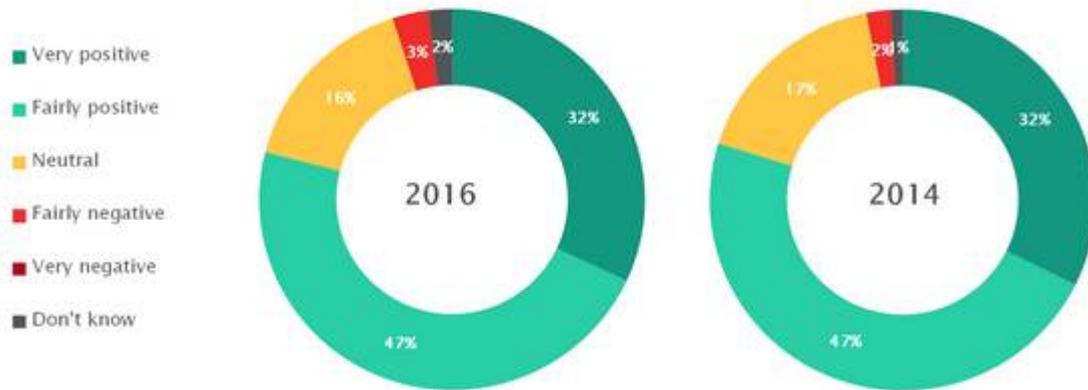
	Academic	Civil Society Organisation	Government / Policy	Industry
<b>Easy to work with</b>	68% (NC)	46% (+5)	53% (-2)	57% (+9)
<b>Neither easy nor difficult</b>	21% (NC)	32% (-6)	16% (-15)	27% (-11)
<b>Difficult to work with</b>	9% (-1)	8% (-2)	6% (-2%)	5% (-1)
<b>Don't know</b>	2% (+1)	14% (+4)	25% (+18)	11% (+4)

% change from 2014 in brackets. Base 2016: Academics (n=293), Industry (n=100), Government / policy (n=32), Civil society (n=37). Base 2014: Academics (n=111), Industry (n=112), NGO (n=29), Government / Policy (n=51). \*NC = no change from 2014

### 3.4 QUALITY OF INTERACTIONS WITH BBSRC

Stakeholder’s working relationships with BBSRC are forged through their interactions with the organisation, and a majority of stakeholders view these positively. In total, four in five (79%) stakeholders would describe their interactions with BBSRC as positive, the same proportion as in 2014. Within this, a third (32%) describe their interactions as *very positive*. Only 3%, regard their interactions with BBSRC as negative, with 16% classifying them as neutral.

Figure 3.5: Quality of interactions



Q8. And thinking about all of your interactions with BBSRC, would you describe your interactions as...? Please select one answer only. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

By stakeholder group, the proportion of Government / Policy stakeholders who report their interactions as positive has decreased by 25 percentage points since 2014, with the proportion reporting these interactions as neutral has increased by 20 percentage points. This is not necessarily a negative finding, for several reasons. Firstly, with the low base size for this audience, the result should be taken as indicative rather than representative of opinion. In addition, no respondents cite negative reactions, so this finding likely relates more to the earlier finding (p.26) that this audience would like a closer working relationship, rather than any negative feelings.

	Academic	Civil Society Organisation	Government / Policy	Industry
<b>Positive</b>	83% (+1)	70% (+4)	63% (-25)	73% (-5)
<b>Neutral</b>	13% (-1)	22% (+1)	28% (+20)	21% (-1)
<b>Negative</b>	4% (NC)	3% (-4)	0% (-2)	2% (+2)
<b>Don't know</b>	0% (NC)	5% (-2)	9% (+7)	4% (+4)

Base 2016: Academics (n=293), Industry (n=100), Government / policy (n=32), Civil society (n=37). Base 2014: Academics (n=111), Industry (n=112), NGO (n=29), Government / Policy (n=51). \*NC = no change from 2014

*“When we’ve undertaken a working partnership with them, you know, they haven’t been too tied down by set procedures. They’ve been prepared to think about ways in which we can make the outcome happen.”*

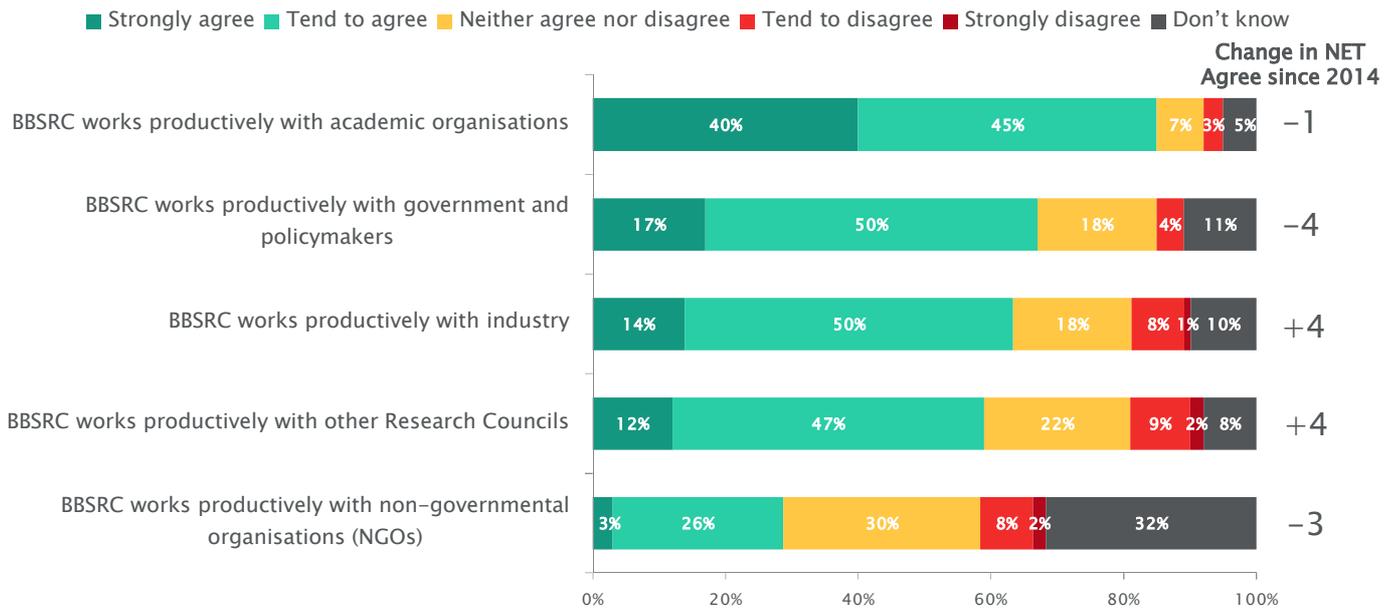
Academic stakeholder



### 3.5 WORKING PRODUCTIVELY WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Views regarding how productively BBSRC works with various different stakeholder audiences are mixed. Of the groups tested, stakeholders are most likely to feel BBSRC works productively with academic organisations, with 85% agreeing with this statement. This is a consistent trend in the research, linked to the closeness of relationships with academia. Civil Society Organisation stakeholders are the group least likely to have a productive relationship with BBSRC (29%). This is significantly lower than any other stakeholder group, and is largely due to the third (32%) who say they don't know, and three in ten (30%) with a neutral opinion. This illustrates that stakeholders tend not to know how productively BBSRC works with NGOs, rather than believing that BBSRC has poor or ineffective relationships with this audience.

Figure 3.6: Working productively with stakeholders



Q30. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: all respondents (n=501)

### 3.6 IMPROVING WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

The online survey also offered stakeholders the chance to indicate in their own words how they feel their working relationship with BBSRC could be improved or strengthened through an open text question. While many responses to this question relate to individual relationships which require context, some general themes emerge as a guide for BBSRC:

- Clearer signposting of BBSRC staff job roles when engaging with stakeholders;
- Academics desire a larger role in strategic priority setting, as they feel this is too heavily led by stakeholders from Government / Policy;
- Many academics mention their desire for better feedback from grant funding decision making committees;
- A range of stakeholders would like BBSRC to make sure its staff are easy to contact, potentially with contact details listed on the BBSRC website; and

- Build closer relationships with other research councils and Innovate UK, in order to allow for smoother interdisciplinary working.

The quantitative findings, particularly the reported closer working relationships between BBSRC and industry, are largely reflected in the qualitative interviews. When probed in depth, Industry stakeholders tend to feel that academics are the primary stakeholders of BBSRC and research councils generally. In this context, Industry stakeholders appreciate BBSRC's commitment to engaging them. Several Industry stakeholders attribute this to BBSRC having a greater focus than other research organisations on how the research they fund can translate into economic and social impact.

*“One of their managers... sends out an email through the various trade associations into individual companies on all the tools that might be relevant to industry, which is also helpful. I've actually sent that to other research councils saying, 'I think this is a good idea. I think you should follow best practice.’”*

**Industry stakeholder**

One note of caution is raised by Industry stakeholders in terms of these working relationships. A few state that their engagement with BBSRC can sometimes be superficial. This builds on the point mentioned in the previous section (p.22), that while BBSRC can be very effective at making initial contact, this is not always seen to translate into tangible actions or a closing of the feedback loop.

*“The group that came to visit us were particularly keen in wanting to increase engagement...the actions didn't fall within their remit, [so] there wasn't much appetite for following it up.’”*

**Industry stakeholder**

This feeling emerges elsewhere as well. One Academic stakeholder, for example, comments that BBSRC have reduced face-to-face visits to universities, likely as a result of staff resource issues, and this could engender a lack of trust and loss of relationship further down the line.

*“There's no substitute for meeting and talking with people. We know it's an overhead, but to retreat, as some of the research councils did, to the occasional bulletin or say, 'You'll find it on the web,' usually you find surprises or a lack of information and then it leads to a lack of trust and understanding.’”*

**Academic stakeholder**

In-depth interviews with Government / Policy stakeholders reinforce that they would like a closer working relationship with BBSRC. Overall, they tend to be positive about their working relationship, particularly praising BBSRC's embracing of the impact agenda and focus on how research can contribute to economic growth. These stakeholders highlight the opportunity for BBSRC in forming closer working relationships with Government departments, other than BIS, as these will be the stakeholders implementing research which the potential to translate into policy.

*“There is an opportunity for BBSRC, for their research to have impact by engaging with end-users such as Government departments, because it will have a direct impact through policy etc.’”*

**Government / Policy stakeholder**

However, several Government / Policy stakeholders highlight that BBSRC should be wary of spreading external engagement resources and time too thinly. Examples are cited by a few stakeholders of BBSRC being slow to respond or inflexible, possibly as a result of stretched staff resources. This perception may explain the quantitative finding that Government / Policy stakeholders have become less satisfied with the closeness of their working relationship, while Industry and Civil Society Organisation have become more satisfied.

*“I think they’re limited in their capacity to engage, and there’s a great danger that [BBSRC] engage too widely because then, their resources may be too thinly spread.”*

**Government / Policy stakeholder**

Working relationships with academia are generally perceived to be very close, and BBSRC is deemed to work well with research teams. As displayed in the quantitative findings, this relationship has largely remained a constant, with a sufficient level of engagement maintained since 2014. One area in which some academics feel BBSRC could do more regard students, for example by hosting roadshows for undergraduates.

*“I think of late they haven’t done very many, what they used to do in the past, road shows. You know, getting out to universities.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

### 3.7 ADDING VALUE TO THE WORK OF STAKEHOLDERS

In BBSRC’s diverse role as a funder, facilitator and partner to different stakeholder audiences it seeks to add value to the work of its stakeholders. To measure the effectiveness of this, we asked stakeholders in both the quantitative and qualitative phases the extent to which BBSRC achieves this.

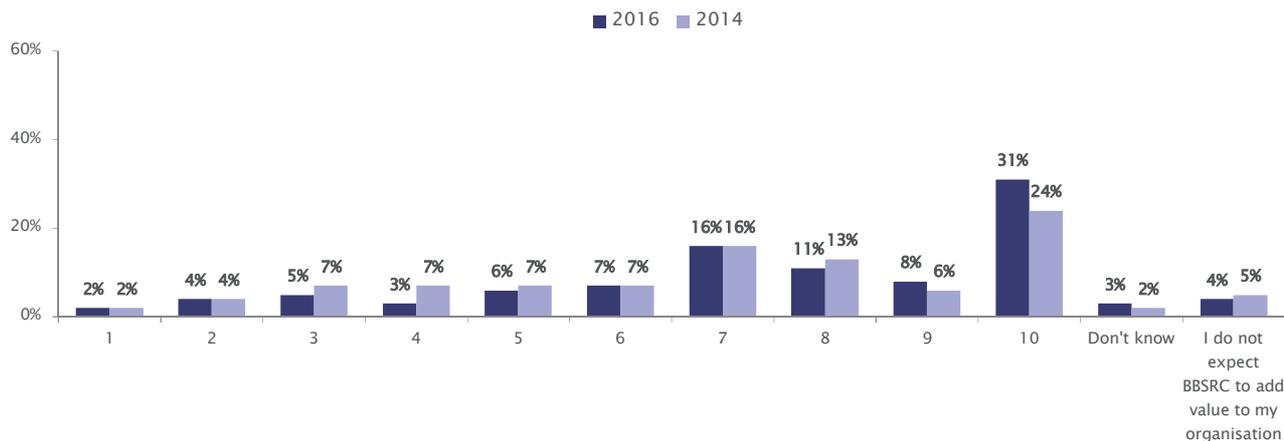
#### BBSRC’S CURRENT VALUE ADD

Two thirds (66%) of BBSRC’s stakeholders rate the value added to their organisation by BBSRC as between 7 and 10 out of 10. This is an increase of seven percentage points since 2014. Three in ten (31%) rate BBSRC as 10 out of 10, an increase of seven percentage points from 24% in 2014. The overall mean rating from stakeholders is 7.4, a slight increase from 6.7 in 2014, further emphasising a positive upward trend on this metric since 2014.

Four in five (81%) academics rate the value added by BBSRC between 7 – 10, compared to half of all Government / policy stakeholders (53%), 41% of Civil Society Organisation stakeholders and 40% of Industry stakeholders. It is not the case, however, that these audiences do not feel BBSRC adds value, as no more than 5% of stakeholders from different groups rate BBSRC as 1 out of 10. Industry and Civil Society Organisation stakeholders in particular mostly give neutral ratings of BBSRC’s value add, between 4 and 6 out of ten.

