



NESTA CRUCIBLE 2008 LAB I

Science Policy Explained and Explored

(Delivered as part of the Newton's Heirs programme by Newton's Apple)

As part of NESTA Crucible 2008, postdoctoral career researchers in science, technology, engineering, medicine, science policy and social science participated in a Newton's Apple Science Policy Explained and Explored workshop. The aim of the workshop was to create an enhanced appreciation of the policy process among those studying and working in science, engineering and social sciences.

Participants were given a brief introduction to UK Policy by Dr Belinda Clarke from *ERBI*. This was followed by four guest panellists giving a more in-depth explanation of science policy, each from a different perspective within the science policy community: Dr Stephen Benn from the *Royal Society of Chemistry* spoke about how science is used within Parliament, Dr Yvonne Boyd of *DEFRA* talked about how science is collected and collated to inform Government policy, Dr Caroline Wallace from the *Biosciences Federation*, explained how an intermediary body collects and collates information from the science community to inform policy decisions and Branwen Hide an *Oxford University PhD student*, talked about how researchers can get more involved in science policy.

The participants were divided into four breakout groups, each led by a guest panellist. The participants were asked to explore the issues presented by their panellist and to develop practical recommendations on how the science-into-policy framework and the gateways within it can be improved to allow science to more effectively inform the policy process.

The participants felt that in order for more researchers to engage with policy, both Government and Parliament need to communicate to them the kind of scientific information that is needed to help produce better policies. One participant suggested that this could be done via a centralised database which could also contain a contact list, for use by Government and Parliament, of all researchers willing to contribute to policy.

Several participants also stressed the need for both Government and the Research Councils to fund and recognise policy-relevant research. They also highlighted the need for greater promotion of Government research grants and of Government & Parliament committees they might become involved with.

To incentivise more scientists to help in informing policy, the participants felt that a number of things could be done; Government reports published by scientists are not currently taken into account by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) when determining research grants for institutions. If Government reports were considered, the researcher would not only be contributing to better policy, but also to their research department. Participants also suggested that other science policy activities, such as writing consultations and giving evidence at scientific select committees should be acknowledged by HEFCE. Another idea to incentivise researchers to participate could be to pay them for giving their scientific advice.

The participants also felt that it can be difficult for non-scientist MPs to sift through the wealth of information they get, which can range from sound science to more propagandist material. Scientific information therefore needs to be presented in a way that will help policy-makers to achieve their goals.

Participants also highlighted the "cost" of getting involved in policy work, as it takes time out of laboratory research. One way to counter this would be to use professional bodies and other interest organisations to advocate on behalf of researchers.

For more information on Newton's Apple, and the Newton's Heirs programme, see the website: www.newtons-apple.org.uk