



Natural
Environment
Research Council

Minutes of the 16th meeting of NERC Council in UK Research and Innovation (redacted)

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

Sixteenth meeting of NERC Council in UK Research and Innovation held at Polaris House, Swindon on Thursday, 3 March 2022.

Members present:

Professor Sir Duncan Wingham (Executive Chair), Nick Folland (Senior Independent Member) (via Zoom) (part), Judith Batchelar (via Zoom), Professor Hannah Cloke, Dr Matthew Harwood, Dr Rebecca Heaton, Professor Sir Stephen Holgate, Professor Karin Lochte (via Zoom), Michael Lewis (via Zoom) (part), Clare Matterson, Gordon McGregor, Professor John Pyle, Professor Gideon Henderson, CSA, Defra, Professor Graham Underwood, Chair, Science Committee

NERC/UKRI Directors (Head Office): Tim Bianek (Chief Operating Officer, UKRI), Nigel Bird (Director, Major Projects), Victoria McMyn (Chief Operating Officer), Alison Robinson (Deputy Executive Chair), Professor Susan Waldron (Director, Research and Skills), Dr Iain Williams (Director, Strategic Partnerships),

Apologies: None

Other attendees: Liam Haydon for items 2 and 9, Corrina Urquhart for item 2, Michelle Wickenden for item 11

Secretariat: Helen Page

Introductory items

1. Executive Chair's welcome and introductions (Oral)

- 1.1 Duncan Wingham welcomed members to the sixteenth meeting of NERC Council.
- 1.2 Duncan Wingham introduced Tim Bianek as the new UKRI observer on NERC Council and welcomed him to the meeting.
- 1.3 Duncan Wingham advised Council that this was the last meeting for Karin Lochte and thanked her for her contributions to NERC Council which was endorsed by Council members.
- 1.4 Duncan Wingham congratulated those in the environmental science community who had been recognised in this year's Queen's New Year Honours including:
 - **CBE: Professor Myles Allen**
Professor of Geosystem Science, University of Oxford for services to Climate Change Attribution and Prediction and Net Zero

- **CBE: Professor Anne Magurran, FRSE**
Oceans Institute, University of St Andrews for services to Biodiversity
- **CBE: Professor Tavi Murray**
Professor of Glaciology, Swansea University for services to Glaciology and Climate Change Research
- **OBE: Professor Alisa Hall**
Director of the Sea Mammal Research Unit and Professor of Biology, University of St Andrews for services to Environmental Protection and Epidemiology
- **OBE: Professor Zoe Shipton**
Professor of Geological Engineering, University of Strathclyde for services to Geoscience and Climate Change Mitigation
- **MBE: Professor Lucy Carpenter**
Professor of Atmospheric Chemistry, University of York for services to Atmospheric Chemistry.

Duncan Wingham encouraged Council members to submit names for future nominations.

1.5 Duncan Wingham outlined some other notable awards:

- Gold Medal, Royal Astronomical Society – Professor Richard Horne, FRS, British Antarctic Survey
- Polar medal – Melody Clark, Markus Frey and John Eager, BAS were awarded the Polar Medal

1.6 Duncan Wingham asked members for any updates to their declared interests or any vested interests in the items being discussed today. None were declared.

2. Discussion of Council retreat outcomes (Oral/Slides) *Slides, item 2*

2.1 Duncan Wingham introduced this item and explained that Council were being asked to ensure the summary slides captured the key points from each of the four discussion items at the Council retreat. The summary slides have been attached to the minutes as an annex as a record of the day. Corrina Urquhart and Liam Haydon observed this item.

2.2 Council discussed the summaries of the Council retreat and the key points of the discussion are captured below.

2.3 Balancing NERC investment across National Capability and competitive funding

2.4 Council commented that there had been a discussion during the retreat on the extent to which National Capability (NC) research activity was used by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and suggested this might be further explored, particularly in terms of initiating a dialogue with the HEI community on what NC should look like, noting that this was not the primary objective of NC research.

