



## Confirmed minutes of the 6th meeting of NERC Council in UK Research and Innovation

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### NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

Sixth meeting of NERC Council in UK Research and Innovation, held in the Aloft Hotel, Liverpool on Friday, 27 September 2019.

**Members present:**

Professor Gideon Henderson, Professor Louise Heathwaite, Professor Stephen Holgate, Mr Imran Khan, Professor Karin Lochte, Mr Gordon McGregor, Professor Dame Julia Slingo, Lord Willis of Knaresborough

**NERC/UKRI Directors (Head Office):** Mr Nigel Bird (Interim Chief Operating Officer), Mr Mike Blackburn (Interim Chief Finance Officer, UKRI) Dr Phil Heads (Interim Director, Research and Skills, and Strategic Partnerships), Mr Geoff Robins (Transformation Director, UKRI), Ms Alison Robinson (Director of Corporate Affairs)

**Apologies:** Mr Nick Folland (Senior Independent Member), Professor Duncan Wingham (Executive Chair)

**Other attendees:** Ms Rachel Bruce (Head of Open Research, UKRI) for item 6 (via videoconference); Dr Hannah Collins (Associate Director, Strategy and Insight), for item 5; Professor Angela Hatton (Chair of Science Committee); Ms Jo Thompson (Head of Engagement) for item 7

**Secretariat:** Mrs Helen Page

### Introductory items

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

- 1.1 Alison Robinson chaired the meeting and welcomed members. Apologies had been received from Nick Folland and Duncan Wingham.
- 1.2 Alison Robinson introduced Geoff Robins, the UKRI Transformation Director and interim Chief People Officer, as the new UKRI observer on NERC Council replacing Ian Kenyon. Alison Robinson also welcomed Nigel Bird to his first meeting as the NERC Chief Operating Officer. Mike Blackburn, Chief Finance Officer, UKRI was also in attendance in an observer capacity as part of his induction programme with UKRI.
- 1.3 Alison Robinson advised Council that this would be the last meeting for Gideon Henderson as a formal Council member. He would, however, continue to attend NERC Council meetings in his role as Chief Scientific Advisor (CSA), Defra. Additionally, this would be the last official meeting for Angela Hatton in her role as Chair, Science Committee although she may attend the December meeting if the newly appointed Chair is unavailable. Alison Robinson expressed her thanks, on behalf of Council, to Angela Hatton for her

chairmanship of Science Committee.

- 1.4 Alison Robinson asked members for any updates to their declared interests. None were declared.
- 1.5 Alison Robinson asked members for any amendments and matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting. One query was raised regarding agreement of the budget for the runway at Rothera and Nigel Bird advised that confirmation of the funding had not yet been received. The minutes of the fifth meeting were confirmed as a true and accurate record.
- 1.6 Alison Robinson advised that the majority of the actions listed on the Decisions and Actions paper were either completed or on the agenda. Alison Robinson explained that a substantive update would be provided in December on progress on an international comparison of the Infrastructure Roadmap (6.8).
- 1.7 Council noted that two items were due to be discussed further in December and asked whether any update might be provided on their progress; Discovery Science analysis (8.6) and the Training Portfolio (14.2). Alison Robinson advised that she would provide an update on progress with the Discovery Science analysis as part of the Executive Chair update and Phil Heads explained that the Training Portfolio item would be discussed at the next Science Committee meeting before being brought to Council in December.

