

Public encourage to protect fundamental bioscience

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A report detailing how the public view fundamental science, and research on ageing, is published today. The public dialogue study commissioned by the Babraham Institute (BI) and supported by BBSRC and the UK Government's Sciencewise programme, brought together public participants to gather input on how the Institute should develop its research and public engagement activities over the next five years. Through activities and discussion sessions designed by dialogue specialist Ipsos MORI, members of the public shared their views on the Institute's science programme (including ageing research), what fundamental bioscience means for them and the importance of public engagement in allowing people to engage with scientific research.

Over forty participants from Cambridge and Birmingham were recruited on the street by Ipsos MORI recruiters to take part in the study, which took place earlier this year. They spent two days discussing BI's science and [public engagement](#) strategies with each other as well as with scientists from the Institute.

The participants looked at individual science project case studies as well as wider issues such as fundamental science funding, research partnerships, openness and transparency, covering topics such as epigenetics, ageing and [animal research](#).

Participants emphasised the need to support fundamental sciences. Speaking about curiosity-driven research, for example, one participant commented: "It is important to feed curiosity because it produces more

questions and possibly more answers."

Participants spoke about the value of ageing well, the need to understand human health and the role of the Institute in this area:

"We all said we wanted to stop the ageing process, but the more we discussed it, we realised it's more about how we make ageing better".

"If you have a better idea of how [illness] works you have a better idea of how to prevent it"

"We want [Babraham] to provide a progressive understanding of how its research benefits the future."

The report provides some clear guidance for the Institute's Director, Professor Michael Wakelam, and his Executive Committee. In a section entitled 'Views on strategy: Public Principles for science and governance', six principles are identified to inform the Institute's future science strategy. The research principles were highlighted in the project's first public workshop in July and further refined at a reconvened second event held in September. These state that BI's research should:

- Be fundamental, in-depth and a 'building block'
- Be fair, helping the greatest number of people and/or most vulnerable
- Enable collaboration
- Help people control their health through understanding
- Work to increase quality of life
- Bring commercial benefit

The principles and the views reported support the Institute's conviction that fundamental, early-stage research is of utmost importance to

society.

Fundamental research brings benefits to society because of its role in generating knowledge and, in the long term, preventing and treating disease or as the report states:

"Participants want BI to prioritise projects which might give people the knowledge to control their own health by giving them both understanding of how their bodies work and the tools to change things."

Speaking about the study Professor Wakelam commented:

"This was an excellent and timely opportunity for us to listen to public views to help in framing our future [science](#) strategy." He continued:

"The public dialogue project has provided valuable insight into the areas of priority for the Institute, at both a scientific and engagement level, and the next steps are to consider how these can be addressed in our future plans."

Head of Public Engagement at the Babraham Institute, Linden Fradet, also identified a direct benefit. She reported:

"The discussion activities around openness in animal [research](#) and public engagement were particularly enlightening. This study has confirmed our work as a signatory to the Concordat on Openness in Animal Research in the UK is valued and appropriate but it has also given us valuable advice on additional information to include and guidance on what the public value most."

Speaking about the project, Head of Engagement at BBSRC, Patrick Middleton added:

"BBSRC was keen to support the Babraham Institute's public dialogue to

help build their capacity to listen to the wider public's views so that the Institute can reflect on these as it considers its future strategy and engagement."

More information: The full report is available on the Institute's website. [www.babraham.ac.uk/get-involve ... ialogue/final-report](http://www.babraham.ac.uk/get-involve-dialogue/final-report)

Provided by Babraham Institute

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