2.5 Council suggested that the summary be revised to include a request for NC to review their current operating model for NC research in light of whether activities might need to adapt over time to better meet the challenges of the future.

2.6 Duncan Wingham asked for these additional points to be captured and added to the summary slides to better cover the breadth of the discussion.

2.7 Delivering our ambitions and cost savings: how can we be more effective and efficient?

- 2.8 Council commented that the summary was reflective of the discussion and added that, in agreeing efficiencies, it would be important to consider the context of the purpose of both UKRI and NERC.
- 2.9 Tim Bianek added that the points raised on the slides applied to all research councils who were facing similar issues and suggested that the key to reviewing the efficiencies agenda would be to define the activities which were primarily driving administration costs.
- 2.10 Council emphasised that it would be important to ensure that innovation and creativity continued to be supported. Council added that UKRI should make improvements to the way in which research was communicated, making this more accessible for the user community, for example, in finding out who in the academic community was working in a particular area.
- 2.11 Duncan Wingham added that the slides were a good summary and emphasised that the impact on the community of any future changes in funding models would be an area of focus for the research councils rather than UKRI and that it would be important to retain the trust of the community.
- 2.12 What are the implications of the NERC net zero transition to UK funded Environmental Science?
- 2.13 Council suggested that NERC might have lessons to learn from the business community with regard to setting targets and reporting against their delivery.
- 2.14 Council agreed that NERC had a role to play in identifying options for abatement and should be leading in this area given its scientific expertise.
- 2.15 Council highlighted that it would be important not to 'greenwash' and that there might be an opportunity for NERC to lead by example on transparency with regard to the quality of the data being used.
- 2.16 Duncan Wingham commented that it was important to acknowledge that there were already ways in which NERC might achieve its net zero ambitions but that these came at a cost and he suggested that this be added to the slide. He observed that any offsetting would be a long term commitment and that governance and policy would be key to delivery.
- 2.17 It is 2030: what does NERC's training offer look like and how would we get there?
- 2.18 Council highlighted that international training models often valued skill-based training over academic training and suggested that the skill deficiencies of graduates highlighted by industry might be addressed by involving industry in the design of training programmes from the outset.
- 2.19 In determining the types of skills which might be required in 2030, it was suggested that certain skills that would be a desirable attribute of any graduate, for example data analysis expertise, be embedded as a requisite in all training rather than be aligned with an investment in a particular discipline.
- 2.20 Council emphasised the importance of requesting skills development at earlier stages in the announcement of opportunity for training investments as students should be able to contribute to solutions and supervisors should be trained to facilitate any changes. It was also noted that the emphasis of the value of the training to career development may attract different students and increase diversity.
- 2.21 Duncan Wingham acknowledged that there were some concerns that the higher education system was not delivering sufficiently on the skills required for the UK economy and that this issue was being considered, for example, by alternative providers.

3. Unconfirmed minutes of the 15th meeting of NERC Council and Decisions and Actions

3.1 Duncan Wingham asked members for any amendments and matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting. No amendments were made, and the minutes of the fifteenth meeting were confirmed as a good record.

3.2 Duncan Wingham advised that the actions listed on the Decisions and Actions paper were completed.

4. UKRI update (Oral)

4.1 Tim Bianek explained that his update would focus on three areas: the UKRI Strategy; Operational Expenditure (OpEx) and on a number of reviews which were currently taking place.

i. UKRI Strategy

Tim Bianek reminded Council that this would be the first strategy for UKRI since its creation and that it was timely given its links to the multi-year Spending Review settlement. He added that the strategy was currently awaiting Ministerial approval and was expected to be published soon.

ii. Operational Expenditure

Tim Bianek explained that, as part of the Spending Review settlement, there was increased scrutiny from Government on operational expenditure with a particular focus on efficiency savings. He added that work was underway within UKRI to establish a clear framework, or operating model, to determine the most efficient way in which to deliver the UKRI strategy. Tim Bianek informed Council that Alison Robinson would be closely involved in creating this revised UKRI operating model to deliver on efficiency.

iii. Reviews

Tim Bianek informed Council that there were three reviews currently underway which were inter-linked: the review of research bureaucracy, led by Professor Adam Tickell, which had now published an interim report; the landscape review by Sir Paul Nurse and the independent review of UKRI, led by Sir David Grant. He added that the expectation was that a set of recommendations would be produced by Summer 2022.