## **2. Executive Chair's update (Oral)**

- 2.1 Alison Robinson gave an oral update on some of the key activities since the previous Council meeting.
  - i. RRS *Sir David Attenborough* - Royal Naming Ceremony  
Alison Robinson expressed her thanks to Nigel Bird and his team on the delivery of the new research ship, the RRS *Sir David Attenborough*. Alison Robinson asked for thanks, on behalf of Council, to be extended to the communications team at BAS, BGS and those involved at NERC Head Office who had organised the successful naming ceremony.
  - ii. Honours  
Alison Robinson advised Council that a very successful last round of Honours had resulted in the following being recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours; Professor Sir Ian Boyd Knighthood; Professor Tamara Galloway OBE; Professor Hannah Cloke OBE; Professor Melanie Leng MBE; Professor Corinne Le Queré CBE; Professor Paul Bates CBE; Professor Richard Betts MBE; Professor Lynne Boddy OBE.
  - iii. Council member recruitment  
Alison Robinson advised that Council member interviews had been held recently for three new members of NERC Council. There had been a strong field of good candidates with a business focus which was one of the areas highlighted as requiring more expertise in the recent Council self-assessment exercise. Announcements on the successful candidates would be made following UKRI confirmation.
  - iv. Thwaites Glacier  
Alison Robinson advised that BAS was currently part of a NERC/US National Science Foundation (NSF) funded programme at the Thwaites Glacier and early reports indicated that the science and logistics were going very well.
  - v. Smart Sustainable Plastic Packaging (SSPP)  
Alison Robinson informed Council that the SSPP Programme had received formal approval from BEIS and Treasury in July 2019 and work had started in August. With £60m of public investment through the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) and a

target of £149m industry co-investment the programme was due to run from 2019/20 – 2024/25.

Alison Robinson advised that Duncan Wingham was the Senior Responsible Officer for UKRI with the challenge team led by an Interim Challenge Director (ex-External Affairs Director at Suez). A Programme Board and external Challenge Advisory Group had been established and inaugural meetings had taken place. The first academic call would be in January 2020 with the first demonstration call in December 2019.

Council asked for clarification on how the funding would be allocated as the first two calls contained a fairly small portion of the overall total. Alison Robinson confirmed that there would be approximately £12m for the academic call and that the majority of the matched industry funding would be on the innovation rather than the research side. Council were keen to ensure a coordinated interface between the industrial and academic calls and Alison Robinson confirmed that the programme board were considering this aspect and a further update on this would be provided at the December meeting.

**ACTION**

vi. Climate and Environmental Risk Analytics for Resilient Finance Programme

Alison Robinson advised that the joint initiative with Innovate UK was progressing well; Climate and Environmental Risk Analytics for Resilient Finance programme. A draft Announcement of Opportunity was being developed and discussions had taken place with BEIS Green Finance and the new Green Finance Institute with the programme launched as part of the Government's Green Finance Strategy in July. A further update would be provided at the December meeting.

**ACTION**

Julia Slingo reminded Council that she had attended a major conference in London recently organised by the Geneva Association which had involved world leading climate scientists and financial institutions. Julia Slingo highlighted the importance of ensuring international partnership opportunities were considered as well as openness, transparency and impartiality. Julia offered to liaise with the Geneva Association if this would be helpful as they were the umbrella organization for the leading insurers in the world. Julia Slingo advised that the work in this area was moving at a fast pace and emphasised the opportunity for the UK and NERC, in particular, to take a leadership position globally and regard this as an initial step, noting the complexity meant further initiatives could build on this call.

Council endorsed the comments made by Julia Slingo with regard to the international dimension and highlighted that this area had been the focus of the UN in recent weeks, also noting that finance institutions were looking for more data to make their decisions and it would be important for the UK environmental science community to play a large part.

vii. Strategic Priority Funds (SPF)

Alison Robinson advised that the SPF Wave 2 ministerial announcements had now been made:

- Space Weather Innovation, Measurement Modelling and Risk (SWIMMR) (Science and Technology Facilities Council (STCF) led) £20m, announced by the Prime Minister on 24 September
- Clean Air: Future Challenges (NERC led) £22m, (Complements the wave 1 clean air investment with an additional focus on indoor air quality and particulates)
- Greenhouse Gas Removal Demonstrators (NERC led) £32m
- Sustainable Management of UK Marine Resources (NERC led) £12m
- Involved with Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) led initiatives:

Food Systems; National Interdisciplinary Circular Economy Research Programme; and Harnessing Exascale Computing.

