



Natural  
Environment  
Research Council

## Minutes of the 10th meeting of NERC Council in UK Research and Innovation

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### NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

Tenth meeting of NERC Council in UK Research and Innovation held via Zoom on Thursday, 24 September 2020.

**Members present:**

Professor Sir Duncan Wingham (Executive Chair), Mr Nick Folland (Senior Independent Member), Dr Matthew Harwood, Dr Rebecca Heaton, Professor Gideon Henderson (part), Professor Louise Heathwaite, Professor Stephen Holgate (part), Professor Karin Lochte, Ms Clare Matterson, Mr Gordon McGregor, Professor Dame Julia Slingo, Professor Graham Underwood

**NERC/UKRI Directors (Head Office):** Ms Sue Donaldson (Chief People Officer, UKRI), Mrs Victoria McMyn (Chief Operating Officer, NERC) (part), Ms Alison Robinson (Deputy Executive Chair), Professor Susan Waldron (Director, Research and Skills), Dr Iain Williams (Director, Strategic Partnerships)

**Apologies:** None

**Other attendees:** Sir John Kingman (Chair, UKRI Board) for item 4, Ms Isobel Stephen for item 2, Dr Hannah Collins for item 5

**Secretariat:** Mrs Helen Page

#### Introductory items

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

- 1.1 Duncan Wingham welcomed members to the tenth meeting of NERC Council in UKRI.
- 1.2 Duncan Wingham asked members for any updates to their declared interests or any vested interests in the items being discussed today. None were declared.
- 1.3 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 ninth meeting were confirmed as a good and complete record.
- 1.4 Duncan Wingham advised that the actions listed on the Decisions and Actions paper were completed or on the forward agenda.

**2. UKRI update on Spending Review**

- 2.1 Isobel Stephen joined the meeting to provide an overview of the UKRI submission to the Spending Review.

- 2.2 Isobel Stephen advised that, despite the recent announcement that there would not be an Autumn budget, it was expected that the multi-year Spending Review would proceed, and work was continuing on that basis.
- 2.3 Isobel Stephen informed Council that the UKRI Corporate Plan was due for publication in October 2020 and would incorporate the vision and mission for the organisation. Isobel Stephen presented slides which outlined some of the detail within the Corporate Plan alongside the framework for the Spending Review bid.
- 2.4 Council raised some queries following the presentation:
- i. Did the UKRI Spending Review bid include elements of the Government's Industrial Strategy?
  - ii. How might NERC work more closely with Innovate UK
  - iii. How might UKRI support bottom-up collaboration
  - iv. Where the consideration of ethics fitted within the framework
  - v. Who was involved in engagement, referenced in the mission statement, and whether there was collective evidence available across UKRI that reported on positive outcomes.
- 2.5 Isobel Stephen confirmed that the Industrial Strategy would remain important and UKRI would continue to work closely with Government on their priorities. She explained that this was presented on the slide in the top-down collaboration section and some of these areas would be directed by Government. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) were currently reviewing the Industrial Strategy and considering what themes and challenges might be taken forward and UKRI would be supporting this activity.
- 2.6 Isobel Stephen advised that the top-down challenges would provide opportunities to work closely with Innovate UK, for example there would be some areas, such as inequalities, where we would start with the research questions before moving from basic research through to application and delivery of innovation. She acknowledged that it was a complex matrix, but it would be important to integrate these activities.
- 2.7 Isobel Stephen informed Council that there were many ideas for collaboration across the councils. She added that there might be an opportunity to better align the Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF) with Government priorities in a more collaborative and faster way.
- 2.8 With regard to the query on ethics, Isobel Stephen advised that this was outlined in the top level of the framework slide 'essentials for integration and connectivity' which included research culture.
- 2.9 Isobel Stephen explained that UKRI were considering engagement in the broadest sense and this was viewed as important at every level of the organisation. She added that, whilst some evidence was available, particularly for SPF and the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF), there was insufficient evidence available to evaluate UKRI as an organisation at the moment and, as a starting point, an evaluation framework had been included in the UKRI Corporate Plan to begin to address this. Council suggested that one opportunity for engagement might be in communicating with universities with regard to the information they were collating in preparation for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) which might produce some useful exemplars.
- 2.10 Duncan Wingham advised that one of the areas included in the top down section of the Spending Review framework slide, Net Zero, would be discussed later in the meeting with a more substantial item at the December Council meeting. He added that it would be important for councils to continue to explore bi and tri lateral possibilities and gave the examples of the current and planned co-funded programmes with Innovate UK on Green

Finance and Sustainable Fashion.