4.2 Council asked whether there were any plans to launch a replacement for the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). Duncan Wingham explained that there would not be a direct replacement for GCRF although existing commitments would still be met, adding that the Ayrton Fund, within BEIS, would retain an element of Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding but it was not yet clear what the delivery mechanism for the fund might be.

4.3 Council asked whether UKRI intended to engage external advice to provide an independent view when considering its revised operating model and Tim Bianek confirmed that the intention was to use the skills and knowledge from within the organisation.

5. Update from CSA, Defra (Oral)

5.1 Gideon Henderson explained that his update would focus on ten areas:

i. Queen's New Year Honours

Gideon Henderson highlighted some additional honours of note:

KCB: Sir Patrick Vallance and Professor Chris Whitty

OBE: Kathryn Brown

Lately Head of Climate Adaptation, Committee on Climate Change for services to Climate Change Research

CBE: Nicola Spence

Deputy Director, Plant and Bee Health and Chief Plant Health Officer, Defra for services to plant health

- ii. International
Gideon Henderson commented that the Government was considering its position on scientific engagement with Russia following the conflict in Ukraine. He added that a policy would be published shortly outlining that the UK would withdraw from all interaction with institutes and funding bodies in Russia and from any visits to Russian scientific organisations. He informed Council that there was guidance surrounding international meetings which included Russian attendees and clarified that interaction with individual scientists in Russia was still permitted at the moment on a case by case basis.
- iii. EU Science Programmes
Gideon Henderson commented that the intention was still to associate with the Copernicus programme although there was a 'Plan B' in place if it proved not to be possible.
- iv. National Science and Technology Council (NSTC)
Gideon Henderson informed Council that the NSTC was a cabinet committee with the aim of drawing together the scientific needs of Government departments. He added that a possible focus of the Council would be on biotech which would be of relevance to NERC.
- v. Reviews
Gideon Henderson highlighted that the landscape review by Sir Paul Nurse might have some impact on the research centres.
- vi. Levelling Up
Gideon Henderson commented that the recently published Levelling Up White Paper outlined the requirement to ensure Research and Development spend was more evenly distributed across the country.
- vii. Porosity
Gideon Henderson clarified that the Government definition of porosity was the ability of people and skills to move more easily in and out of organisations, such as scientists and technologists moving in and out of Government via, for example, short term secondments.
- viii. Adaptation
Gideon Henderson commented that the IPCC report had recently been published and informed Council that the Government was working on a National Action Plan. He added that the Government was keen to co-ordinate the Research and Development needed for adaption in a similar way to the coordinating activity undertaken by the Net Zero Innovation Board.
- ix. Official Development Assistance (ODA)
Gideon Henderson commented that there was limited 'new' money available in the Ayrton Fund which drew together a package of existing projects. He added that the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office-led Gilbert Initiative would also include some ODA funding for food and agriculture.
- x. Defra

Gideon Henderson informed Council that the secondary legislation on gene editing and the primary legislation to change the definition of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) were currently under discussion.

Gideon Henderson informed Council that there would be a consultation on the targets outlined in the Environment Act which he encouraged Council to provide feedback on.

- 5.2 In response to a query on the content of the National Action Plan, Gideon Henderson explained that it provided the detail on how to tackle the risks identified in the National Climate Risk Assessment. Council commented that it would be important for NERC activity to be explicit in how it linked to both the risk assessment and the Sixth Carbon Budget.
- 5.3 Council commented that it would be helpful to identify a single intervention which would have multiple benefit to help meet the interdisciplinary challenges and Gideon Henderson agreed that the Government agenda around training and porosity might provide opportunities to collaborate.
- 5.4 Duncan Wingham added that he would support a cross-Government board on adaption and that it would be important to understand the latest research agenda around adaption.