Despite engagement and awareness of BBSRC increasing among Industry and Civil Society Organisation stakeholders, this increase is not seen in terms of perceptions of BBSRC’s value add, which remains consistent with 2014. That perceptions of value add have not improved for these groups may tie into the feeling reported in the qualitative interviews by Industry stakeholders that while engagement has increased, it is, at times, superficial.

Figure 3.7: BBSRC adding value



Q15. To what extent do you feel BBSRC adds value to your organisation? Please give your answer on a scale of one to ten where one means BBSRC adds no value to your organisation and ten means Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

During the in-depth interviews there was widespread agreement across stakeholder audiences that BBSRC adds value to the work of their organisations. However, most say that, except for funding/monetary value, this is difficult to quantify.

*“How would I rate their impact? Do you know, that’s really hard to answer for any individual organisation, let alone for BBSRC, which, kind of, represents a whole group of them. I think impact is something that, kind of, can only really be quantified at the very final stage.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

Academics have the clearest perception of value add from BBSRC. Fundamentally, BBSRC funds some of the research academics undertake, and without BBSRC these projects may not occur. Beyond this, BBSRC’s contribution is seen by academics to be supporting the greater cause of science, raising the profile of fundamental science, and supporting innovation in science. In a more practical sense, the funding and profile BBSRC’s involvement provides to higher education institutions helps recruit and retain talented people into science. All of these elements of value add in academia come together and represent a wider element of BBSRC’s worth – representing the Bioscience community in conversations with Government.

*“BBSRC support individuals and that helps academics to develop their science and their careers... It funds quite a lot of the work that we do at this university, so without them it simply wouldn’t happen.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

*“[BBSRC] draws the community together across the nation to lobby and influence Government on things that are important within their remit. So, continually raising the profile of the importance of fundamental research, right the way through from cellular and molecular studies to animal and plant health, and it’s an important voice within Government.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

While positive value add is the prevailing theme among academic stakeholders interviewed, a note of caution is sounded. For example, one stakeholder stated that sometimes BBSRC does not make much of an effort to appreciate interdisciplinary work, reporting that projects can ‘fall between the cracks’ between BBSRC and EPSRC.

Stakeholders in the Industry and Civil Society Organisation audiences perceive BBSRC’s value add to come through its reputation and expertise. BBSRC is perceived to lend legitimacy to projects, particularly of use to NGOs who are trying to promote a specific agenda. Furthermore, BBSRC’s name recognition, independence and core mission to improve science for economic growth ensure they are a perfect partner for an organisation looking to gain credence and respect in their field.

*“They provide direction, without them we wouldn’t have had the rigour and the license to operate in the field. They provide knowledge, they provide respect in the field, and that’s important. They also have a huge network.”*

**Civil Society Organisation stakeholder**

The 2014 research identified a trend among stakeholders from Civil Society Organisations of feeling BBSRC did not add much value. Progress appears to have been made as stakeholders state that BBSRC helps to raise the profile of particular scientific areas, and also assists organisations in bringing together different stakeholders in projects, such as industry, consultants and academics. One stakeholder in particular notes that in the last few years BBSRC have engaged more readily with civil society stakeholders in the area of agroecology.

*“The independent working group was mixed; from academia, NGOs [and] government [as part of] this global food security public engagement program where BBSRC created a panel of people.”*

**Civil Society Organisation stakeholder**

Industry stakeholders report BBSRC adding value in a similar manner. These stakeholders note that the organisation allows certain smaller companies in the Bioscience industry to ‘punch above their weight’ given the expertise BBSRC staff can provide and the reputation which precedes them.

*“I think what they’ve helped us to do, is to punch above our weight as a science organisation because of the relationships we’ve had with some of their development programmes for postdocs, and others.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

A criticism which does emerge in this wave of the research is the perception that BBSRC is providing less funding and doing less work on providing industry placements for science students, which is vital in ensuring collaboration and furthering the goals of BBSRC – both scientific and economic.

*“Well one of the things that they’re changing is the studentships. The studentship numbers for us will get less. You won’t find anyone to say a bad thing about case studentships I don’t think, because there’s something in it for everybody. The academic gets access to industry and some of our problems, they also get access to some of our technologies.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

Perceptions of BBSRC’s value add remain consistent with 2014 among Government / Policy stakeholders interviewed qualitatively. They say BBSRC adds significant value – it underpins policy making work and

its mission and value are naturally aligned with those of its funders at BIS – however, the relationship could be closer. Translating science into policy is viewed as a very slow process, and these stakeholders feel BBSRC could buy-in and have greater awareness of policy development, which could in turn lead to further productive collaboration.

*“Oh yes, yes it does [add value], but it actually–, the value is added over very long time periods, it’s quite difficult to map back.”*

**Government / Policy stakeholder**

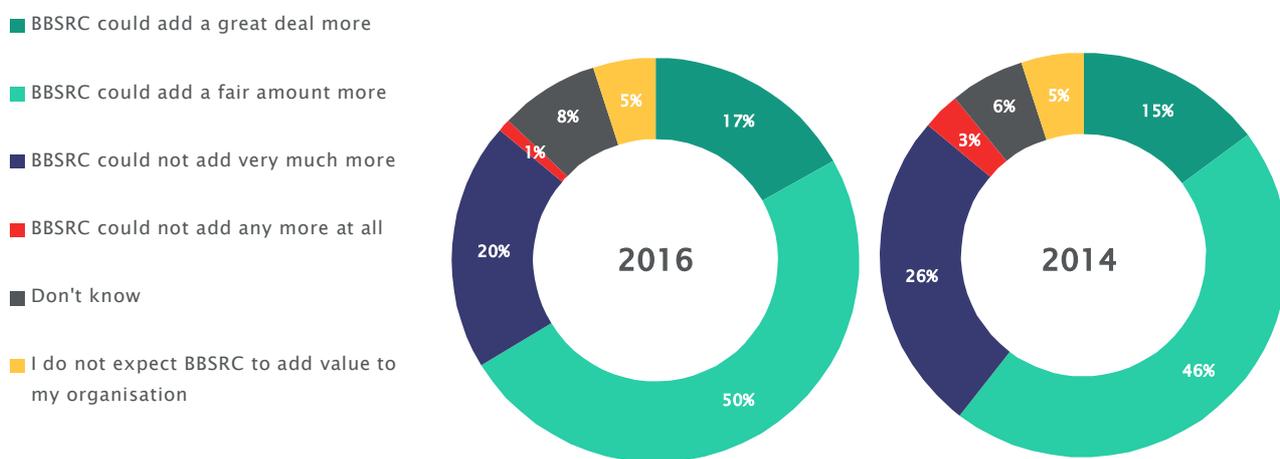
*“There’s a need to look at some short term research investments as well. It’s not all about having long term objectives.”*

**Government / Policy stakeholder**

### 3.8 POTENTIAL TO ADD MORE VALUE

While the majority are clear that BBSRC adds value, stakeholders appear to have high expectations of the organisation in terms of how much more value could be added, presenting an opportunity for BBSRC to further develop relationships. Two thirds (66%) of stakeholders feel that BBSRC could add more value, an increase of five percentage points since 2014, while one in five (20%) feel the organisation could not add more, which has dropped by nine percentage points since 2014. It is also worth noting that these trends can in some part be ascribed to the increased number of academics who took part in 2016 compared to 2014. Be that as it may, the challenge for BBSRC is managing expectations on how much resource it can dedicate to adding value to stakeholders within limited resources.

Figure 3.8: Potential to add more value



Q16. To what extent, if at all, do you feel BBSRC could add more value to your organisation? Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

As the following table shows, stakeholders from the academic stakeholder group are the most likely to feel that BBSRC could add more value to their organisation (74%) as was also the case in 2014. The proportion of stakeholders from Industry who report that BBSRC could add more value (52%) has decreased six points from 58% in 2014, an encouraging finding for BBSRC, which can perhaps be attributed to the increased level of reported BBSRC engagement with industry evidenced throughout this research.

	Academic	Civil Society Organisation	Government / Policy	Industry
<b>Could add more</b>	74% (+1)	59% (-3)	56% (+5)	52% (-6)
<b>Could not add more</b>	18% (NC)	24% (-10)	22% (-15)	24% (-5)
<b>Do not expect BBSRC to add value</b>	2% (-2)	11% (+8)	9% (+1)	9% (+5)
<b>Don't know</b>	6% (+1)	5% (+5)	13% (+9)	15% (+5)

*Base: % change from 2014 in brackets. Base 2016: Academics (n=293), Industry (n=100), Government / policy (n=32), Civil society (n=37). Base 2014: Academics (n=111), Industry (n=112), NGO (n=29), Government / Policy (n=51). \*NC = no change from 2014*

The survey provided the opportunity for stakeholders to provide their own views on how BBSRC could add more value unprompted. As in 2014, many responses concentrated on individual relationships and specific circumstances, however some general themes did emerge:

- More engagement at the front end of how projects relate to wider strategic goals;
- Academics cited funding more student placements and studentships;
- Supporting early career researchers, rather than established scientists;
- More support for translational research;
- Alignment of aims with Government, beyond BIS;
- Dissemination of information on innovation activities, so these can become more widespread and assist adoption; and
- Communications and public engagement on how research translates into positive results for the UK – to further the science agenda and provide better understanding for Government.

The strength of working relationships – broadly speaking – is very encouraging for BBSRC. BBSRC is seen to be easy to work with, adding value and interacting positively with stakeholders. Most significantly, many of these metrics have seen a rise in positive ratings since the previous wave of research in 2014. Despite this, significant challenges remain. BBSRC must seek to better understand expectations about the frequency and depth of engagement it can provide, and avoid associations with superficial engagement.

# 4. PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT



This chapter will explore stakeholder perceptions of BBSRC’s performance to date, its contribution to social and economic impact, and how perceptions toward these metrics have shifted since 2014. Firstly, spontaneous associations with BBSRC in both phases of the research will be discussed. The section will move on to look at advocacy, and potential drivers of advocacy. Finally, contribution to impact will be considered.

## 4.1 PERCEPTIONS OF BBSRC

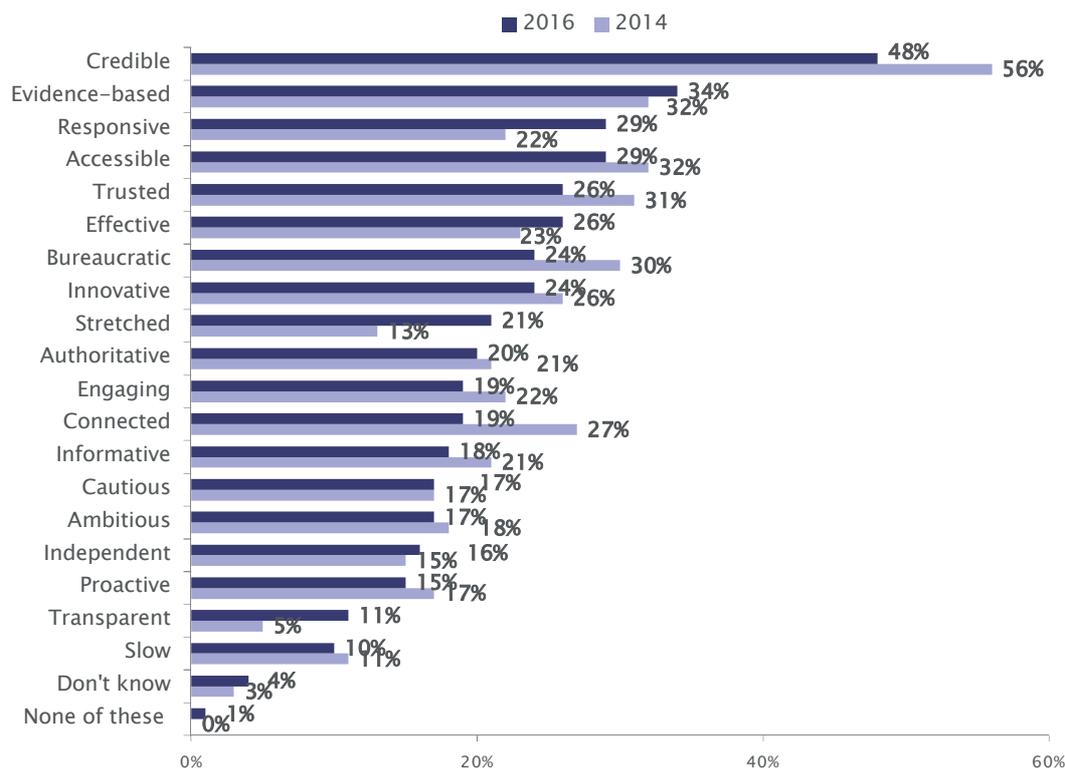
Previous chapters have highlighted that BBSRC is widely seen to forge close and effective working relationships with stakeholders. These positive findings are mirrored in spontaneous perceptions of BBSRC gathered from the qualitative interviews, where ComRes researchers asked stakeholders to provide words and phrases they believe describe BBSRC. As can be seen by their prominence in the following graphic, BBSRC is commonly described as innovative, while the accessible and approachable nature of its staff also emerge strongly. Very few negative comments are stated; the only less than positive descriptions arising relate to BBSRC’s period of transition (such as ‘restructuring’).

Figure 4.1: Unprompted perceptions of BBSRC



In the quantitative survey, stakeholders were provided with a list of words and asked to identify whether they could be used to describe BBSRC. Only the words which were associated with BBSRC by at least 10% of stakeholders appear in the following chart. Of the terms tested, stakeholders are most likely to associate BBSRC as credible (48%), closely followed by evidence-based (34%). As in 2014, bureaucratic is the negative term BBSRC is most likely to be associated with. In this wave of the research, one in five (21%) stakeholders indicate that the word ‘stretched’ describes BBSRC as an organisation, potentially due to various changes at the top of BBSRC, including the departure of Jackie Hunter, as well as wider political changes. This also links to the impression reported previously by Government / policy stakeholders that BBSRC is at risk of spreading its external engagement too thinly. Despite this, akin to the 2014 results, an equal number of positive and negative terms were tested and positive terms are much more likely to be associated with BBSRC.