Council queried whether there was sufficient capacity in the UK academic community to deliver on such a large scale. It was acknowledged that, for these existing SFP programmes, the research leaders and expertise existed and that there was sufficient interest were the funding to be made available. Council noted that one of the priorities of future SPF bids would be to build the capacity to deliver and Council would have a role to play to support the research councils to work collaboratively with their communities to develop this.

Stephen Holgate declared an interest as he had been appointed a Clean Air Champion for UKRI. He noted that this role involved interfacing with all of the relevant organisations including industry, health and atmospheric sciences and, in his view, the community was ready.

viii. Fund for International Collaboration (FIC)

Alison Robinson advised Council of the successful NERC FIC Wave 1 awards:

- Tackling AMR in the environment (£3.5m) – lead partner India
- Delivering Healthy Soils: Signals in the Soil (£8.3m) – lead partner USA
- Climate, environment and health (£3.5m) – lead partners USA and Sweden

and Wave 2 awards:

- The Changing North Atlantic Ocean and its Impact on Climate (£5.11m) – lead partner USA
- UK-Canada Globalink Phd Exchange Scheme (£1.4m) – lead partner Canada

ix. Governance, Responsibilities and Ownership (GRO) programme

Alison Robinson informed Council that final approval had now been received from the Science Minister and HM Treasury for the National Oceanography Centre (NOC) and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) to become independent. Council noted that in the public announcement, the long-standing commitment by NERC Council of the importance of sustaining long-term funding to its research centres was referenced. Alison Robinson thanked Council for their continued support for the GRO programme.

x. NERC Director recruitment

Alison Robinson informed Council that interviews had been held recently for two posts; Director, Strategic Partnerships and Director, Research and Skills. Negotiations were taking place with the preferred candidate for the Director, Strategic Partnerships whilst final interviews for the Director, Research and Skills were due to take place in October. Alison Robinson expressed thanks on behalf of NERC to Julia Slings for her help on the interview panel.

xi. Transformation

Alison Robinson invited Geoff Robins to provide an update on the UKRI Transformation programme. Geoff Robins that the transformation plan was available to UKRI staff via the InfoHub and comprised four work-streams; people, process, system, and organisation. The content of the plan was currently focused on improving areas such as HR and IT/IS alongside the introduction of a unified Funding Service capability. Discussions on the next phase of the plan outline plan which would focus on the long term future of UKRI were now underway.

Mike Blackburn added that, as part of the Funding Service work, UKRI had been conducting a review to simplify the grant application and review process. There had been engagement with the research community to capture ideas on how to improve the process. Mike Blackburn emphasised that, with the intention to move to 2.4% GDP by 2027, it would be important to be prepared for this increase in funding.

Council commented that they would welcome more information on the long-term vision for UKRI and suggested that the recently appointed Directors of Strategy and Governance, Emma Lindsell and Isobel Stephen, might attend a future meeting to provide more detail on UKRI strategy before it was signed off. Geoff Robins indicated that they would be pleased to present the strategy at a future meeting and advised that initial thoughts on this would be presented to the UKRI Board in December.

## **ACTION**

### xii. Delivery Plan

Alison Robinson informed Council that the Delivery Plan had been officially launched on 10 June.

### xiii. UKRI Lead

Alison Robinson reminded Council that Duncan Wingham was the UKRI lead for open access, the funding service and environmental sustainability and that Council would hear updates on these activities as part of their role of advising the NERC Executive Chair as UKRI champion. As an example of this, open access was included on the agenda at this meeting.

### xiv. Discovery Science Reform

Alison Robinson raised the possibility that Council may be consulted in advance of the next meeting if NERC discovery science reform was accelerated as part of the UKRI 'reforming our business' programme. Duncan Wingham had offered to speak to Council members if they had any concerns to raise. Council noted the update and indicated it was content to consider the issues at a faster timescale outside of meetings. Alison Robinson confirmed that the evidence review requested at the last meeting was progressing.