6. Executive Chair's update (Oral)

- 6.1 Duncan Wingham gave an oral update on some of the key activities since the previous Council meeting.
 - i. Simpler and Better Funding

Duncan Wingham reminded Council that he was the SRO for this programme and that there would be a considerable scaling up of available funding opportunities. He added that the new system would run in parallel with the old system for approximately two years to minimise any risks associated with moving to a new system. Duncan Wingham added that decisions were being taken which aligned with the review of bureaucracy by Adam Tickell, for example, testing the necessity of information being requested and simplifying the reviewing process.
 - ii. Open Access Policy

Duncan Wingham informed Council that the open access policy would take effect from 1 April 2022 and engagement on communication and implementation with the university sector was underway. He added that, whilst the policy was welcomed generally, there may be some concerns raised during the transition period.
 - iii. Reviews

Duncan Wingham informed Council that he had met with the reviewers on the landscape review recently and that he did not learn of any proposed radical changes to the way in which the institute sector was funded.
 - iv. Environmental Sustainability

Duncan Wingham informed Council that he had recently had a discussion with the UKRI Board on the ambition to achieve Net Zero by 2040 at which he had outlined that there was not currently a plan in place to achieve this. He added that some of the complexities included gaining agreement across UKRI on a range of policies to achieve net zero and developing policies which would also cover those we fund, including shared entities, such as the Francis Crick Institute. He commented that it would be necessary to improve the organisation of this activity to ensure that the research councils worked together to address these issues, particularly for those councils who were most affected (NERC, MRC and STFC) and to return to the UKRI Board with a fully costed plan.
 - v. Ukraine

Duncan Wingham informed Council that there might be some impact in Antarctica from

the conflict in Ukraine and added that UKRI, NERC and its research centres were reviewing the range of activities connected to Russia to decide on the appropriate action.

Council asked whether the UK intended to retain some connections to Russian scientists and Duncan Wingham responded that currently some interaction would be retained.

vi. Antarctica

Duncan Wingham confirmed that HM Treasury had now approved the funding to replace the DASH aircraft and to make the necessary runway modifications. He added that, despite modifications to activities, there had also been significant progress on the building programme at Rothera and that the RRS *Sir David Attenborough* was now coming to the end of its maiden voyage.

vii. Marine Gas Oil

Duncan Wingham informed Council that there had been significant increases in marine gas oil which had not yet impacted NERC as the fuel was purchased in advance but consideration would need to be given to future budget as part of the Spending Review settlement.

viii. NERC National Capability Multi-Centre Science

Duncan Wingham reminded Council that two of the proposals which were discussed by Council in December 2021 had been revised based on the feedback given and re-submitted for Science Committee to discuss at their meeting in February and that these had now been approved for funding. Iain Williams added that one of the proposals would be asked to report back after 12 months to ensure there was sufficient progress.

ix. Changing the Environment

Duncan Wingham informed Council that the Changing the Environment call had recently closed and he invited Iain Williams to comment. Iain Williams advised that four programmes would each receive £10 million to develop solutions to issues such as biodiversity loss, helping rural communities adapt to climate change, achieving net zero cities and providing timely data, analysis and evidence for policy decisions. The teams would be led by the universities of Cambridge, Exeter, Glasgow and Oxford.

x. NERC Council membership

Duncan Wingham informed Council that three new members had recently been appointed to NERC Council: Peter Liss and Rashik Parmar would join from April 2022 and Mike Kendall from April 2023.

xi. Tour of the National Oceanography Centre (NOC) and the RRS *Discovery*

Duncan Wingham informed Council that they would shortly receive an invitation to visit NOC and the RRS *Discovery* in Southampton on 1 April 2022.

Items for discussion

7. Spending Review allocation 2022-2025 (Oral) Slide, item 7

7.1 Duncan Wingham introduced this item which was to provide a summary of the current situation and presented a slide which illustrated the draft NERC Spending Review allocation from 2022/23 to 2024/25.