**ACTION: Net Zero to be added to the agenda for December 2020**

- 2.11 Council welcomed the framework for the UKRI Spending Review bid which was really clear.
- 2.12 Duncan Wingham added that he was pleased that an evaluation framework had been incorporated into the UKRI Corporate Plan as this would be important to start to integrate the outcomes into a larger narrative.
- 3. NERC submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review (NERC 20/25) (Slides, item 3, September 2020)**
- 3.1 Alison Robinson introduced this item and explained that the discussion was scheduled into two sections to accommodate Sir John Kingman's visit to Council. She explained she would use the first section to present slides to Council. Hannah Collins observed this item.
- 3.2 Alison Robinson explained that the Spending Review process was in two stages:
- i. UKRI bid to BEIS/HM Treasury (HMT)
  - ii. Budget allocation from BEIS/HMT to UKRI
- 3.3 Alison Robinson added that the timing of the Spending Review provided an opportunity for Council to contribute to the ideas that could be included in the NERC spending review bid, once that had been requested by UKRI.
- 3.4 Council were asked to consider a range of questions to inform emerging NERC thinking including whether NERC was being imaginative enough in light of the expected increase in budget, whether the correct core science areas had been considered and whether the proposed balance of budget was appropriate.
- 3.5 Duncan Wingham added that the upward bid to BEIS/HMT was a UKRI activity and that the focus of research council activity would be once UKRI received a settlement and was looking to allocate to individual councils. Council were being asked to contribute to the second part of this process.
- 4. Sir John Kingman**
- 4.1 Duncan Wingham welcomed Sir John Kingman to NERC Council.
- 4.2 Sir John Kingman congratulated NERC on achieving independence for two of its research centres (National Oceanography Centre (NOC) and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH)) and for the anticipated completion of the RRS *Sir David Attenborough*. He also expressed thanks for the central part NERC had played in developing UKRI's thinking on net zero and sustainability.
- 4.3 Sir John Kingman outlined some current issues including the challenges, particularly for universities, of both COVID-19 and navigating EU exit. He welcomed the Government commitment to investment in Research and Development and the expected budget uplift in the forthcoming Spending Review and informed Council that the current Government focus had shifted towards a commitment to increasing funding in fundamental research.
- 4.4 Sir John Kingman reminded Council that he would be stepping down as Chair, UKRI in the summer of 2021.
- 4.5 Council took the opportunity to discuss the following issues with Sir John:
- i. How NERC might achieve a positive uplift for environmental science in the Spending Review given societal challenges such as climate change and biodiversity decline

- ii. The importance of having headline initiatives to create the case for increased investment rather than just requesting an increase across the board
  - iii. The future relationship with Europe following EU exit and the geographical rebalancing of the UK
  - iv. The broadening of the definition of innovation beyond the traditional
  - v. How NERC might do things differently in the future
  - vi. How best to support the next generation of scientists.
- 4.6 Sir John Kingman indicated that he was optimistic that there would be greater flexibility at UKRI level to determine priorities in future. He remained hopeful that UKRI might secure a Spending Review settlement which allowed us to both have headline initiatives and across the board increases in funding, whilst emphasising the strategic importance of securing a multi-year settlement over and above any decisions about the balance of investment.
- 4.7 Sir John Kingman acknowledged that the EU was a big funder of research in the UK and that it would be important to preserve membership of the various EU schemes if a sensible deal could be reached, noting that UKRI needed to be prepared for either scenario as there was much uncertainty. He also noted that levelling up remained a priority, with more to do to build on, for example, the Strength in Places fund.
- 4.8 Sir John Kingman agreed that it might be useful to broaden the remit of Innovate UK were the budget increase to materialise. He also welcomed consideration within NERC of how things might be done differently. He advised that he felt the research councils should be setting more strategic agendas and seeking to focus on the best scientific outcomes which would involve thinking differently and this would be helped by a positive Spending Review settlement. An additional potential positive outcome might be that this would attract talented people to come and work for UKRI which was welcomed by Council.
- 4.9 On the issue of supporting the next generation of scientists, Sir John Kingman commented that Dame Ottoline Leyser was keen to address this issue which would be a major theme under her leadership.
- 4.10 In concluding the item, Duncan Wingham thanked Sir John Kingman, on behalf of NERC Council, for his contribution to, and oversight of, the establishment of UKRI and wished him well for the future.

## **5. NERC submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review (NERC 20/25) – continued**

- 5.1 Alison Robinson re-introduced this item and reminded Council that they were being asked to comment on:
- i. Whether NERC had positioned its role and interface with UKRI in the 'right' way
  - ii. How NERC framed its bid especially in terms of its core remit
  - iii. The overall balance of funding
- 5.2 Council asked for clarity on the percentage of the increase NERC was seeking in comparison to the overall increase to the UKRI budget and emphasised that it would be important to make a compelling case for any increase and ensure that NERC could differentiate its case in comparison to the other areas of UKRI if it was seeking a larger proportion of UKRI funding.
- 5.3 Duncan Wingham explained that it was important to pursue two simultaneous agendas and to make a strong case both for those areas which fitted clearly within NERC remit and those which would require collaboration but where NERC might have leadership.
- 5.4 Council asked what consideration had been given to health as part of the inequalities and place agendas. Council also queried whether NERC had a role to play in thinking about the way in which cities might evolve in the future. Council also commented that it would be

important to develop innovative approaches to the use of data across the NERC remit. The Executive agreed to look again at how these were included, alongside bringing out the importance of data including digital research and infrastructure.