### xv. Infrastructure roadmap

Alison Robinson advised that the publication date for the roadmap was not yet agreed and Council would be informed once the date was confirmed.

### xvi. UKRI Brand

Alison Robinson informed Council that the UKRI Brand had now been shared internally and presented slides to demonstrate the new branding. She reported that there had been wide consultation on the brand including with Science Committee. The UKRI aim for the new branding was both to build on the history of the research councils and retain individual identity whilst also bringing unity. Implementation dates were not yet agreed but Mike Blackburn confirmed that a comprehensive plan was in place and funding for this had been approved.

Council were concerned that there was some loss of heritage brand and emphasised the importance of engagement with the community when launching the new brand. Concerns were also raised regarding the loss of opportunity to consider a change of name as it was felt the new logo re-emphasised the use of the word 'Natural' which did not adequately describe the breadth of NERC's remit and funding. Council were reminded that any change of name would require permission from the Secretary of State

as it was set in the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA).

xvii. EU Exit

Council asked whether there was any update on the preparations for EU exit and were advised by Geoff Robins that plans were in place and on track. Communications were being led by BEIS with UKRI keen to ensure timely communication.

On the issue of communications more widely, Council queried whether the centralisation of the communications function was able to provide sufficient resource given the topicality and increased public interest in environmental issues. Alison Robinson reminded Council that the communications function was now led by UKRI and wider discussion was planned for the December meeting on communications. Geoff Robins acknowledged that the new function had taken some time to establish and that there were some tensions which were recognised and that effort was being made to ensure the balance was right.

**3. NERC Council outcome of the annual self-assessment (NERC 19/26)**

- 3.1 Alison Robinson introduced this item which was reporting on the outcome of the first UKRI NERC Council annual self-assessment. Council were being asked to comment and agree the proposed actions.
- 3.2 Council noted that the question of diversity remained relevant and that this should be discussed once the outcome of the interviews were known noting Alison Robinson's advice that the business diversity should be improved.
- 3.3 One of the issues of concern raised by the self-assessment was the relationship with UKRI. Alison Robinson invited Geoff Robins to address this aspect of the feedback.
- 3.4 Geoff Robins advised that the two new Strategy Directors were focussing on the strategic framework which included improving interaction with the research councils.
- 3.5 Council acknowledged that the relationship between UKRI and NERC was improving and emphasised the importance of ensuring that the research councils continued to work collaboratively. Geoff Robins reminded Council that it was his role as the UKRI observer at NERC Council meetings to ensure a robust relationship between NERC and UKRI central and that he would provide updates on UKRI strategy development at future meetings.
- 3.6 Council suggested that having a common topic on which councils could unite would also be helpful and noted that, whilst the annual all-Council meeting had been useful, it had been difficult to have any useful discussion in such a large group. Council suggested that hosting an annual meeting with just one other Council including a joint dinner might be more beneficial. Mike Blackburn commented that a joint dinner between EPSRC and Innovate UK Council members had been held earlier in the week and the Executive agreed to consider this. NERC to consider which Council initially to pilot a joint dinner with.

**ACTION**

- 3.7 Council noted that the area of prioritising funding distribution between the disciplines had not scored as highly as some of the other responsibilities under the Terms of Reference section of the self-assessment. Phil Heads advised that Science Committee had also requested some up to date analysis on disciplinary investment to inform their advice to Council. This was one of several 'balance of funding' issues which Council would be invited to discuss once Spending Review outcomes and forward budgets were known. Council suggested that any discussion needed to take account of funding across disciplines as well as within disciplines, and consider cross-disciplinary goals given the focus on the way we are collectively working. Alison Robinson confirmed that a broader discussion would be held once the Spending Review outcome was known and funding disciplines would be

added to the rolling programme of business.