7.2 Duncan Wingham informed Council that he had been engaging with UKRI on the potential creation of a cross-UKRI programme, 'Building a Green Future,' to improve coherence across UKRI environmental expenditure and to provide a mechanism to discuss opportunities for co-funding with other Government departments. He added that the programme would be dependent upon funding being available as part of the Spending Review allocation process.

7.3 Duncan Wingham explained that the figures illustrated on the slide were still in draft and highlighted the expected reduction in budget for 2022/23 and the increases in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

7.4 Duncan Wingham added that Council would have a further discussion at their meeting in June to discuss the implications of the settlement once it was finalised.

8. NERC Council forward agendas (NERC 22/03)

8.1 Nick Folland introduced this item and reminded Council that they had agreed, following the previous annual self-effectiveness review, to have an annual discussion item on forward agenda items. He thanked members for the suggestions which had previously been submitted via correspondence and added that it would be useful for forward agenda items to align with the revised Strategic Delivery Plan and Spending Review settlement to ensure items were timely and appropriate.

8.2 In discussion, Council made the following suggestions for potential agenda items:

- themes and challenges faced by the other research councils with a view to improving interdisciplinary working
- consideration of assessing potential partners using a broader set of criteria, for example on diversity and inclusion, as well as scientific credentials
- regulations of relevance and how research and innovation might implement them
- how the research councils might respond to the levelling up agenda
- the balance of science programmes
- identifying the skills which were needed to develop the workforce
- innovation and engagement with industry, including with extractive industries
- strategic science and what the NERC contribution was to UKRI programmes
- increased engagement with other research councils, particularly with MRC on health and the environment and with Innovate UK
- international working
- the level of scientific research, in NERC's arena, which was happening within Government departments
- in depth discussion on the key issues impacting the environment, such as climate change or biodiversity
- a suggestion that the agenda provide a framework which details what each paper refers to, for example, is it related to cross-council activity, the NERC Delivery Plan or a policy issue

8.3 Duncan Wingham thanked Council for their suggestions and agreed that many of these might be suitable topics for future discussions. He commented that successful engagement with industry and business relied on alignment of interests and acknowledged that this was more likely than in the past with increased interest in, for example, issues such as offsetting and green finance. Duncan Wingham added that there was engagement with Innovate UK planned and an intention to hold a joint session with MRC Council later in the year.

ACTION: The Executive to consider how to integrate Council suggestions for forward agenda items into the rolling programme.

8.4 Nick Folland suggested that the Council pre-dinner discussions might be used to raise Council awareness of key issues impacting the environment. Gideon Henderson added that there might be an opportunity for other Government CSAs to contribute to this.

8.5 Nick Folland commented that consideration would be given to how to frame the agendas or papers to make them clearer and suggested that there was a follow up discussion in six months to ensure that the items raised by Council were being covered on the agenda.

ACTION: SIM/the Executive to consider how to frame agendas/papers to make them clearer.

8.6 Nick Folland thanked members for their contributions and reminded them that items for the forward agenda might be sent through at any point.

9. NERC Strategic Delivery Plan Refresh (NERC 22/04) Slides, item 9

9.1 Alison Robinson introduced this item and presented slides to illustrate the timeline for the development of the NERC Strategic Delivery Plan (SDP). Liam Haydon observed this item.

9.2 Alison Robinson explained that engagement on the draft plan with key stakeholders, including a sub-set of the UKRI Board, was underway and that Council would be asked to review a final draft by correspondence in April. Following this review, final approval, with Council agreement, would be made by the Executive Chair before gaining UKRI approval and entering the design stage ahead of publication.

9.3 Alison Robinson outlined some of the key challenges and asked Council for their comments including whether there was anything missing in the current draft in terms of representing the NERC community.

9.4 Council commented that the current draft plan was much improved and included some good case studies. In response to a comment by Alison Robinson on the alignment of the Delivery Plan with the five pillars within the UKRI strategy, Council asked what issues had been encountered. Alison Robinson explained that, as the document was required to signal both to UKRI and the NERC community, it had been important to ensure the broad themes within the pillars were clearly signposted to the wider NERC research community.