Figure 4.2: Word association with BBSRC



Q11. From your interactions with BBSRC to date, which of the following words if any would you use to describe BBSRC as an organisation? Please select up to six answers. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

	Academic	Civil society	Government/ policy	Industry
<b>Credible</b>	45% (-14)	46% (-2)	59% (+8)	46% (-9)
<b>Responsive</b>	36% (+1)	16% (+9)	19% (-3)	16% (+1)
<b>Accessible</b>	34% (-6)	22% (-6)	27% (NC)	22% (-4)
<b>Evidence-based</b>	29% (+3)	41% (+3)	39% (-2)	41% (+13)
<b>Effective</b>	28% (NC)	14% (-3)	22% (-5)	14% (-3)
<b>Stretched</b>	28% (+7)	11% (+4)	10% (-4)	11% (+3)
<b>Trusted</b>	24% (-11)	30% (+2)	27% (NC)	30% (-7)
<b>Bureaucratic</b>	22% (-8)	16% (-8)	39% (-27)	16% (-20)
<b>Ambitious</b>	20% (+6)	8% (-20)	10% (-19)	8% (-4)
<b>Innovative</b>	20% (-8)	19% (-15)	27% (+3)	19% (+3)
<b>Engaging</b>	19% (-1)	14% (-14)	19% (-3)	19% (-5)
<b>Informative</b>	19%	8%	22%	8%

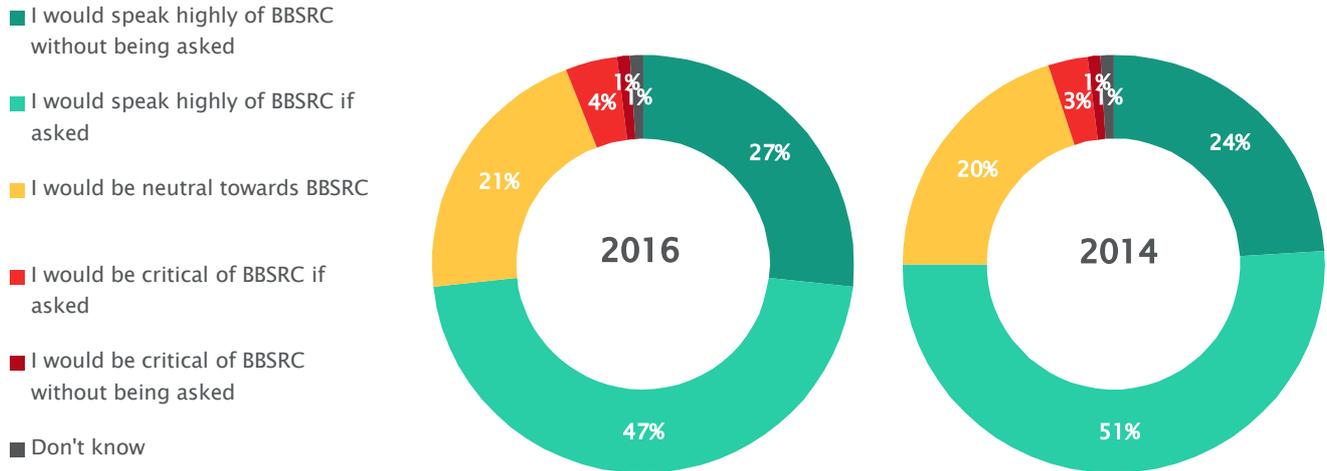
	(-4)	(-23)	(+6)	(-15)
<b>Connected</b>	17% (-8)	19% (+2)	27% (NC)	19% (-16)
<b>Cautious</b>	17% (NC)	14% (-7)	22% (+14)	14% (-6)
<b>Authoritative</b>	16% (-2)	30% (+13)	24% (NC)	30% (+5)
<b>Independent</b>	15% (+2)	0% (-17)	13% (-9)	0% (-17)
<b>Proactive</b>	15% (+1)	8% (+1)	14% (-10)	8% (-8)
<b>Transparent</b>	12% (+7)	8% (+8)	7% (+5)	8% (+2)
<b>Slow</b>	12% (-2)	0% (-7)	9% (+3)	0% (-12)
<b>Reactive</b>	9% (NC)	3% (-4)	6% (+4)	3% (-3)
<b>Flexible</b>	7% (-1)	8% (-2)	2% (NC)	8% (+7)
<b>Closed</b>	6% (-1)	3% (-4)	5% (-1)	3% (-5)
<b>Inflexible</b>	6% (-3)	11% (+4)	9% (-1)	11% (+6)
<b>Defensive</b>	5% (NC)	11% (+4)	2% (-4)	11% (+7)
<b>Disjointed</b>	5% (-7)	0% (NC)	5% (-1)	0% (-5)
<b>Insular</b>	4% (-4)	8% (-6)	9% (+5)	8% (+2)
<b>Ineffective</b>	2% (-1)	0% (NC)	0% (NC)	0% (-3)
<b>Untrustworthy</b>	1% (+1)	3% (+3)	0% (NC)	3% (+3)

*Base: % change from 2014 in brackets. Base 2016: Academics (n=293), Industry (n=100), Government / policy (n=32), Civil society (n=37). Base 2014: Academics (n=111), Industry (n=112), NGO (n=29), Government / Policy (n=51). \*NC = no change from 2014*

## 4.2 ADVOCACY

Encouragingly for BBSRC, three quarters (74%) of respondents say they would speak highly of the organisation, in line with 2014 (75%). Only 5% of stakeholders say they would speak critically, compared to 4% in 2014. Given the staff changes at BBSRC, these are encouraging findings which reflect the strength of working relationships and goodwill toward BBSRC staff.

Figure 4.3: How stakeholders would speak about BBSRC



Q31. Which of the following phrases best describes the way you would speak of BBSRC to other people? Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

By stakeholder group, Government / Policy (81%), Academic (76%) and Industry (71%) stakeholders are those most likely to say they would advocate BBSRC. Civil Society Organisation stakeholders less likely to say they would speak highly of BBSRC than other stakeholder groups. Only half (51%) of this group are BBSRC advocates, while two in five (41%) say they would be neutral. This high level of neutrality may reflect that it is a lack of knowledge which prevents Civil Society Organisation stakeholders becoming full advocates, as they have the lowest report knowledge of BBSRC, of stakeholders surveyed.

	Academic	Civil society	Government / policy	Industry
<b>Would speak highly</b>	76% (-4)	51% (-11)	81% (+6)	71% (-2)
<b>Would be neutral</b>	19% (+5)	41% (+17)	16% (-8)	23% (-2)
<b>Would be critical</b>	5% (+1)	8% (-6)	0% (-2)	4% (+2)
<b>Don't know</b>	0% (-2)	0% (NC)	3% (+3)	2% (+2)

Base 2016: Academics (n=293), Industry (n=100), Government / policy (n=32), Civil society (n=37). Base 2014: Academics (n=111), Industry (n=112), NGO (n=29), Government / Policy (n=51). \*NC = no change from 2014

From the qualitative interviews, we can gain significant insight into views on BBSRC's strengths and where there may be room for improvement and how this has changed since 2014, in order to better understand what drives advocacy.

- BBSRC is a helpful, trusted, professional organisation

In the 2014 research, a strong degree of trust in BBSRC staff was mentioned across stakeholder groups as a major driver of advocacy. This remains consistent in 2016, primarily framed in terms of BBSRC's reputation and expertise in ensuring they are a trusted partner organisation for a variety of purposes.

*"They're very accessible. I think we, over the years, have built a good, trusted, open dialogue which has helped us on both fronts."*

**Academic stakeholder**

*"They're a reputable body who is objective and hasn't got any particular agenda or anything."*

**Government / Policy stakeholder**

On a more practical, day-to-day level, those interviewed appreciate the staff with whom they come into contact. They are seen as flexible, easy to work with, and responsive to stakeholder needs. Almost all of those interviewed firmly view BBSRC as an organisation that listens to its stakeholders and delivers against its remit.

*"I think they are obviously smart and engaging. I think they are very focused as an organisation for delivery against their remit. I think the level of professionalism and knowledge amongst their staff is very good actually."*

**Civil Society Organisation stakeholder**

*"I'm a great supporter of BBSRC, I think it's done a lot of good stuff, I think it continues to do a lot of good stuff. I think at senior level you have people who are absolutely committed to the areas of research that they represent and want to get the best for the UK."*

**Academic stakeholder**

- Focus on innovation

As seen in spontaneous word associations with BBSRC, innovation is viewed as a central element of BBSRC's work by stakeholders and something they have been focusing on in recent years. This driver of advocacy is particularly prevalent among Industry and Government / Policy stakeholders, who note that various 'blue sky thinking meetings' involving BBSRC are positive from both an innovation and relationship building point of view. Specific examples of innovation projects highlighted include the Food Innovation Network, the 'pre-competitive space', and BBSRC training such as the new professional internships.

*"That whole idea of pre-competitive space and open innovation, that is something that the BBSRC has truly championed in our industry."*

**Industry stakeholder**

*“They are encouraging UK academics and UK research, and UK innovation or UK collaboration between academia and industry to create value for the future. Those would be the first things I would say. They’ve been around long enough that they run structures that stuff that gets done in the UK is delivered through them.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

- A consultative approach, involving different stakeholders

In 2014, stakeholders highlighted that BBSRC’s collaborative nature, being flexible and willing to deal with a wide range of stakeholders, was a major driver of advocacy and distinguished BBSRC from other research councils. This is again evident, with words like ‘partner’ regularly used to describe BBSRC.

*“They are very much a partnership organisation and they are seen as highly collaborative.”*

**Civil Society Organisation stakeholder**

*“Hence their emphasis on the strategic partnerships which they’ve set up, not only with universities, but with industry and other stakeholders, and I think they’ve worked really hard at that with good success.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

*“It [BBSRC] massively adds value to the work of our organisation because it supports translational science into areas that the industry is then able to take forward. They are an effective collaborator in those processes, they take time and effect to engage in those processes. Of all the research councils they are the most straightforward to engage with.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

Academics often highlight the benefits of BBSRC funded research facilitating collaboration, bringing in a diverse range of stakeholders.

*“You’ve then got a critical mass of people working in an area, or lots of people to actually draw upon. We’ve got a massive collaboration with [university name] now which is largely underpinned by BBSRC co-funded research.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

It is, however, worth noting that this perception among academics of BBSRC as a collaborative body, bringing the academic community and other stakeholders together, is not universal. A few stakeholders in this audience note the tension between the sector and institutes which are strategically funded by BBSRC, and a perception that there could be preferential treatment.

*“Many people in the HE sector would question why it’s allowable for staff at a BBSRC institute to apply for a BBSRC grant. That might be viewed, to many of us, as double-dipping.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

- Have effectively increased engagement – particularly around the impact agenda

Stakeholders from across audience groups, in particular Industry, note that BBSRC's efforts to engage with them have increased in the past two years. Stakeholders describe how BBSRC brings actors together in this area, tailoring their engagement to stakeholders' particular needs. For instance, BBSRC is seen to 'hand-hold' academics and higher education institutions and identify mutual benefits. More broadly, BBSRC's positive dissemination of the Government's impact message to industry and civil society brings together stakeholder groups toward a clear set of objectives, and is widely praised.

*"I think much more dialogue has emerged in recent years and, I think it's significant in part because of the whole Impact agenda. BBSRC has a very positive message to give here, to BIS and to Government, it's had to hand-hold the academic community a little bit to get it through."*

**Academic stakeholder**

Stakeholders also note an increased effort from BBSRC with industry and the private sector more broadly. Some stakeholders attribute this to the stewardship of Jackie Hunter, who had a background in the pharmaceutical industry. The challenge for BBSRC now is to maintain and continue to develop this level of engagement, regardless of changes in leadership.

*"I think they've tried very hard to engage with the private sector more, and despite what I say about them needing to do more, they have genuinely tried to grow that. There are a lot more references to that in their work now than there used to be. So again that's very positive, and I suspect it's something that has been driven particularly by the senior team there, Jackie Hunter obviously had a private sector pharma background."*

**Academic stakeholder**

- Success in translating research into outcomes

In the 2014 research, some stakeholders reported that not enough focus was placed on how BBSRC funded research translated into practice for policy makers or industry. In 2016, the research has shown movement in stakeholder perceptions. Firstly, Government / Policy stakeholders report that BBSRC excels at disseminating the difference which is made by the research they fund, providing stakeholders and decision makers with readable, tangible evidence on the results of research. This is seen by these stakeholders as crucial both in terms of demonstrating the value of BBSRC and the profile of science more broadly, and also strengthening the case for further research.

*"When I was at [Department] we were looking at what's the impact from all this research funding and it's very easy to get into, 'Well, it's all basic research, won't somebody else fund it? What's the real difference it's made?' They were very good at actually putting together a good case for why it was actually needed and what the tangible results were."*

**Government / Policy stakeholder**

In addition, the focus on the bioeconomy, as will be explored further in the next chapter (p.57), which stakeholders recognise as connecting science to the wider economy, is appreciated as BBSRC funded research takes into consideration potential positive, bioeconomy related, outcomes.

*“Bioeconomy means to be able to translate the findings of the bio-scientists into a product that can be valuable to society.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

*“These things are all within the art of the possible under the bioeconomy and the UK has the opportunity to lead that because we do have the best science. The key for us is turning that best science into commercial opportunity.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

- Engaging the public

Opinion is divided on BBSRC’s role in engaging the public. Many stakeholders, particularly those from the Government / Policy and Civil Society Organisation audiences mention that the public are key stakeholders in the work of BBSRC, and that engaging the public should be a higher priority for the organisations, although some do feel positive steps are being made.

*“I thought their public engagement that they did, using childhood, was excellent.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

The importance of such public engagement is not universally shared, however. Some Academics in particular are sceptical, believing this to be a responsibility of universities and researchers, and that it does not fit within the remit of a research council.

*“The public engagement side, I’m less convinced that that’s been a success. I don’t think it needs to be for the research council to deliver it themselves. That’s something which is probably best delivered through the universities.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

- Acquiring secondments and placements for PhD students

Several academic stakeholders note that BBSRC has led the way in acquiring secondments and placements for PhD students in policy areas, and organisations outside of traditional locations for student placements. It is reported that BBSRC have driven these through, and other research councils have followed.

*“I think it’s been a very positive two years for them. I think they have tried to lead the way in many initiatives in the research council arena. I mean, for example, they are acquiring secondments and placements for PhD students in policy areas outside of the research area, which is something that they led on and other research councils have adopted subsequently.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

- Bureaucratic

As in 2014, the perceived bureaucracy of BBSRC remains a concern for a significant tranche of stakeholders, particularly in terms of staff roles and responsibilities. While not all share this view, frustration with bureaucracy does emerge during conversations with a wide range of stakeholders, suggesting BBSRC needs to work with stakeholders to understand their challenges and make its processes as easy to navigate as possible.