**ACTION**

### **Items for discussion**

#### **4. Terms of Reference for Science Committee and the NERC Advisory Network (NERC 19/27)**

- 4.1 Alison Robinson invited Phil Heads to lead on this item to introduce the Terms of Reference for Science Committee and the NERC Advisory Network (NAN).
- 4.2 Phil Heads reminded Council that the creation of UKRI had provided NERC with an opportunity to become more agile in its governance and decision making and that the changes to Science Committee and NAN were agreed as part of this exercise.
- 4.3 Phil Heads informed Council that Science Board had evolved to become Science Committee and had now met twice in its current format. The membership was evolving to bring in new skills with interviews being held in October for a new Chair.
- 4.4 Phil Heads advised Council that the standing advisory groups within NERC had been disbanded to form the NERC Advisory Network which would provide a range of expertise to draw upon for a variety of purposes. The network had now been recruited to and its first annual induction meeting would take place in November.
- 4.5 Council were being asked to agree the formal Terms of Reference for both the newly constituted Science Committee and the NAN.
- 4.6 Council were supportive in principle but asked for further clarification on the purpose of the NAN as the bullet points were somewhat vague. Council expressed a specific concern that this might limit the diversity of applicants especially those new to NERC. It was recommended that more specific examples of the sort of work the NAN would be asked to do were included in the terms of reference and induction meeting as they were identified.
- 4.7 Under the Science Committee Terms of Reference, Council queried its purpose with regard to addressing government, UKRI and NERC strategic priorities as there appeared to be an overlap with the role of Council. Phil Heads confirmed that the role of Science Committee was to provide advice to Council rather than duplication of effort and he agreed to make this clearer.
- 4.8 Council raised the issue of responsibility for decisions with regard to National Capability (NC). The paper stated that the Executive retained responsibility for NC funding decisions and Council expressed concern that this appeared to be a loss of the scrutiny which had previously been in place. Phil Heads advised that Science Committee had looked at the mid-term evaluation of the NC Science Multiple Centre awards so they retained a role although it was agreed that the role of the committee with regard to NC would be made more explicit in the Terms of Reference. Council agreed that National Capability was an area which required fuller discussion and it was agreed to add this to the rolling programme.

**ACTION**

- 4.9 Council commented on the membership of Science Committee and referred to a previous arrangement where a Council member would attend Science Board to ensure connectivity. Phil Heads advised that the Science Committee Chair provided connectivity by attending Council meetings with Science Committee members attending the annual retreat. Council requested that the Science Committee terms of reference explicitly allow a Council member to attend Science Committee, and suggested that this could be on a rotational basis.

- 4.10 The NAN Terms of Reference were agreed with the expectation that diversity of membership, especially internationally, was considered and drafting improved to encourage new applicants. In response to a query regarding the success of the recruitment exercise, Phil Heads advised that 86 applications had been received with 29 being asked to join the NAN in addition to the members who had transitioned from the disbanded advisory groups.
- 4.11 The Science Committee Terms of Reference were agreed subject to clarifying the roles with regard to their role in addressing strategic priorities; consideration of whether the wording was sufficiently powerful in the National Capability area; and the Terms of Reference would be re-drafted to allow Council member attendance at Science Committee.

**ACTION**

**5. Commissioning strategic research to address NERC Delivery Plan ambitions (NERC 19/28) (Slides item 5, September 2019)**