9.5 Council suggested that there might be more on interaction with industry given the increasing realisation that the environmental impact of their activities comes at a cost. Council also asked whether the NERC Strategic Delivery Plan was a performative document for UKRI and Alison Robinson confirmed that there were elements within the plan which were performative, as well as linkage with the UKRI Corporate Plan. She confirmed that Council would continue to receive a revised annual delivery plan report to ensure Council was sighted and assured of how NERC was delivering the ambitions within the SDP.

9.6 Council asked for more detail on the communications plan for announcing the new Strategic Delivery Plan, whether there was a map of stakeholders NERC planned to engage with and whether there was a role for Council members to play as ambassadors for the plan. Alison Robinson confirmed that a communications plan was in the development stage. Duncan Wingham added that stakeholders could be broadly identified as researchers and the organisations that they worked for, Government and business and that a series of roundtables and one to one meetings with business and Government were already planned.

9.7 Council commented that the case studies were really important and suggested even more be included if possible and highlighted the importance of researchers being able to see themselves represented in the plan, for example, through the photographs which would be added at the design stage.

9.8 Duncan Wingham added that the framework for the Strategic Delivery Plans was subject to change and, therefore, the next draft for Council comment might be in a slightly different format.

9.9 Council agreed to the suggestion that they delegate the approval of the final draft to the Executive Chair for approval, between meetings, in April.

DECISION: Council agreed to delegate the approval of the final draft to the Executive Chair

10. NERC Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Living Action Plan (NERC 22/05)

- 10.1 Alison Robinson introduced this item and reminded Council that NERC had previously shared the UKRI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion plan as context.
- 10.2 Alison Robinson commented that the NERC Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Living Action Plan was based partly on feedback from the community diversity roundtables held by NERC in 2021 which had identified the importance of setting out some specific actions and also that some of the actions were drawn from the outcomes of the roundtables. She added that NERC had taken a broad approach, with consideration of different backgrounds and lived experience in addition to protected characteristics.
- 10.3 Alison Robinson informed Council that the DEI plan was over four years and contained four priority areas: openness and transparency; funding processes; workforce and community engagement. She added that Council were being asked to approve the DEI action plan and, specifically as part of this, to establish a funding line of £1.5 million per annum to meet the aims set out in the action plan. The £1.5 million would be ringfenced within the Strategic Research and Innovation funding line.
- 10.4 Council was supportive of the plan, commenting that it was clear, grounded and straightforward. Council encouraged NERC to go even further with the leading indicators by setting targets in particular areas as baselines were established. Council noted that some of the indicators within the plan would be quite slow to progress and suggested that some softer indicators might be included, for example, asking our stakeholders whether they considered we were making progress in this area. Council also sought to confirm its role in ensuring DEI continued to be viewed as a priority and ensuring that NERC succeeded in its aims.
- 10.5 Council queried why NERC had taken a decision to adopt the use of the word 'Equity' rather than 'Equality' which was used in the UKRI EDI plan. Alison Robinson commented that NERC had decided to use the word 'Equity' for their plan based on the feedback from the community roundtables. After discussion, Council agreed, on balance, to retain the word equity, noting it described the intent of the NERC action plan.
- 10.6 Council suggested that there might be more work to do on identifying diversity in the community and clarifying the barriers for particular groups before attempting to find solutions. Council asked whether grant conditions might be amended to support the aims, for example, either by offering incentives or sanctions. Council commented that underrepresentation often resulted in people being overburdened and unable to accept invitations to contribute in order to protect time spent on research activities. Council added that it would be important to ensure there were incentives and support provided to enable participation.
- 10.7 Alison Robinson acknowledged that there was more baseline work to be done and that this was included in the actions within the plan. She confirmed that work was now starting to better understand the existing scientific community. She added that NERC were not yet in a position to set targets but agreed that Council would retain oversight of progress via the annual Delivery Plan report and that it would be useful to set some soft indicators.
- 10.8 Alison Robinson commented that the plan was focused on environmental science and that a further series of roundtables were planned which would help to address questions such as how to support specific career stages which might then be added to the action plan.
- 10.9 Council encouraged the Executive to consider the interlinkages with this plan and public engagement in the round, including engaging at school age, as part of ongoing wider engagement.