*“I think, you know, their weaknesses are that the, kind of, monolithic and bureaucratic organisation, so it’s a big organisation and lots and lots of staff, and it’s very difficult to, kind of, work out who does what.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

### 4.3 IMPACT

Demonstrating the social and economic impact of the research it funds is a key aim of BBSRC, and is crucial for ensuring continued public support for Bioscience. Impact questions were included in both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the research in order to ascertain how BBSRC is performing on this metric, and to explore the perceptions behind this.

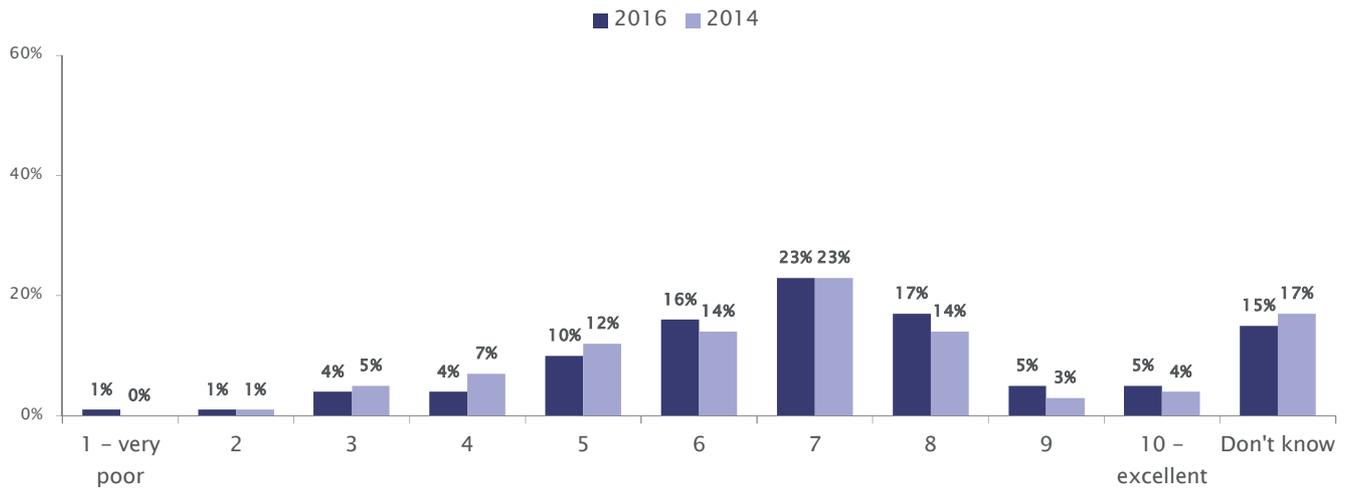
Overall, the trend since 2014 on these metrics is positive; there has been a ten percentage point increase in the two-year period of stakeholders rating BBSRC’s contribution to social impact between 7 and 10 (31%, from 21% in 2014), where 10 is excellent and 1 is very poor. For economic impact, the equivalent percentage point increase is eight points (50% from 42% in 2014); both of these figures indicate that BBSRC is continuing to make good progress in demonstrating impact to its stakeholders. The overall average stakeholder rating for BBSRC’s contribution to economic impact is 6.7 out of 10, and 5.8 for social impact. These are similar to the figures from 2014, where there was a mean rating of 6.3 for economic impact and 5.5 for social impact.

There still remains a significant minority who say that they don’t know when asked to rate BBSRC’s overall contribution to both social and economic impact. As in 2014, several stakeholders (in both phases of the research) found this question difficult to answer, commenting that impact is very difficult to accurately quantify; particularly social impact. Additionally, one stakeholder compared BBSRC’s research to the Medical Research Council’s, arguing that it is easier to demonstrate the impact of the latter as they can cite clear examples of how many lives a particular drug has saved, for example.

*“How would I rate their impact? Do you know, that’s really hard to answer for any individual organisation, let alone for BBSRC. I think impact is something that can only really be quantified at the very final stage, once your product’s sold and you can measure CO2 footprints and it’s very hard to take that back to say, “How much of that would’ve happened or wouldn’t have happened if it hadn’t been for BBSRC’s funding?”*

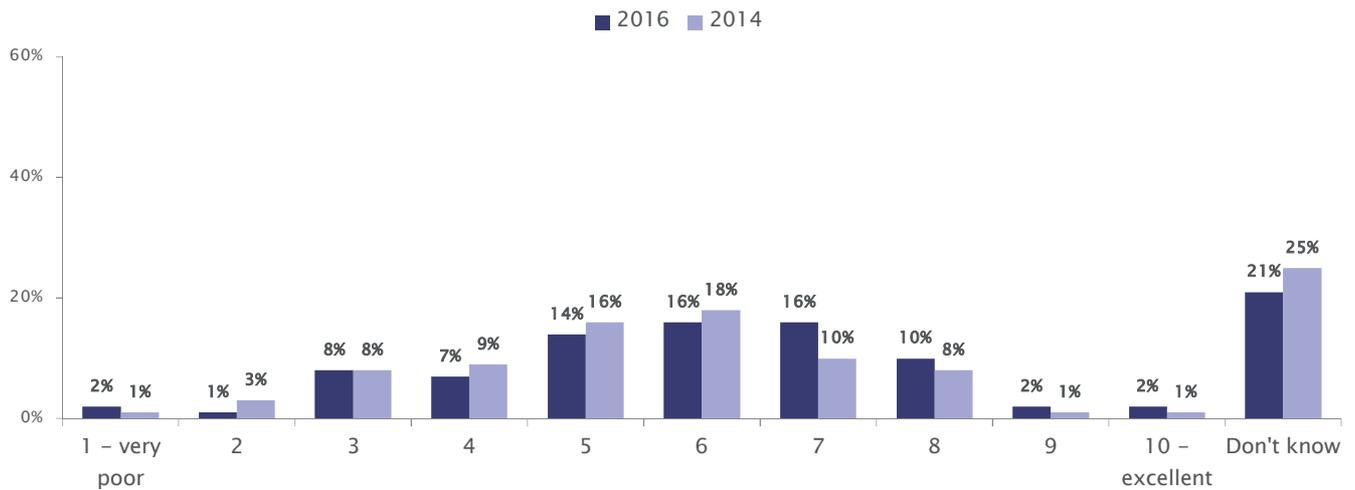
**Industry stakeholder**

Figure 4.4 BBSRC's to economic impact



Q21. How would you rate BBSRC's overall contribution to economic impact within the UK? Please answer on a scale of one to ten, where one means very poor and ten means excellent. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376).

Figure 4.5 BBSRC's to social impact



Q22. How would you rate BBSRC's overall contribution to social impact within the UK? Please answer on a scale of one to ten, where one means very poor and ten means excellent. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

While most felt that BBSRC does contribute meaningfully to economic impact in the UK, some questioned whether this should be part of its remit, and that perhaps this should fall to the organisations and people it funds. Academic stakeholders in particular were quick to praise the number of trained scientists in the UK supported by BBSRC in one way or another as being a good example of where BBSRC contributes significantly to overall economic impact.

*“I think it’s very real, because a huge proportion of our trained scientists, bioscientists, are supported by the BBSRC in one way or another, and they have an important role in helping to inspire individuals to go into that sort of sector. So in terms of the skills pipeline I think there’s a very direct role.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

*“The work they did in linking basic research and the research they support through to tangible impacts in industry and in the wider economy was particularly effective for spending reviews”*

**Government / Policy stakeholder**

*“I’d say they’re among the top leaders in terms of being able to do this [demonstrate impact]. They’re very much on the front foot with this and actually being quite pragmatic in how to do it.”*

**Government / Policy stakeholder**

In the quantitative survey, stakeholders are split as to whether BBSRC is effective at communicating its social and economic impact<sup>3</sup>; around half (49%) say that it is effective, compared to two in five who say the opposite (39%). As several stakeholders in the qualitative interviews found this question difficult to quantify, this indicates that there is a good opportunity for BBSRC to communicate strongly the impact of the research that it funds. This would have a two-pronged outcome: improvement of stakeholder perceptions on the social and economic impact of BBSRC research, as well as continuing to justify funding.

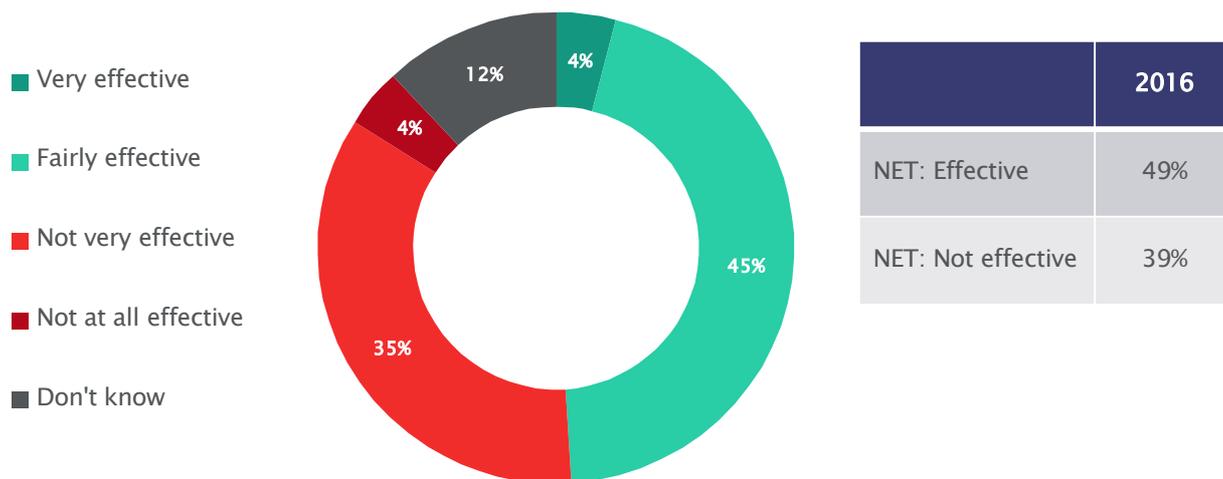
*“In the world of austerity, funding for scientific research is as likely to be cut as anything else, and perhaps these things are, I mean, that will be partly why they are really focusing on impact.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

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<sup>3</sup> Please note that this question was not asked in 2014; hence there is no tracking data for this metric.

Figure 4.6: Effectiveness of communicating impact



Q23. How effective, if at all, is BBSRC at communicating its social and economic impact? Base: all respondents (n=501)

	Academic	Civil Society Organisation	Government / Policy	Industry
Very effective	5%	0%	0%	2%
Fairly effective	54%	27%	38%	25%
Not very effective	29%	43%	34%	52%
Not at all effective	1%	8%	9%	8%
Don't know	11%	22%	13%	13%

During qualitative interviews stakeholders were also asked whether they feel that BBSRC does enough to promote the social and economic impact of the science it funds. Overall, there are mixed feelings on this; some believe that within budget constraints BBSRC does the best it can, while others comment that it could do more, pointing out that most members of the public do not know anything about life sciences.

*"[It's] all about how you can bridge the gap between the scientist and the rest of the general public on biological science research and practice. So almost like a kind of bridge and a translator, and a kind of enabler for a proper conversation on those things. I think translator is probably a good idea [for BBSRC]."*

**Academic stakeholder**

Public awareness of and engagement with bioscience therefore appears to be an area in which BBSRC could do more to strongly demonstrate the impact that its research has. One Government / Policy stakeholder gave the example of the Wellcome Trust as an organisation that proactively promotes the science it funds, and therefore an organisation for BBSRC to emulate in this regard.

Several industry stakeholders also argued that BBSRC could do more in terms of putting across a 'business case' for the economic impact of the science it funds; examples given are the value added to British exports, contribution to health outcomes, and the inward investment it attracts such as the genome science in the Cambridge Science Park. Others also pointed towards the jobs that BBSRC funding creates as a clear area it could emphasise as an example of their economic impact.

Overall, economic impact was viewed as being easier to demonstrate, while social impact is necessarily more abstract and therefore requires greater skill both to establish and show. Providing a definition of social impact, and BBSRC's efforts in this area, could therefore enable stakeholders to better understand how to assess social impact.

*"I think they're probably pretty strong on the economic, I think it's easier. From what I've seen, they're very good at saying, 'This is an opportunity to invest.' This is, you know-, the commercialisation of their science is naturally an economic contribution. Social, I have not seen any evidence of anything particularly sophisticated."*

**Civil Society Organisation stakeholder**

*"Social impact, I think, getting more in that space, actually, if I think about, sort of, student training, probably engagement, that's the other thing that is, I think, getting more traction."*

**Academic stakeholder**

# 5. BBSRC'S VISION AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION



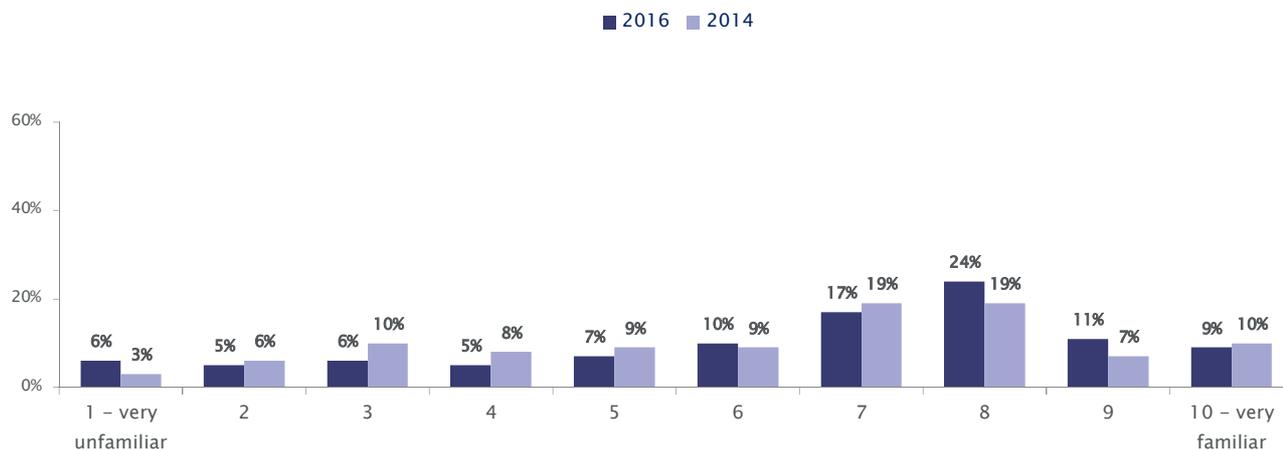
Throughout this chapter, stakeholders’ perceptions of the BBSRC’s vision and mission are explored, including their familiarity with them and to what extent they believe BBSRC to have achieved these objectives.