- 5.1 Council agreed to a request from Alison Robinson to ask Mike Blackburn to Chair this item to allow her to focus on the detail. Mike Blackburn thanked Council and explained that Council were being asked to confirm that they were confident that the emerging gaps were sufficiently robust to move to the next stage and that the agreed process was being followed. Hannah Collins observed this item.
- 5.2 Alison Robinson introduced the item and reminded Council that the process had been agreed at the meeting in June with initial focus on the gap analysis identified as the first area to ensure is robust to allow the remaining steps to follow. Alison Robinson presented slides to demonstrate the methodology which had been used for both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the NERC portfolio mapped against the Delivery Plan ambitions. Alison Robinson explained that a double mapping of spend against a primary and secondary ambition had proved useful for the quantitative analysis and confirmed that control mechanisms had been put in place to ensure consistency. She then outlined the findings from the qualitative analysis, which had proved beneficial in confirming gaps indicated by the qualitative analysis, and also identifying delivery plan ambitions where there were specific gaps within portfolios that may need to be addressed at the next stage of prioritisation.
- 5.3 Alison Robinson also noted that the process had demonstrated areas of strength across the NERC portfolio. Council agreed that while these were not relevant to the discussion today on gaps, these would provide useful context for the next stage of the process, prioritisation.
- 5.4 Alison Robinson explained that the mapping exercise had been thorough, using expertise drawn from across NERC. A separate team in NERC had provided challenge and guidance throughout the mapping process. This meant the findings were robust and could be presented to Council with confidence. Council were reminded that the intention was for the identification and prioritisation process to be conducted annually going forwards, and so a robust, replicable process was important.
- 5.5 Alison Robinson advised that feedback from Council would be used to refine the gaps before this was used to begin the next stage, prioritisation. As agreed by Council in June, the proposed prioritisation would then be shared with Science Committee in November to inform its development before the proposed priorities were presented to Council for agreement at the December meeting.
- 5.6 Council were extremely supportive of the excellent analysis and appreciated having the evidence to inform their understanding. Council highlighted figure 3 within the paper as



particularly valuable in light of the earlier discussion regarding National Capability. Council noted that the exercise had identified areas of broad gaps against the Delivery Plan, noting that these were in areas where the Delivery Plan specifically sought to move NERC in new directions. The broad gaps identified were across areas including environmental solutions, productive, resilient and digital environment with specific gaps in delivering our ambitions in pushing the frontiers of understanding and resilient environment. Council noted that the mapping had focused on inputs (funding). This was important for this mapping stage, but Council requested that the prioritisation stage be brought to life by including examples of the impact of NERC funding so that the discussion could focus on desired outputs rather than being informed solely by inputs.

- 5.7 Council raised one potential concern with the mapping exercise in terms of the categories used and the possibility of the Delivery Plan ambitions not being crisply worded enough to ensure consistency of mapping. Alison Robinson advised that there were internal controls in place through the mapping exercise to ensure consistency, and that the exercise had been useful in determining where changes might need to be made when reviewing the Delivery Plan.
- 5.8 Council queried whether NERC had sufficient analysis of other technology within UKRI, for instance within MRC, when looking at the Digital Environment priority, noting it would be useful to ensure we were well informed. Alison Robinson confirmed that this had not been included in the mapping exercise but could be factored in at the prioritisation stage. Council also asked whether NERC investment in the Met Office and NERC Supercomputer Nodes (MONSooN) had been included in the exercise and it was confirmed that it had.

## 6. The UKRI Open Access Review (NERC 19/29)

- 6.1 *[Rachel Bruce joined via videoconference for this item].*
- 6.2 Alison Robinson explained that Duncan Wingham was leading the Open Access (OA) review on behalf of UKRI and wanted to provide an update for Council to gain their input and guidance as part of the consultation process. Alison Robinson invited Rachel Bruce, Head of Open Research, UKRI to lead on this item.
- 6.3 Rachel Bruce advised that the draft future open access policy was being shared in advance of the public consultation. Council were invited to raise any issues which should be considered as part of the consultation phase which was due to start in October and close in January 2020. The intention was to publish the policy in late Spring 2020 and it would apply to publications at the point of publication from 2022, although there were differences for monographs which it was proposed are part of the OA policy.
- 6.4 Rachel Bruce explained that one of the main differences from the current policy was the move to a zero embargo policy for 'Green' OA, which aimed to result in open access for all peer-reviewed articles. Additionally, whilst the existing policy placed a preference for 'Gold' OA, the new policy would regard either 'Gold' Open Access or zero-embargo 'Green' open access to be equally permissible if they met the aim of immediate OA.
- 6.5 Council commented that, whilst the zero embargo was a more stringent requirement, the loss of gold as the preferred route raised a concern. Whilst green was always a possible route it was previously not emphasised and this would be quite an important change for the community both financially and in the way in which people responded to the revised policy. There was a concern raised that the 'Green' route might not be of the same quality in terms of discoverability of content.
- 6.6 Rachel Bruce stated that the intention was to identify minimum standards associated with 'Green' repositories that would need to be met to be considered compliant. Discussions with publishers had indicated that they saw a continued future in the 'Green' route, even

with zero embargo.