10.10 Council were supportive of the DEI plan and, agreed the plan, including the development of soft targets to assist in measuring progress.

DECISION: Council approved the NERC Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Living Action Plan

10.11 Council approved the establishment of a £1.5 million funding line to meet the aims of the action plan.

DECISION: Council approved the establishment of a £1.5 million new funding line to meet the aims of the action plan

[Nick Folland left the meeting].

11. Future Leaders Council (NERC 22/06)

11.1 Alison Robinson introduced this item and reminded Council that they had reviewed a previous version of the Terms of Reference (ToR) at their December meeting, noting that the Executive had made significant changes in light of Council feedback. Michelle Wickenden observed this item.

11.2 Alison Robinson explained that the paper provided more detail on who we were seeking to sit on this new NERC body, adding that NERC hoped to attract members from academia, business and wider society who were on a pathway to leadership. She added that the paper also sought to set out more clearly the specific role and remit of the group, asking them to provide oversight and governance across four key areas: digital, diversity and inclusion, net zero and public engagement, as well as providing advice to Council. She added that guidance had been sought from recruitment agencies who had highlighted that these were the key skills which were in demand for boards and that this was reflected in the revised Terms of Reference.

11.3 Council sought, and received confirmation, that there was no overlap between this new body and Science Committee. Graham Underwood confirmed that he was content with the arrangements as set out in the paper and did not foresee any overlap of responsibilities.

11.4 Council encouraged the Executive to be as clear as possible about the types of people NERC was seeking to recruit, for example, those from scientific backgrounds and to sharpen the written description of who might comprise the membership and to ensure that the ToR reflected this and were clearly written. Council supported an approach that mirrored the composition of NERC Council and Alison Robinson confirmed that the intention was to recruit members from both scientific and business end user backgrounds with a similar composition to NERC Council (approximately 50:50 split). She added that the FLC would meet twice per year and also be invited to attend the NERC Council annual retreat and that it had been decided to retain the use of the word Council in the title to highlight that this would be a pathway to becoming a future Council member.

11.5 Council agreed the ToR for the new Future Leaders Council noting that the name was important to signal its role within a research council. Council also agreed that the FLC would provide the funding governance, as set out in the ToR, for a new £1.5 million funding line (ringfenced from the Strategic Research and Innovation line) targeted at diversity and inclusion. Council noted that the governance arrangements for this funding mirrored the function Science Committee provided for Highlight Topics and noted that this arrangement could be reviewed at any time by Council should it not operate as anticipated. Alison Robinson clarified that the ToR for the FLC stated that they would make recommendations on programme spend to the NERC Executive which would ensure any risk, for instance, regarding headroom management, was minimised.

11.6 In response to a query on the size and tenure lengths of the FLC, Alison Robinson

confirmed that the intention was to recruit a maximum of eight members with staggered terms for the first cohort. She agreed that guidance for future applicants would need to be clear, for example, in defining what was meant by a senior board.

11.7 Duncan Wingham commented that the FLC would provide a development opportunity which might lead to future appointments on NERC Council. Council offered to help identify suitable channels, such as leadership development programmes within business, which would help in recruiting members to the FLC and agreed to share the opportunity widely once it opened to applications.

11.8 Council asked whether there were lessons to be learned from other organisations who ran similar boards and Alison Robinson commented that these were primarily within business organisations. She added that there was mixed feedback on how successful these have been and this had been taken into account when formulating the ToR, for example, in ensuring NERC did not overpromise on what the role entailed and that there was a clear purpose and boundaries.

11.9 In summary, Duncan Wingham confirmed that Council was supportive of the establishment of the Future Leaders Council and the suggestion that they would have responsibility for the funding line agreed earlier today.