## 5.1 BBSRC’S VISION

Stakeholders are much more likely to report familiarity with BBSRC’s mission and vision than unfamiliarity; three in five (61%) rate their familiarity with it at 7 or higher on the scale, while just 17% rate it between 1 and 3. It is notable that a significant minority of stakeholders (22%) place themselves in the middle of the scale (4–6), suggesting that they do not feel they know very much about the mission and vision of BBSRC. The overall average rating for familiarity with BBSRC mission and values is 6.7, similar to the 2014 average of 6.3.

This is evident also in the qualitative interviews; the most common answer to this question is that stakeholders see themselves as ‘reasonably familiar’ with the mission and vision of BBSRC, while being unable to provide specific details of the mission statement. Some stakeholders refer specifically to BBSRC’s focus on strategic priorities in answer to this question, suggesting that these have cut through to a wider audience.

Figure 5:1 : BBSRC mission and vision



Q18. To what extent would you say you are familiar with the mission and vision of BBSRC? Please give your answer on a scale of one to ten where one means you are very unfamiliar and ten means you are very familiar. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

There has been an overall positive trend since 2014 in terms of awareness of BBSRC’s mission and vision. Overall, stakeholders are more likely than two years ago to report familiarity with BBSRC’s mission and vision (61% vs 55%), and correspondingly less likely to say they are unfamiliar. This is a positive finding for BBSRC, indicating that things are moving in the right direction and that BBSRC has been communicating its vision effectively. The challenge now will be to ensure there is deeper awareness and understanding of the mission and values among all stakeholders, to ensure that they understand the context of decisions BBSRC makes in future.

*“I think fairly well. I’ve read their strategic plan; I’ve watched how they’re moving forward. I think I understand what they want to do in very broad terms.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

*“I couldn’t recite them to you, but I feel as if I’m sufficiently familiar with them.”*

**Government / Policy stakeholder**

The breakdown of familiarity with BBSRC’s mission and vision by stakeholder type can be seen below. It is clear that academics are much more likely to report familiarity (73%) with BBSRC’s mission and vision than other stakeholder types, particularly civil society (27%). This may reflect the fact that academics feel that their organisations’ vision aligns more closely with BBSRC’s than other stakeholders, or indeed it may reflect the overall higher familiarity with BBSRC among academics.

BBSRC’s mission and vision	Academic	NGO/civil society	Government / policy	Industry
NET: 7-10	73% (-4)	27% (-11)	44% (-7)	46% (+6)
NET: 4-6	17% (+4)	30% (-8)	22% (-3)	31% (-1)
NET: 1-3	9% (-1)	41% (+20)	34% (+12)	23% (-5)

Base 2016: Academics (n=293), Industry (n=100), Government / policy (n=32), Civil society (n=37). Base 2014: Academics (n=111), Industry (n=112), NGO (n=29), Government / Policy (n=51).

In order to gain a more detailed picture of how BBSRC’s vision has cut through to stakeholders, the qualitative interviews probed how well they thought BBSRC had communicated its vision and mission. BBSRC’s mission statement was read out to all stakeholders, after which they provided a view on how well they thought it had been communicated to them ahead of this.

*“BBSRC’s vision is to lead world-class 21<sup>st</sup> century bioscience, promoting innovation in the bioeconomy and realising benefits within and beyond the UK by:*

- *Supporting high-class research and related training;*
- *Promoting the exploitation of research and providing trained scientists in support of bio-based industries; and*
- *Promoting public engagement in bioscience.”*

Generally, there is a consensus that BBSRC communicates the vision well, with the possible exception of public engagement in bioscience, which is mentioned several times as being an area that stakeholders are less familiar with or confident about. Most acknowledge that this may be because this part of the vision is understandably less targeted at them, compared to the other aims of BBSRC, for example, supporting training and promoting research. However, it is telling that many stakeholders are not aware of BBSRC’s efforts in this area, suggesting that a concerted push to highlight the work being done to promote public engagement in bioscience would be helpful in convincing stakeholders of its success and importance.

*“I think they communicate it pretty well, actually. Again, I’d say, you know, you have to be on the circulation list, you have to have signed up for that. There’s not a lot of outreach.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

*“I don’t think that [public engagement] comes across as a particularly strong aim for the BBSRC”*

**Academic stakeholder**



Similarly, the majority of stakeholders believe that BBSRC does communicate the vision well, referring to literature they receive on a regular basis providing information and case studies of its impact as examples of this. However, there was a feeling among some stakeholders that their familiarity with the vision may be because of their specific relationship with BBSRC, and that perhaps a broader group of people, who are less engaged with it, may not be aware of the mission. This is borne out by the lower reported familiarity with the vision among stakeholders who are overall less engaged with BBSRC (such as civil society), and indicates that greater engagement with BBSRC is vital in improving familiarity with and ‘buy-in’ to BBSRC’s vision.

*“Maybe they have [communicated it] but I’m not aware of it.”*

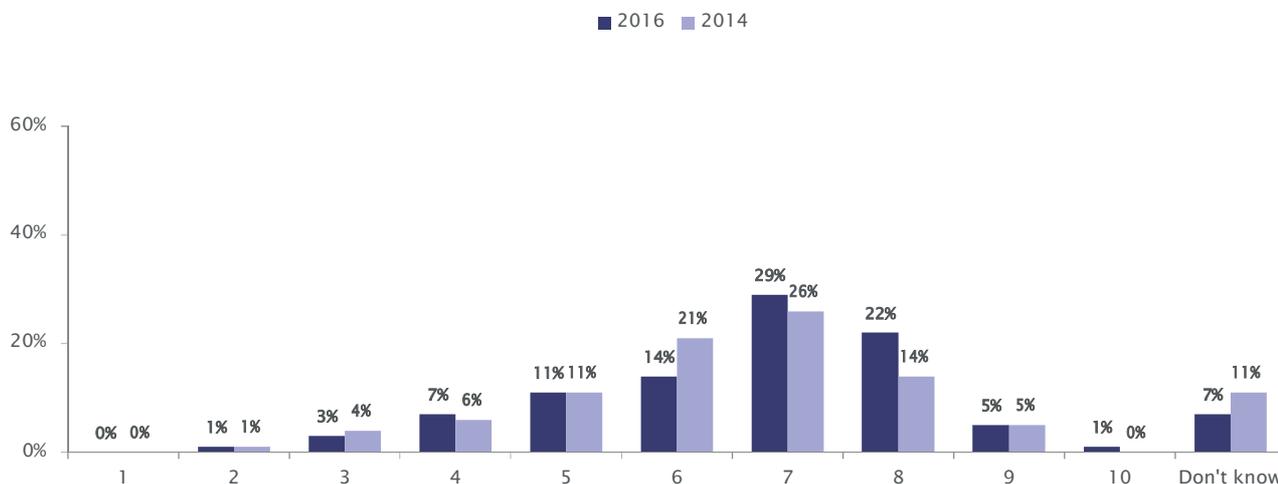
**Government / Policy stakeholder**

## 5.2 ACHIEVEMENT OF BBSRC’S MISSION

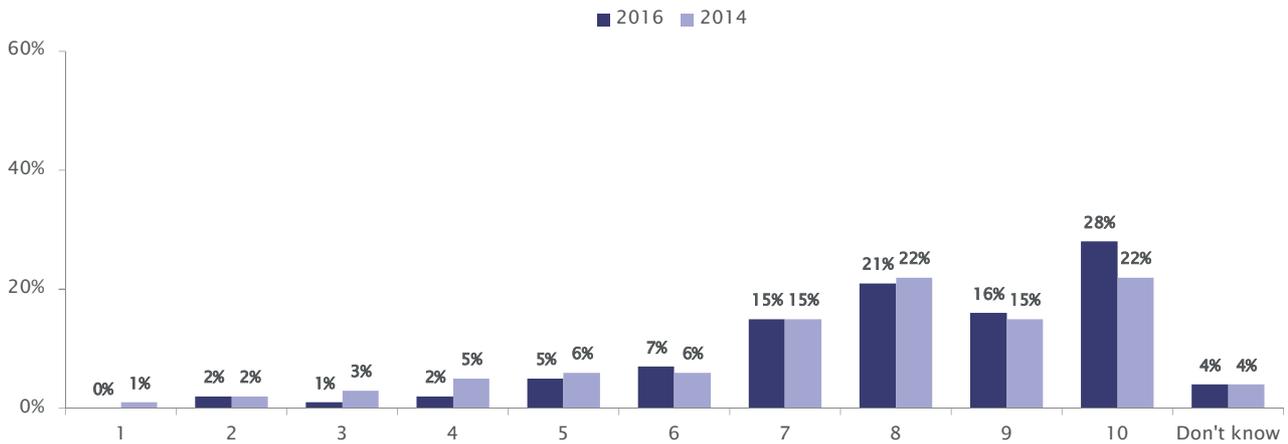
Overall, the majority of stakeholders feel that BBSRC does achieve its vision (57%), rating 7 – 10 out of 10 means it is completely achieving the vision and one means it is not achieving it at all. Despite this, a significant minority (32%) rank BBSRC’s achievement of its vision between 4 and 6 on a ten-point scale, suggesting that some do not feel as confident that BBSRC achieves the vision set out previously. However, it is very encouraging that just 4% of stakeholders select 1–3 on the ten-point scale when indicating the extent to which BBSRC has achieved its vision. The proportion of stakeholders who select 7–10 on the scale has increased by 12 percentage points since 2014, indicating that BBSRC has made good progress on this metric.

On average, stakeholders rate BBSRC’s achievement of their vision as 6.5, in line with the average of 6.3 from 2014. In terms sharing the vision, stakeholders on average rate this as 8 out of ten, consistent with the average of 7.7 in 2014.

Figure 5.2: Achievement and sharing of vision



Q24. To what extent, if at all, do you think BBSRC achieves this vision? Please give your answer on a scale of one to ten where one means not at all and ten means it is completely achieving it. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

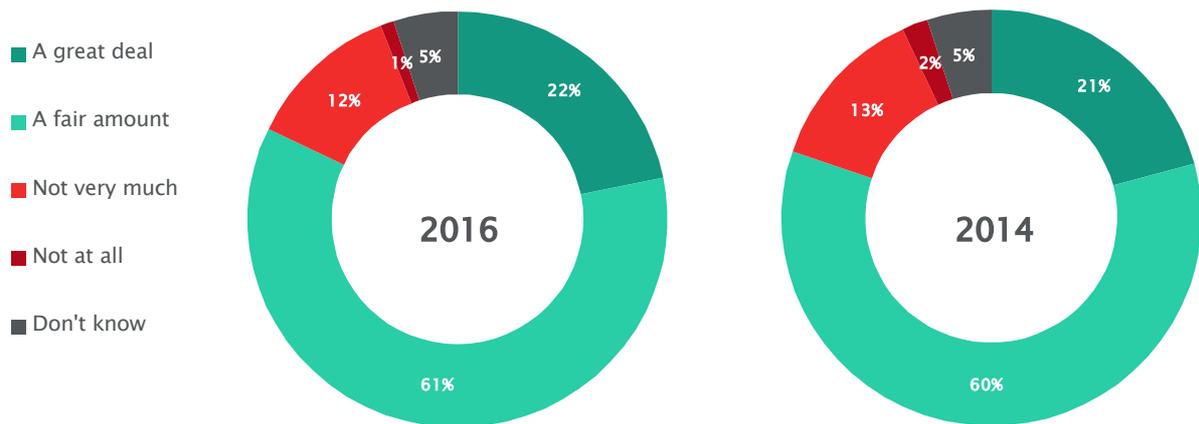


Q26. To what extent, if at all, does your organisation share BBSRC's vision? Please give your answer on a scale of one to ten where one means you don't share it at all and ten means you completely share it. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

A clear majority (79%) of stakeholders indicate their organisation shares the vision of BBSRC, an increase of five percentage points since 2014. This finding is very positive as it indicates that BBSRC is positioning itself well in the sector.

Most stakeholders say that there is scope for BBSRC to work more closely with their organisation (82%), while one in five say there is a great deal of scope (22%). These proportions are in line with 2014, indicating that stakeholders continue to view BBSRC as being relevant to their own organisation and able to offer partnership and collaboration in a wide range of areas. It also echoes a trend discussed earlier in this report, that stakeholders have high expectations and desire closer working relationships with BBSRC.