6.7 Council noted the direction of travel of the revised policy and supported the open consultation on this topic.

## **7. Strategic Business Engagement (NERC 19/30) (Slides item 7, September 2019)**

7.1 Alison Robinson introduced this item which followed on from discussion at the Council retreat earlier in the year relating to increasing strategic business engagement to foster advocacy to meet the ambitions of the Delivery Plan. Council were being asked to agree the proposed approach, confirm that the work carried out so far was moving in the right direction and identify any gaps. Jo Thompson observed this item.

7.2 Alison Robinson presented slides which provided the rationale for the increased activity in this area and how it would build upon the success NERC had previously enjoyed when working with business. Alison Robinson explained that the proposals were to:

- i. Establish a new business forum to replace the now disbanded Innovation Advisory Board which would engage senior decision makers and directly seek industry insight and advice. Events would be held around a theme and would be held no more than quarterly. The first example of this had been a business breakfast held prior to the RRS *Sir David Attenborough* ceremony which had proved successful.
- ii. Create a 'NERC alumni' community focused on those who use their environmental science background in industry. The community would be self-identifying and the aim would be to bring them together at an annual event to create networking opportunities and keep them in touch with NERC science. NERC would benefit from understanding their business needs from a broad range of industry.
- iii. Create a suite of engagement tools for business to help to make environmental science more accessible to industry.
- iv. Draw on the strong assets that were identified through routine cohort tracking for PhD students and investigate who in the NERC funded community had useful business links and in which areas.

7.3 Council were supportive of the suggested approach and queried whether the intention was to work with international as well as national companies. Alison Robinson agreed that this should be factored into implementation planning and commented that additional emphasis on SMEs would also be considered.

### **ACTION**

7.4 Gordon McGregor informed Council that he had previously been involved with a private sector business forum which had concentrated on both short term issues which were affecting the business and a forward look at the issues which were going to affect the business in 10-15 years' time. Alison Robinson asked if the Executive might draw on his experience and it was agreed to discuss this outside of the meeting.

7.5 Council also noted that there may be some barriers to academics sharing their expertise with business in private sector forums. Council asked the NERC Executive to consider how to overcome any barriers ensuring that there were no constraints to academic participation at the NERC forum.

7.6 Council agreed the proposed approach and asked Alison Robinson to consider how to link to the insights that might arise from engaging HEIs within the newly formed NERC Strategic Partnerships directorate.

### **ACTION**

## **8. Spending review (Oral)**

- 8.1 Phil Heads presented this item, building on earlier comments from Mike Blackburn (item 2.1 xi), and reminded Council that NERC was still working towards the 2.4% target although there remained uncertainty in planning ahead with a budget which was only agreed until March 2020.
- 8.2 Phil Heads advised Council that the spending review pitch was being led by UKRI and that they were building a compelling case. A key element of the pitch was to ensure the capacity to enable the volume of new science were the 2.4% target to go ahead.
- 8.3 Alison Robinson added that the UKRI pitch was framed in broad themes rather than budget lines. The pitch contained a lot of discussion of net zero which provided a lot of opportunities for NERC. Alison Robinson advised that negotiation of individual budget lines would follow at a later stage.
- 8.4 Mike Blackburn added that environmental science featured heavily in the pitch although in a cross-collaborative sense rather than a focus on individual councils. Mike Blackburn confirmed that the submission would state the importance of multi-year budgets to enable UKRI to work more strategically.
- 8.5 Council cautioned that there was no guarantee of the 2.4% Government target materialising. The historical positive correlation between publicly funded research investment and private sector spend had slowed down in recent years, so that leveraging private spend to achieve the overall 2.4% target may become harder.
- 8.6 Mike Blackburn confirmed that to reach 2.4% GDP would require both private and public funding and emphasised the importance of the increase in funding to enable the UK to compete internationally.
- 8.7 Alison Robinson confirmed that NERC would continue to prepare for a 2.4% scenario acknowledging the need to build capacity. Alongside this, NERC would also plan for other possible outcomes of the spending review.