DECISION: Council agreed to establish the Future Leaders Council and the suggestion that they would have responsibility for the £1.5 million funding line

[Gordon McGregor left the meeting during this item].

12. NERC financial outturn 2021/22 and draft budget 2022/23-2024/25 (NERC 22/07)

12.1 Victoria McMyn introduced this item and advised Council that her update would focus on the outturn for 2021/22. She reminded Council that NERC had previously declared savings to UKRI of £4 million and, despite some slippages, were still expected to be on target, partly due to bringing forward some activity from 2022/23 to ease pressure on the budget in that financial year.

12.2 Victoria McMyn outlined some of the challenges which had needed to be closely managed within the forecast such as delays to starting research activities and supply chain issues.

13. Review of the Top Risks at March 2022 (NERC 22/08)

13.1 Victoria McMyn introduced this item and commented that the risk register would need to be reviewed in light of the conflict in Ukraine to consider what impact this might have on the nature and the scoring of the risks.

13.2 Victoria McMyn highlighted some of the key points within the paper including the new risks related to funding, cyber security and the transition to the new funding service. She added that some risks had increased which related to financial and supply chain volatility and the Antarctic, although she commented that the Antarctic risk was now expected to reduce due to the mitigations which had recently been put in place.

13.3 Council commented on the rising fuel and energy costs and asked whether there were any ways to mitigate this risk, for example, by reducing energy consumption. Duncan Wingham responded that the primary concern for NERC was marine gas oil and that there was contingency funding within the NERC budget. Nigel Bird added that one solution to help mitigate costs might be to increase production of our own energy supplies such as at BAS where they now generate 50% of their own electricity.

[Stephen Holgate left the meeting].

14. Minutes of the NERC Assurance Board (NERC 22/09)

- 14.1 Victoria McMyn introduced this item and outlined some of the items which had been discussed at the last meeting, held in January 2022, which had been chaired by one of the NERC Non-Executive Directors.
- 14.2 Victoria McMyn commented that there had been a deep dive at the meeting on aircraft assurance which included looking at the report from an external safety consultant which had identified some areas for improvement. She added that it was intended to carry out a similar exercise on the operation of the ships.
- 14.3 Victoria McMyn added that there had been a discussion on cyber security which had identified the need for investment to strengthen some of NERC's IT infrastructure including for cyber security on the ships.
- 14.4 Victoria McMyn informed Council that work was underway to provide an annual report on governance, risk and assurance to UKRI with the submission due in March.

15. Agenda and unconfirmed minutes of Science Committee (NERC 22/10)

- 15.1 Graham Underwood introduced this item to update Council on the last meeting of Science Committee which had been held in February 2022.
- 15.2 Graham Underwood commented that Science Committee had reviewed the Announcements of Opportunity for the three strategic research programmes which had been approved by Council in December. He added that Science Committee were supportive of the programmes and had suggested some improvements to the wording of the Announcements of Opportunity particularly for the 'Understanding the deterioration in quality of UK freshwaters' programme. Susan Waldron confirmed that the advice from Science Committee would be taken on board when finalising the Announcements of Opportunity. Graham Underwood confirmed that Science Committee was content for the office to finalise the AO.
- 15.3 Graham Underwood informed Council that Science Committee had reviewed the re-submitted NC Science Multi-Centre revised proposals for CHAMFER and MOET. He confirmed that both proposals had now been approved for funding as they had been significantly improved. He added that there remained some concern on CHAMFER related to stakeholder mapping and it had been decided to ask them to come back with more information in a year on engagement with stakeholders.
- 15.4 Graham Underwood explained that Science Committee had also reviewed the NC Hydro-JULES mid-term review and agreed it was strongly delivering against its objectives. Science Committee made one suggestion which was to allocate some internal resource to improve their stakeholder engagement.
- 15.5 Duncan Wingham thanked Graham Underwood for his report and asked him to thank Science Committee on behalf of Council for their thorough work.

16. Any Other Business (Oral)

- 16.1 There was no further business.
- 16.2 The meeting was closed.