Figure 5.3: Scope to work more closely with BBSRC



Q25. To what extent, if at all, do you think there is scope for BBSRC to work more closely with your organisation to achieve this vision? Please select one answer only. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376)

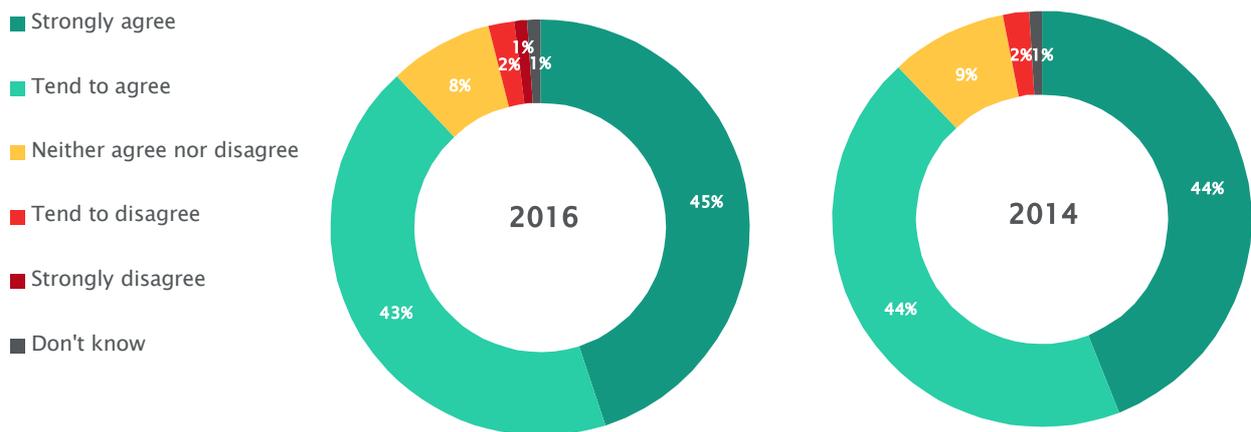
	Academic	Civil Society Organisation	Government / Policy	Industry
<b>A great deal</b>	24% (-8)	30% (+16)	13% (-5)	13% (-2)
<b>A fair amount</b>	62% (+5)	62% (-10)	72% (+13)	57% (-9)
<b>Not very much</b>	10% (+1)	8% (+1)	13% (-5)	21% (+9)
<b>Not at all</b>	0% (NC)	0% (-3)	0% (-2)	2% (NC)
<b>Don't know</b>	4% (+1)	0% (-3)	3% (-1)	7% (+2)

Base 2016: Academics (n=293), Industry (n=100), Government / policy (n=32), Civil society (n=37). Base 2014: Academics (n=111), Industry (n=112), NGO (n=29), Government / Policy (n=51). \*NC = no change from 2014

### 5.3 BIOSCIENCE AND THE BIOECONOMY

Over the past two years, BBSRC has promoted the concept of the ‘bioeconomy’ to illustrate the economic and social impact of UK bioscience. This was a new area tested in the 2016 research across both the quantitative and qualitative phases. Stakeholders overwhelmingly agree that the UK has a world-leading position in bioscience (88% agree vs 3% disagree). This is in line with the findings from 2014 and highlights that there has not been any major change in the UK’s perceived status as a global leader in bioscience. It is notable, however, that while 88% agree that the UK is a world leader in bioscience, less than half (45%) *strongly* agree, while 43% tend to agree, suggesting that, while they see the UK as having a world-leading position, many do not have complete confidence in this.

Figure 5.4: UK’s world leading position in bioscience



Q19. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the UK has a world-leading position in bioscience? Please select one answer only. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents (n=376)

The majority of BBSRC’s stakeholders (79%) continue to say that the UK’s international position in bioscience is at least a fair amount due to BBSRC, with one in five (18%) saying that this is a great deal due to BBSRC. This suggests that most stakeholders believe that the UK’s position in bioscience is perhaps only in *part* due to BBSRC, rather than BBSRC being the primary driver. In order to perform even

more strongly on this metric, there is scope for BBSRC to promote itself as an integral part of UK bioscience, highlighting the wide range of research it funds and the impact that it has on the economy.

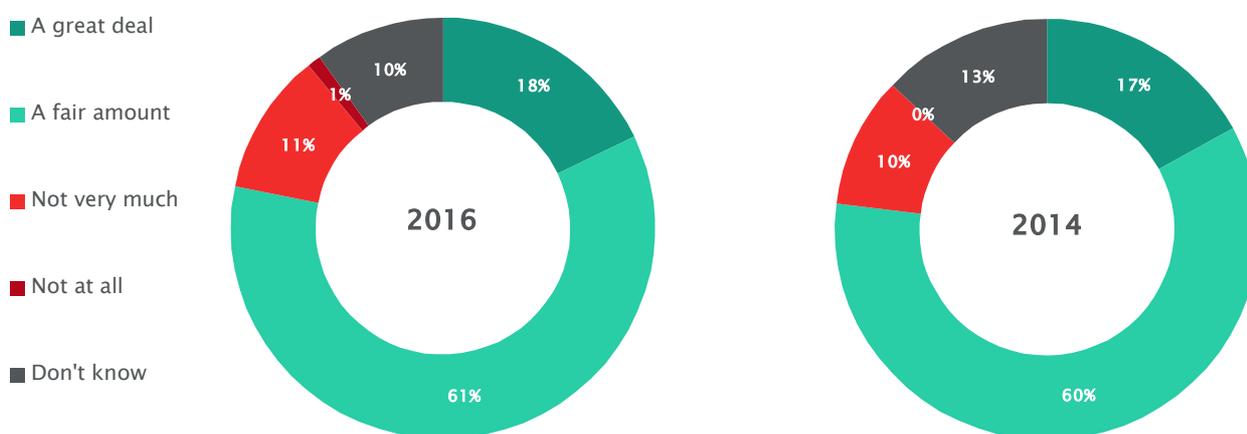
*“Biological sciences and the area in which BBSRC works are areas where the UK delivers its punches very well actually, very competitive internationally.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

*“Well, I think it does what it can with the resources that it has available. I would not say that BBSRC is the representative of UK bioscience. I mean, UK bioscience is what it is, and it’s a very large nebulous group. BBSRC is one of the foci, the nucleus around which it tends to cluster.”*

**Government / Policy stakeholder**

Figure 5.5: UK’s position in Bioscience



Q20. To what extent, if at all, do you think the UK's international position in bioscience is due to BBSRC? Please select one answer only. Base: all respondents 2016 (n=501), all respondents 2014 (n=376).

	Academic	Civil Society Organisation	Government / Policy	Industry
<b>A great deal</b>	19%	16%	22%	14%
<b>A fair amount</b>	65%	57%	53%	54%
<b>Not very much</b>	11%	8%	6%	14%
<b>Not at all</b>	0%	0%	0%	2%
<b>Don't know</b>	5%	19%	19%	16%

Base 2016: Academics (n=293), Industry (n=100), Government / policy (n=32), Civil society (n=37).

Stakeholders were also asked in the qualitative interviews how well they feel BBSRC represents UK bioscience. Overall, there was a consensus among stakeholders that BBSRC is a good representative of UK bioscience, with many citing its credibility internationally as especially important; one academic stakeholder commented that the BBSRC seems to have more of an ‘international focus’ compared with other British research councils.

*“I’ve seen them at various events. I think their reputation is strong, I think that’s important in their role here, I think again they’re relatively pragmatic.”*

**Civil Society Organisation stakeholder**

*“They have a very international approach to funding, the most probably of all the Research Councils in terms of funding bilateral or multilateral agreements with different funding agencies, for example in Japan or the USA. So they are very international in their outlook, so they are commendable for that actually.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

However, several feel that BBSRC is not visible enough in the UK bioscience landscape. One stakeholder comments that they believe BBSRC would do a very good job of demonstrating its contribution to UK bioscience, if it had a higher profile. The stakeholder offered an example of how BBSRC might go about doing this:

*“I think the only way they can possibly do that is through partnership and ensuring that we all have an understanding of what some of the common messages are, and how we present them to different audiences.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

BBSRC’s events and conferences are particularly praised, for providing forums for scientists and industry stakeholders to come together to share ideas and collaborate. These events also have the benefit of being a tangible way in which BBSRC can raise both its own profile and that of bioscience more broadly.

*“I think it does a pretty good job domestically. I think BBSRC does a pretty good job promoting and supporting conferences and getting scientists together.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

*“I think that they are visible at events where they are helping support and communicate some of the science.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

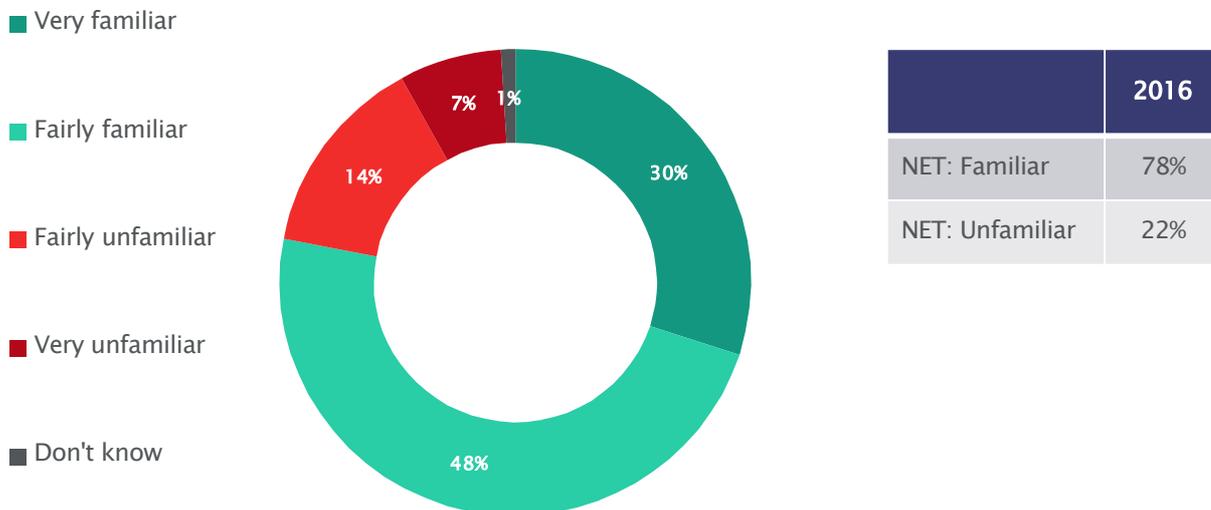
*“They also did a couple of evening roundtable events over dinner which got a good mixture of people in the room and were a good way of engaging a wide range of key stakeholders.”*

**Government / Policy stakeholder**

## 5.4 BIOECONOMY – FAMILIARITY AND RELEVANCE

The 2016 research asked stakeholders about the bioeconomy, both familiarity with it and its relevance to the work of BBSRC. Overall, four in five of BBSRC’s stakeholders (78%) say that they are familiar with the concept of the bioeconomy, while it is unfamiliar to one in five (21%).

Figure 5.6: Familiarity with the bioeconomy



Q27. How familiar are you with the concept of the 'bioeconomy'? Base: all respondents (n=501)

Government / Policy stakeholders report the greatest level of familiarity with the bioeconomy; nine in ten (91%) say that they are familiar with it, compared to around three quarters of Academic (78%), Civil Society Organisation (73%) and Industry (72%) stakeholders.

The bioeconomy	Academic	Civil Society Organisation	Government / policy	Industry
NET: Familiar	78%	73%	91%	72%
NET: Unfamiliar	22%	27%	9%	27%

The high level of familiarity with the bioeconomy is echoed in the qualitative findings. However, while familiarity is high, stakeholders provide a wide range of definitions. At the top level, most stakeholders see the bioeconomy as the portion of the economy that is related to the living world and plant and animal inputs and products, and therefore of great importance to the economy of the UK as a whole.

*“It’s using biological processes to contribute to economic productivity in all sorts of ways. I’m most familiar with it in terms of industrial biotechnology because we have one of the synthetic biology research centres, but I realise it’s much wider than that, and, of course, it’s the supply chain or production chains that feed into that which actually are important.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

*“When I think of bioeconomy, I think of synthetic bio, not only biologics and pharma but obviously also energy and potentially food chains.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

While most stakeholders are in agreement that the bioeconomy itself is very important, several are less convinced of the term’s relevance or meaning. Specifically, Civil Society Organisation stakeholders tend to be less positive about the term, (as opposed to the bioeconomy itself), with one commenting that it is a ‘buzzword’ which lacks a tangible meaning, and others arguing that the word itself was unhelpfully vague. Similarly, several comment that while they are familiar with the term due to their area of work and expertise, members of the public would be unable to accurately describe what it is. This lack of public awareness of the bioeconomy demonstrates an opportunity for BBSRC to highlight its large contribution to the British economy, and indeed increase awareness of the bioeconomy and the wide variety of areas it encompasses.

*“I suppose it’s a very broad term. It’s a bit of catch-all for bioscience industries research. So everything from health through to anaerobic digestion, energy type stuff.”*

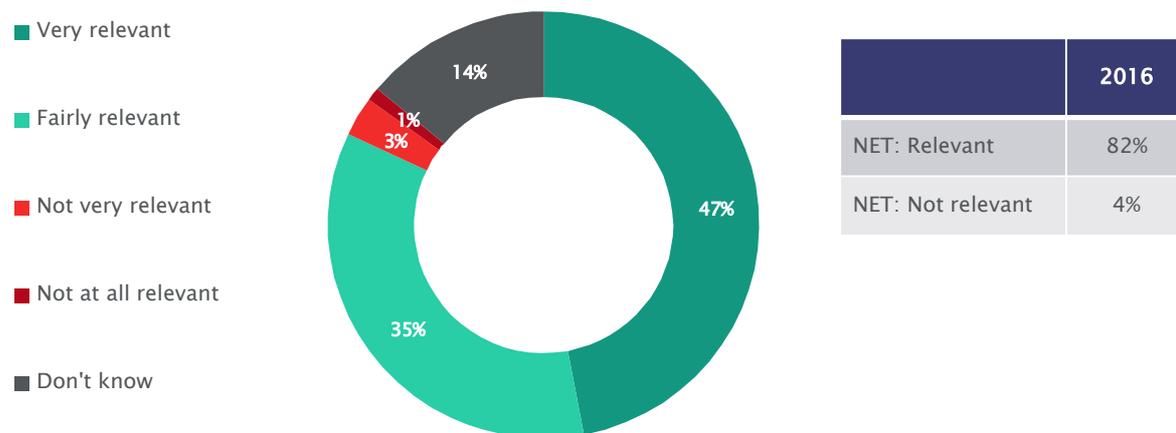
**Government / Policy stakeholder**

*“I think from my perspective it’s a very broad definition. So a lot of people think of the bioeconomy as covering the meds and pharmaceutical sector, which of course it does. It’s much, much more than that; agri-tech, food production, are all areas which are critically important to the bioeconomy and I think those in many ways are even more important than the, sort of, pharma and biomedical side of what we do.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

Another new question in 2016 asked stakeholders about the relevance of the bioeconomy to BBSRC’s work. Overall, most stakeholders are in agreement that the bioeconomy is relevant to BBSRC’s work; around four in five (82%) say that it is relevant, compared to just 4% who say the opposite. A similar proportion (83%) say that it *should* be relevant to BBSRC’s work. This implies that stakeholders are convinced as to the importance of the bioeconomy, indicating that BBSRC should maintain the bioeconomy focused narrative which has been pursued over the past two years.