## **9. NERC financial forecasts (NERC 19/31)**

- 9.1 Nigel Bird advised Council that he intended to maintain both the existing format and commitment to transparency in his Council report.
- 9.2 Nigel Bird informed Council that the report contained an update on the finance position.
- 9.3 Nigel Bird also advised that there was an emerging opportunity to increase spend on Official Development Assistance (ODA) to balance the portfolio.
- 9.4 Nigel Bird explained that budget uncertainty remained and the affordability of inflationary increases in a flat budget would need to be addressed but would be dependent upon the outcome of the Spending Review.
- 9.5 Finally, Nigel Bird drew Council's attention to the success NERC had enjoyed in securing funding from the UKRI collective funds which were detailed in annex A of the paper.
- 9.6 Council raised the issue of where the RRS *Sir David Attenborough* would be based when in the UK and whether there would be opportunities to combine and optimise the use of the facilities. Nigel Bird confirmed that the ship would be based at Cammell Laird for the next two years but was formally registered in Stanley, Falkland Islands. It was suggested that

the use of the facilities on the ship in the widest sense be considered. Council asked the NERC Executive to consider how to promote the use of facilities on the ship across diverse academic communities.

**ACTION**

#### **10. NERC top risks at August 2019 (NERC 19/32)**

10.1 Nigel Bird explained that some risks remained on the NERC register surrounding the RRS *Sir David Attenborough* and the Antarctic Infrastructure Modernisation Programme.

10.2 Nigel Bird noted that the top risk on both registers related to EU exit and invited Phil Heads to provide an update on the preparations.

10.3 Phil Heads advised that preparations for EU exit were being led by UKRI. As part of the planning process, staffing resource was being considered for NERC where it was required to conduct peer review for EU schemes and this would be covered financially by UKRI. Phil Heads confirmed they did not expect any adverse effect on NERC operations as a result.

#### **11. Unconfirmed minutes of Science Committee meeting: September 2019 including Strategic Programme Area 2019 Recommendation (NERC 19/33)**

11.1 Angela Hatton updated Council on the second meeting of the NERC Science Committee held on 4-5 September 2019.

11.2 Angela Hatton advised that Science Committee had scored and ranked the Highlight Topics, looking at 62 proposals before recommending up to 10 priority areas which could be included in the next call. Angela Hatton clarified that, whilst Science Committee ranked these proposals, the final decision was made by the Executive and the funding line would be based on available budget.

11.3 Angela Hatton advised that Science Committee had discussed the Strategic Programme Area ideas and the recommendation to Council was included in the paper (NERC 19/33i). Angela Hatton reminded Council that this would be the last time Science Committee would recommend SPA funding.

11.4 Council approved £12 million to fund the Form, Function and Future of UK Treescapes with the requirement that stakeholder engagement took place to ensure it fulfilled its potential. The Executive would implement the decision.

**DECISION/ACTION**

#### **12. Rolling Programme (NERC 19/34)**

12.1 Helen Page highlighted the confirmed dates of future NERC Council meetings and invited Council to input to the rolling programme.

12.2 The following items were suggested by Council:

- Public Engagement
- National Capability (identified under item 4.8)
- Research evaluation of centres

**ACTION**

#### **13. Any Other Business (Oral)**

13.1 No other business was raised.

13.2 Alison Robinson thanked Council for a productive meeting

13.3 The meeting was closed.