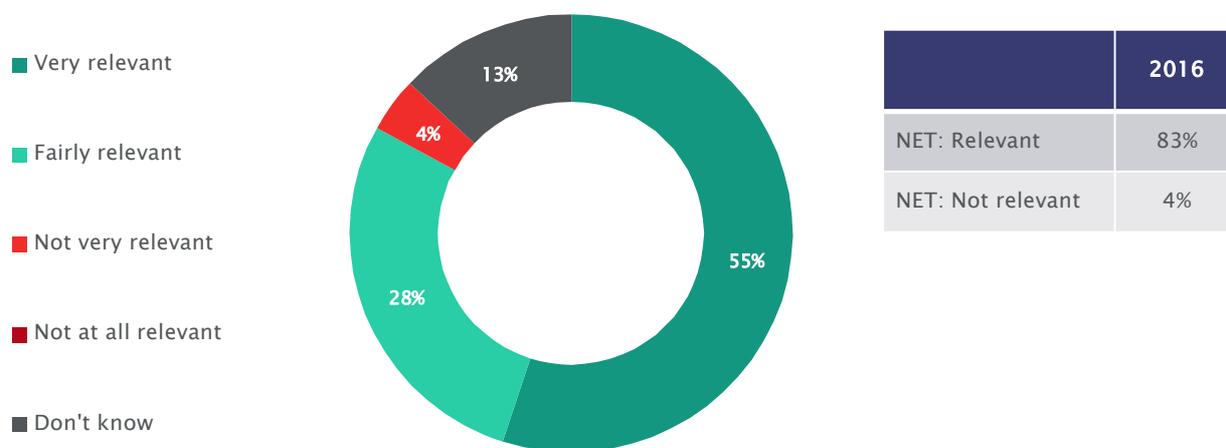
Figure 5.7: Relevance of the bioeconomy to the work of BBSRC



Q28. How relevant, if at all, is the bioeconomy to BBSRC's work? Base: all respondents (n=501)

	Academic	Civil Society Organisation	Government / Policy	Industry
<b>Very relevant</b>	46%	46%	66%	42%
<b>Fairly relevant</b>	37%	38%	22%	34%
<b>Not very relevant</b>	3%	0%	0%	6%
<b>Not at all relevant</b>	1%	3%	0%	0%
<b>Don't know</b>	14%	14%	13%	18%

Figure 5.8: How relevant the bioeconomy should be to the work of BBSRC



Q28. How relevant, if at all, should the bioeconomy be to BBSRC's work? Base: all respondents (n=501)

	Academic	Civil Society Organisation	Government / Policy	Industry
Very relevant	47%	54%	72%	65%
Fairly relevant	35%	30%	16%	16%
Not very relevant	5%	3%	0%	2%
Not at all relevant	0%	0%	0%	0%
Don't know	12%	14%	13%	17%

The qualitative interviews asked about BBSRC’s contributions to the bioeconomy; overall, stakeholders assume that BBSRC does make a significant contribution to it, by its nature as the largest funder of bioscience research in the UK. However, they found it harder to provide tangible examples of what these contributions might look like in practice; BBSRC could therefore perhaps look to provide stakeholders with case studies of where it has made significant contributions to the bioeconomy through its funding. One academic stakeholder recommended that BBSRC find a ‘niche’ and demonstrate a distinctive contribution to the bioeconomy that other organisations cannot.

*“They’re the leading advocate of it, and they provide a lot of the underpinning science for it.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

*“I think they flag this up quite strongly. I think their strategy, focussing on–, it’s a three-pronged strategy. It’s agriculture and food security on one hand, bioscience for health and then industrial biotechnology and biofuels and bioenergy and that sort of stuff.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

*“They are always very keen to demonstrate the value of the bioeconomy and biology to society and to the scientific community as well.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

The findings in this chapter indicate that overall, BBSRC has made good progress on the metrics tested, compared to 2014. Familiarity with BBSRC’s mission and vision is high, therefore the challenge now for BBSRC is to increase familiarity among the less familiar stakeholder groups, particularly civil society. Similarly, there is scope for BBSRC to capitalise on the fact that the majority of stakeholders say their organisation shares BBSRC’s vision, and strengthen collaborative working. Finally, while most stakeholders say that the UK’s position in bioscience is at least a fair amount due to BBSRC, there is scope to increase the proportion who say that it is a *great deal* due to BBSRC.

## 6. FUTURE PRIORITIES



Stakeholders were asked at the end of both the quantitative and qualitative research phases about their thoughts on the future of BBSRC, including any challenges or opportunities they envisaged for the research council. This also covered how they believe BBSRC can best serve UK bioscience over the next five years.

In the qualitative research, a wide variety of responses to this question were provided – and most stakeholders gave a response, indicating that most respondents are engaged with BBSRC and willing to offer feedback and advice. Several stakeholders also say that the best way BBSRC can serve UK bioscience is to continue doing what it has been doing, an encouraging finding. Indeed, overall, stakeholders express support and admiration for BBSRC, with many commenting that it is doing the best that it can with the resources it has available. When asked about the future and what it may mean for BBSRC, several major themes emerge.

### **Budget cuts and potential lack of funding**

- Several stakeholders referred to their concerns about what would happen if BBSRC's funding were to be reduced in the event of further government spending cuts, or if the government were to change BBSRC's remit significantly. This also led some to discuss the importance of being able to justify BBSRC's funding from government, in a period of austerity and heightened scrutiny of public spending.
- BBSRC's broad remit was mentioned by several stakeholders, in particular those from Government / Policy audiences, throughout the qualitative interviews; whether or not it can continue to support this in a time of restricted budgets was flagged as a potential issue for the future, and some stakeholders are concerned about the implications of this.

### **Demonstrating Impact**

- Managing the tension between academic stakeholders, who are very keen for BBSRC to continue to fund fundamental, or 'blue sky' research, and not allow its quest to demonstrate impact to overshadow this, and stakeholders from other sectors, who are keen for BBSRC to fund more research with a demonstrable impact is a challenge.
- Stakeholders across audiences highlighted the importance of strengthening BBSRC's contact with industry, in the form of providing an interface between academic research and industry, or simply becoming more responsive to the needs of industry. This latter point would also have the benefit of demonstrating the tangible impact of BBSRC-funded work.

*“Across the piece, they're talking about losing, or having to cut back by another 25% by the year 2020. We seriously worry that this hamstrings their ability to do a range of things that your questions have suggested are important.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

### **Transition to UKRI**

- Most stakeholders, particularly those from the academic field, offer a view on the future of the research councils and what it may mean for BBSRC. Many are worried about the potential loss of autonomy for BBSRC if or when UKRI happens, also mentioning the need for BBSRC to maintain its own character and links with stakeholders.

- Similarly, some Academic stakeholders expressed concern regarding the potential dilution of fundamental biological research, with some areas of research potentially ‘falling through the gaps’ as they do not come under the remit of any particular research council.
- While more stakeholders are wary of UKRI rather than optimistic, Government / Policy stakeholders remark that it is a positive move for BBSRC, and indeed for the research councils as a whole as it will encourage collaborative and partnership working as well as moving towards simplified mechanisms of accessing investment and support.

*“The process by which UKRI is formed means that there’s likely to be intra-council battles of budget cuts...that’s going to distract the powers and energies of senior leadership for a significant period of time.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

*“I think that the direction of moving towards UKRI, and potentially combining them, is a very positive move.”*

**Government / Policy stakeholder**

*“We’re very worried about some of the unintended, consequences, negative consequences, of the establishment of UKRI. We’ve said that we think it’s very important that organisations like BBSRC retain their own character, they retain their own links with their constituents, that we use the expertise that they have and we don’t dissipate it by re-labelling something, and going back to bad old days.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

### **Managing transitional phase**

- The senior leadership of BBSRC is referred to by a range of stakeholders, but particularly those from the academic world; several express concern that there has not been a clear strategy laid out for the future of BBSRC’s leadership.
- Similarly, the uncertainty around the leadership is viewed to be a problem for BBSRC during this period (i.e. that of budget cuts, Brexit and transition to UKRI), as strong and effective leadership is seen to be important in safeguarding both its own interests and those of its stakeholders.
- Linked to this is a worry that BBSRC may struggle to attract the same calibre of chief executive as before, due to the uncertainty of the current situation, and therefore should do everything in its power to find stable new leadership.

*“I think the fact that the BBSRC has not formally announced a process or timeline for replacement of their Chief Executive is a concern and sends a message of uncertainty about the future”*

**Academic stakeholder**

*“The danger is that the role of the chief executive of the research council will be downgraded by losing their, if you like, budgetary responsibility, and that they will find it difficult to attract people of the appropriate calibre to be intellectual leaders in the field.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

### **Championing fundamental research and bioscience, and making sure the UK is as competitive as possible in bioscience and scientific research**

- Stakeholders emphasise the importance of continuing to promote the impact of the science that BBSRC funds – as BBSRC is in a ‘unique position’ of dealing with some of the fundamental areas of life. Related to this, Academic and Industry stakeholders particularly highlight the importance of encouraging people to go into scientific careers, partly by fostering talent through studentships, and maintaining the number of scientists currently working in the UK.
- Academics particularly emphasise continuing to promote excellence in science while making sure that the success threshold for applications does not fall.
- Keeping pace with the fast changing scientific world and maintaining the UK’s place at the forefront of academic research, acknowledged as being more difficult in a time of budget cuts, is the overall message from stakeholders for BBSRC in this area.

*“Making sure that the UK is at the forefront, and maintains itself at the forefront of academic research and innovation, and commercialisation of those things. That’s a challenge to us all, and BBSRC are in the middle of all that. Those would be my two [challenges] for them.”*

**Academic stakeholder**

### **Engaging the public in science**

- As mentioned previously in the report, several stakeholders, particularly those from Academic and Government / Policy audiences highlighted the importance of convincing the public of the importance of bioscience, particularly in areas such as GM foods. They saw this as an area in which BBSRC could make a larger contribution than it currently does.
- Informing the public about the biological sciences and promoting bioscience to a wider audience is seen as vital by Government / Policy stakeholders for maintaining the level of government funding BBSRC currently holds.

*“The public acceptance of these technologies, irrespective of whether they work or not or if they’re beneficial or not, public acceptance sits over the top of that. I think that is a significant challenge moving forward.”*

**Industry stakeholder**

# 7. EMERGING THEMES



Building on the benchmarking research in 2014, this research has provided an overview of stakeholder perceptions of BBSRC; in terms of the organisation's engagement, performance and direction, and how perceptions have shifted since 2014. Developing productive stakeholder relationships is a long-term challenge, hence many of the broad, emerging themes for BBSRC to consider remain consistent with 2014. The challenge for BBSRC is to remain proactive and open, and to illustrate to stakeholders that it has listened and is acting on their feedback.

- **Tailoring the method and frequency of contact with stakeholders to deepen relationships**

Keeping stakeholders informed about BBSRC's priorities and actions is the foundation of effective stakeholder relationships. BBSRC performs well in this regard but the diverse needs and priorities of its stakeholders means that maintaining a high level of satisfaction with working relationships across all audiences over time is challenging. Additionally, a significant proportion of stakeholders report that they would like to work more closely with BBSRC and that BBSRC could add more value to their organisation.

This desire for ever closer ties with BBSRC presents an opportunity for the organisation to deepen relationships and increase levels of advocacy. To do so effectively within finite resources BBSRC must seek to better understand expectations about the frequency and depth of engagement it can provide, and avoid associations with superficial engagement. This will require a targeted approach, utilising channels of communication that are suited to different stakeholder audiences and making sure that contact with stakeholders translates into tangible actions or, at the very least, a closing of the feedback loop.

- **Exploring Government / Policy and Civil Society landscape in the context of BBSRC's remit to maximise engagement opportunities**

Investing time and energy in better understanding the needs and priorities of Government / Policy and Civil Society Organisations could be extremely beneficial for BBSRC. These organisations are more likely than other stakeholders to not feel well informed by BBSRC and to report that they are very unfamiliar with BBSRC's vision, and are therefore less likely to advocate for BBSRC externally. Given this, mapping the key organisations and contacts within these sectors will be vital in identifying where greater engagement is required to further strengthen BBSRC's standing.

- **Continuing to emphasise the impact of bioscience and BBSRC's role**

Stakeholders, in particular those working in Government/Policy, welcome BBSRC's focus on the impact agenda and the dissemination of this to stakeholders. Consequently, it is widely agreed that BBSRC should continue to engage and collaborate with stakeholders to maximise the impact of the research it funds. Stakeholders do note that BBSRC's contribution to impact can be difficult to quantify, especially in terms of social impact. As such, BBSRC's messaging may need to be refined to make sure stakeholders have a clear understanding of the organisation's contribution to both social and economic impact.

- **Defining and communicating the purpose of the bioeconomy**

Since 2014, BBSRC has promoted the concept of the bioeconomy to illustrate the contribution of bioscience to the UK. Stakeholders tend to welcome the concept and see the importance of the bioeconomy. However, there is some cynicism around the term, with many stakeholders stating that it is too broad and can be seen as a 'buzz word'. Though this feeling is far from universal, BBSRC will need to sustain consistent messaging around how it defines the bioeconomy and the benefits it brings to the UK to avoid negative associations becoming more widespread.

- **Proactively engaging with stakeholders throughout the transition to UKRI**

The impending transition of individual research councils to UKRI features heavily in discussions regarding future challenges and opportunities for BBSRC. Stakeholders are calling for BBSRC to be proactive – keeping them fully informed of key developments and milestones throughout the transition – and to make them aware of the implications of this for UK bioscience.

# 8. APPENDICES



# APPENDIX 1: QUALITATIVE DISCUSSION GUIDE

## TOPIC 1 – AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF BBSRC

### 1) To begin with, thinking about your overall awareness of BBSRC, how familiar or otherwise would you say you are with them?

- How might you describe their remit to someone who had never heard of them?
- What, if any, are the main areas of work you associate with BBSRC?
- What key words or phrases, if any, would you use to describe BBSRC?

### 2) How, if at all, do you interact with BBSRC in your professional role?

- On what issues / topics are you currently engaging with BBSRC?
- Where are your points of contact within BBSRC, if any?
- How would you describe BBSRC as an organisation? What kind of organisation is it trying to be?
- How would you describe your interactions with BBSRC to date?

### 3) Who do you think BBSRC's key stakeholders are? Why do you say that?

- Do you think these are who BBSRC's key stakeholders should be?
- Are there any key groups / organisations that you think BBSRC isn't engaging sufficiently with at the moment?

### 4) How would you assess BBSRC's overall performance in the last two years?

*Probe:*

- What has it done particularly well / less well?
- To what extent is it progressing as you would have expected overall? *Probe on specific areas mentioned.*
- What have you seen / heard that makes you think this?

### 5) What are BBSRC's strengths? What are its weaknesses? *Probe: Staff, expertise, funding models, communications, engagement.*

- Can you provide any examples?

## TOPIC 2 – ENGAGEMENT AND WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

**I'd now like to focus more specifically on your engagement and working relationship with BBSRC.**

**1) To what extent, if at all, do you think BBSRC adds value to the work of your organisation?**

- *[If does not add value]* Are there anyway ways in which you feel the BBSRC could add value to your organisation? Can you think any other similar organisations who do add value to your organisation? Is there anything you think BBSRC could learn from these organisations?
- *[If does add value]* What does this value look like in practice?

**2) Do you find working with BBSRC broadly positive, or broadly negative, for you and your organisation?**

- Why do you say that? Can you give me some examples?
- How, if at all, could your working relationship with BBSRC be improved?
- Overall, thinking about your relationship with BBSRC, would you say you would like to work more or less closely with them, or is your relationship about right? Why do you say that?

**3) How, if at all, does BBSRC engage or communicate with you regarding its work?**

- Which approaches work particularly well, or less well?
- Is there anything BBSRC should stop / start / continue to do to engage stakeholders?
- What more, if anything, would you like from your relationship with BBSRC?
- What, if any, do you see as the main benefits of working with BBSRC?
- What do you consider to be most important in your relationship with BBSRC?

**4) Do you consider BBSRC to be an organisation that listens to its stakeholders?**

- *[If not]* Why not?
- Do you feel you have a clear channel of communication with BBSRC?
- Could the way in which BBSRC communicates with individual stakeholders such as yourself be improved? *[if so]* what sort of improvements could be made?

**5) What are your impressions of how BBSRC represents itself externally?**

- *[if negative]* What, if anything, do you think BBSRC could do to improve how it represents itself? Are there any other similar organisations which represent themselves particularly well, which BBSRC could learn from?

## TOPIC 3 – KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND IMPACT

I'd now like to explore the strategic direction and impact of BBSRC.

**1) To what extent, if at all, would you say you are familiar with the mission and values of BBSRC?**

- *[Read out for all]* BBSRC's vision is to lead world-class 21<sup>st</sup> century bioscience, promoting innovation in the bio-economy and realising benefits within and beyond the UK by:
  - Supporting high-class research and related training;
  - Promoting the exploitation of research and providing trained scientists in support of bio-based industries;
  - Promoting public engagement in bioscience.

**2) With this in mind, how well, if at all, do you think BBSRC has communicated this vision?**

- Why do you say that? Can you think of any examples?
- Do you feel this vision is relevant to your organisation? Where, if at all, do you see your organisation fitting into this vision?
- What, if any, do you view as the major challenges / barriers to achieving this vision?

**3) How well, if at all, do you think BBSRC represents UK bioscience? Probe: *Internationally, domestically***

- Can you think of any examples of BBSRC representing UK bioscience particularly well?
- What more, if anything, could BBSRC be doing to promote UK bioscience?

## TOPIC 4 – ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACT

Thanks very much for your answers so far. I'd now like to focus on the economic and social impact of BBSRC's work.

**1) How would you rate BBSRC's overall contribution to social and economic impact within the UK?**

- Why do you say that? Does BBSRC do enough to promote the economic and social impact of the science it funds?
- What more, if anything, could it do to have an impact in these areas?
- Who should BBSRC be working with to maximise social and economic impact?
- Can you think of any specific examples where BBSRC funding has had an impact?

**2) What does the term 'bioeconomy' mean to you? Where have you come into contact with this phrase?**

- What are your impressions of BBSRC's contribution to the bioeconomy?
- How, if at all, can you measure / judge BBSRC's contribution to the bioeconomy?

**3) What unique value, if any, do you see BBSRC adding to the research landscape in the UK?**

## TOPIC 5 – FUTURE DIRECTIONS

**1) What do you see as the greatest challenges facing BBSRC in the future?**

- *Probe: Serving scientific community, re-branding of research councils*
- How well placed are they to address these challenges?
- What, if any, do you foresee as the most likely changes in the sector in the future?

**2) And what do you see as the greatest opportunities for BBSRC?**

- How well placed is it to capitalise on these?

**3) Finally, what are your impressions on the future of the Research Councils as a whole?**

## CONCLUSION

Finally, are there any further recommendations you would like to give BBSRC, or anything else you would like to add?

## APPENDIX 2: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY OF STAKEHOLDERS

### SECTION 1

#### 1. Which of the following classifications best describes the organisation you work for?

*Please select one answer only*

- a) Government / Policy
- b) Academic
- c) Industry
- d) Non-governmental organisation (NGO)
- e) Other – please specify

#### 2. In your organisation, what kind of role do you have?

*Please select one answer only*

- a) Board level
- b) Senior Executive
- c) Middle management
- d) Chief Scientist
- e) Vice-Chancellor
- f) Pro-Vice Chancellor
- g) Governing Body
- h) Principal Investigator
- i) Department Head
- j) Other – please specify

#### 3. In which, if any, of the following areas does your organisation's work overlap with BBSRC's remit?

*Please select all that apply*

- a) General science
- b) Bioscience
- c) Health
- d) Agriculture
- e) Food
- f) Bioenergy
- g) Industrial Biotechnology
- h) Our work doesn't overlap with BBSRC's remit
- i) Don't know
- j) Other – please specify

## SECTION B: AWARENESS OF, AND INTERACTIONS WITH, BBSRC

### 4. How much, if anything, would you say you know about BBSRC? Would you say you know it...

*Please select one answer only*

- a) A great deal
- b) A fair amount
- c) Just a little
- d) Have heard of it but know nothing about it
- e) Have never heard of it

### 5. How do you mainly engage with BBSRC – at a strategic level or a day-to-day operational level?

*Please select one answer only*

- a) Strategic level (e.g. around BBSRC's goals and strategic direction)
- b) Operational, day-to-day level (e.g. sitting on Panels, reviewing grant applications)
- c) Both of these
- d) Don't know

### 6. How often, approximately, would you say you are in contact with BBSRC?

*Please select one answer only*

- a) Daily
- b) Several times a week
- c) Once a week
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a month
- f) Every few months
- g) About once every six months
- h) At least yearly
- i) Less often than this
- j) Never
- k) Don't know

### 7. Which, if any, of the following are the main interactions you currently have with BBSRC?

*Please select all that apply*

- a) Visiting the BBSRC website
- b) Following BBSRC on social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook)
- c) Watching BBSRC video content
- d) Receiving BBSRC Business Magazine
- e) Receiving monthly email newsletters
- f) Invitations to events
- g) Phone contact
- h) Face-to-face contact
- i) Sitting on a BBSRC committee or panel
- j) Through grant applications
- k) None of these

**8. And thinking about all of your interactions with BBSRC, would you describe your interactions as...?**

*Please select one answer only*

- a) Very positive
- b) Fairly positive
- c) Neutral
- d) Fairly negative
- e) Very negative
- f) Don't know

**9. Which of the following areas, if any, do you most associate with the role of BBSRC?**

*Please select all that apply*

- a) Infrastructure funding
- b) Knowledge exchange and innovation
- c) Communications and public engagement
- d) Research grants
- e) Science policy
- f) Skills and training
- g) Leadership and influence
- h) Partnership and collaboration
- i) Don't know
- j) Other – please specify

**10. How well informed, if at all, do you think BBSRC keeps you about its work?**

*Please select one answer only*

- a) Very well informed
- b) Fairly well informed
- c) Gives me only a limited amount of information
- d) Doesn't tell me much at all about what it does
- e) Don't know

**SECTION 3: WORKING RELATIONSHIPS**

**11. From your interactions with BBSRC to date, which of the following words if any would you use to describe BBSRC as an organisation?**

*Please select up to six answers*

- a) Accessible
- b) Bureaucratic
- c) Ambitious
- d) Cautious
- e) Authoritative
- f) Closed

- g) Connected
- h) Defensive
- i) Credible
- j) Disjointed
- k) Effective
- l) Ineffective
- m) Engaging
- n) Inflexible
- o) Evidence-based
- p) Insular
- q) Flexible
- r) Slow
- s) Independent
- t) Reactive
- u) Informative
- v) Stretched
- w) Innovative
- x) Untrustworthy
- y) Proactive
- z) Responsive
- aa) None of these
- bb) Transparent
- cc) Don't know / not relevant
- dd) Other – please specify

**12. How easy or difficult do you find working with BBSRC?**

*Please select one answer only*

- a) Very easy
- b) Fairly easy
- c) Neither easy nor difficult
- d) Fairly difficult
- e) Very difficult
- f) Don't know

**13. Overall, thinking about your relationship with BBSRC, would you say that you would like to work more or less closely with them, or is your relationship about right?**

*Please select one answer only*

- a) Would like to work a lot more closely with them
- b) Would like to work a little more closely with them
- c) It is about right
- d) Would like to work a little less closely with them
- e) Would like to work a lot less closely with them
- f) Don't know

**14. Please outline any ideas you have for how your working relationship with BBSRC could be improved or strengthened?**

**15. To what extent do you feel BBSRC adds value to your organisation?**

*Please give your answer on a scale of one to ten where one means BBSRC adds no value to your organisation and ten means BBSRC is essential to your organisation. Please select one answer only.*

- a) 1 – BBSRC adds no value to your organisation
- b) 2
- c) 3
- d) 4
- e) 5
- f) 6
- g) 7
- h) 8
- i) 9
- j) 10 – BBSRC is essential to your organisation
- k) Don't know
- l) I do not expect BBSRC to add value to my organisation

**16. To what extent, if at all, do you feel BBSRC could add more value to your organisation?**

*Please select one answer only*

- a) BBSRC could add a great deal more
- b) BBSRC could add a fair amount more
- c) BBSRC could not add very much more
- d) BBSRC could not add any more at all
- e) Don't know
- f) I do not expect BBSRC to add value to my organisation

**17. How, if at all, do you think BBSRC could add more value to your organisation?**

**SECTION 4: KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF BBSRC'S STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND IMPACT**

**18. To what extent would you say you are familiar with the mission and vision of BBSRC?**

*Please give your answer on a scale of one to ten where one means you are very unfamiliar and ten means you are very familiar*

*Please select one answer only*

- a) 1 – Very unfamiliar
- b) 2
- c) 3
- d) 4
- e) 5
- f) 6

- g) 7
- h) 8
- i) 9
- j) 10 – Very familiar
- k) Don't know

**19. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the UK has a world-leading position in bioscience?**

*Please select one answer only*

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Tend to agree
- c) Neither agree nor disagree
- d) Tend to disagree
- e) Strongly disagree
- f) Don't know

**20. To what extent, if at all, do you think the UK's international position in bioscience is due to BBSRC?**

*Please select one answer only*

- a) A great deal
- b) A fair amount
- c) Not very much
- d) Not at all
- e) Don't know

**21. How would you rate BBSRC's overall contribution to economic impact within the UK?**

*Please answer on a scale of one to ten, where one means very poor and ten means excellent.*

*Please select one answer only*

- a) 1 – Very poor
- b) 2
- c) 3
- d) 4
- e) 5
- f) 6
- g) 7
- h) 8
- i) 9
- j) 10 – Excellent
- k) Don't know

**22. How would you rate BBSRC's overall contribution to social impact within the UK?**

*Please answer on a scale of one to ten, where one means very poor and ten means excellent.  
Please select one answer only*

- a) 1 – Very poor
- b) 2
- c) 3
- d) 4
- e) 5
- f) 6
- g) 7
- h) 8
- i) 9
- j) 10 – Excellent
- k) Don't know

**23. How effective, if at all, is BBSRC at communicating its social and economic impact?**

- a) Very effective
- b) Fairly effective
- c) Not very effective
- d) Not at all effective
- e) Don't know

BBSRC's Vision is to ensure the power of biology will deliver a healthy, prosperous and sustainable future. To deliver this vision, BBSRC invests in world-class bioscience research that builds the bioeconomy and realises benefits for society.

**24. To what extent, if at all, do you think BBSRC achieves this vision?**

Please give your answer on a scale of one to ten where one means not at all and ten means it is completely achieving it.

*Please select one answer only*

- a) 1 – Not at all
- b) 2
- c) 3
- d) 4
- e) 5
- f) 6
- g) 7
- h) 8

- i) 9
- j) 10 – Yes, completely
- k) Don't know

**25. To what extent, if at all, do you think there is scope for BBSRC to work more closely with your organisation to achieve this vision?**

*Please select one answer only*

- a) A great deal
- b) A fair amount
- c) Not very much
- d) Not at all
- e) Don't know

**26. To what extent, if at all, does your organisation share BBSRC's vision?**

*Please give your answer on a scale of one to ten where one means you don't share it at all and ten means you completely share BBSRC's vision.*

Please select one answer only

- a) 1 – Not at all
- b) 2
- c) 3
- d) 4
- e) 5
- f) 6
- g) 7
- h) 8
- i) 9
- j) 10 – Yes, completely
- k) Don't know

**27. How familiar are you with the concept of the 'bioeconomy'?**

- a) Very familiar
- b) Fairly familiar
- c) Fairly unfamiliar
- d) Very unfamiliar
- e) Don't know

**28. How relevant, if at all, is the bioeconomy to BBSRC's work?**

- a) Very relevant
- b) Fairly relevant
- c) Not very relevant
- d) Not at all relevant

- e) Don't know

**29. How relevant, if at all, should the bioeconomy be to BBSRC's work?**

- a) Very relevant
- b) Fairly relevant
- c) Not very relevant
- d) Not at all relevant
- e) Don't know

**30. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

- a) BBSRC works productively with industry
- b) BBSRC works productively with non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- c) BBSRC works productively with government and policy makers
- d) BBSRC works productively with academic organisations
- e) BBSRC works productively with other Research Councils

**SECTION 5: SUMMARY QUESTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

**31. Which of the following phrases best describes the way you would speak of BBSRC to other people?**

*Please select one answer only*

- a) I would speak highly of BBSRC without being asked
- b) I would speak highly of BBSRC if asked
- c) I would be neutral towards BBSRC
- d) I would be critical of BBSRC if asked
- e) I would be critical of BBSRC without being asked
- f) Don't know

**32. Thinking about the future, how do you think BBSRC can best serve UK bioscience over the next five years?**



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