**ACTION: The Executive to consider the health agenda, and innovative approaches to the use of data**

5.5 Council commented that the NERC Spending Review bid should be even more imaginative and suggested that the framing be made more explicit, for example clarifying whether the bid was framed on societal issues, biodiversity loss or oceans. The importance of the use of data in monitoring and measuring trends over time was highlighted with the potential to link to health data sets and it was felt this could be further emphasised. Council added that a lot of the issues raised would not be solved by environmental science alone and a collaborative approach would be key along with a requirement to move from diagnosing to solving environmental issues. Duncan Wingham added that it would be important to consider priorities which were equally driven by both society and science.

5.6 Council added that it would be important to support people and talent and queried whether there was anything NERC might do to engage with schools to promote careers in environmental science. It was suggested that the bid needed to be strengthened to help address the issues with the talent pool, particularly with technical staff, in an innovative way. Council advised that an apprenticeship for technical professionals had been established in the Met Office which might provide a useful model for NERC to consider as a way to bring in more technical expertise. Duncan Wingham commented that consideration was being given to including a theme in the NERC Spending Review bid to help to address the issues related to the talent pipeline. It was agreed that Alison Robinson would discuss this further with a sub-group of Council outside of the meeting.

**ACTION: Council sub-group to consider how best to promote diversity in the pipeline of those considering a career in environmental science**

5.7 Council queried whether the bid included examples of how NERC funding had provided benefit to the economy and Alison Robinson responded to say that NERC had provided evidence to UKRI on previous investments.

5.8 In summary, Duncan Wingham thanked Council for the discussion which would help to inform the NERC Spending Review bid and summarised some of the points raised:

- i. NERC should be ready to act at scale, for instance large, high profile 'announceables'
- ii. NERC should consider the health agenda but recognise that medical research and charities also had a role to play
- iii. In terms of positioning, we should cover traditional NERC territory and address wider societal issues
- iv. The importance of data and innovative ways of obtaining and using it
- v. The role of NERC in increasing the diversity and quantity of people coming into environmental sciences
- vi. Resilience
- vii. The importance of technicians
- viii. Value added by NERC, for example, we have provided UKRI with Greenbook case studies which show how environmental science has directly benefited the UK (for example in understanding ozone and sulphur)
- ix. International activity at UKRI level might be expanded so, rather than a specific focus for NERC, it would be better to bring out where we have international impact such as oceanography and polar sciences.

## 6. Executive Chair's update

6.1 Duncan Wingham gave an oral update on some of the key activities since the previous Council meeting.

i. UKRI Chief Executive Officer

Duncan Wingham reminded Council that Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser had taken up her appointment as the UKRI CEO since Council last met and he advised that early interactions had been very positive. Duncan Wingham commented that one of the key issues Ottoline Leyser was looking to address was in seeking to improve scientific culture and integrity.

ii. Net Zero

Duncan Wingham advised that it had been decided to have a broader theme across UKRI which was provisionally entitled 'Clean Environment and Sustainable Growth'. This would be sub-divided into five areas:

- net zero/carbon neutral future (mitigation and adaptation)
- circular economy and resource efficiency
- clean biodiverse agriculture
- sustainable and equitable policies and behaviours
- system overview of cross-cutting elements.

Duncan Wingham explained that the councils had taken a planning assumption of a 60% increase in the budget for environmental science under these headings across the councils, with additional 20% cross-council funding from UKRI which might result in 12-13% of the total UKRI budget being allocated to the environmental component.

In terms of governance, there was broad agreement that an Oversight Board be created led by two Executive Chairs with a wider cross-section of membership which would enable greater integration across the research councils on these issues.

Duncan Wingham explained that this framework and budgetary proposition would be discussed by the Government Net Zero Board at the end of September.

Council were supportive of the leadership position which NERC had taken in coordinating this activity. They also welcomed the consideration of adaptation and noted the factors which influenced the balance of effort between mitigation and adaptation. It was highlighted that there was an adaptation team within Defra, and it was agreed that UKRI, NERC and Defra might forge links in this area to promote this more widely within Government.

**ACTION: UKRI, NERC and Defra to discuss Spending Review plans on adaptation**

In response to a query regarding activity focused on deforestation and rain forests, Duncan Wingham advised that this would be included in the cross-cutting theme and it was agreed to report back to Council on the work carried out in the tropics across UKRI in this area, particularly within the Global Challenges Research Fund.

**ACTION: The Executive to report back on work carried out in the tropics across UKRI**

Duncan Wingham advised Council that the planned joint session with BBSRC on food production and biodiversity and land use was now going ahead with a sub-set of Council members.

iii. NERC Independent Research Fellowship 2019

Duncan Wingham advised that the results had recently been released on the awarded NERC Independent Fellowships which showed that NERC had funded only male candidates. Duncan Wingham advised that four female candidates declined to attend interview, and of those interviewed two female candidates declined the offer of an award. A review of historical data had shown that the gender balance of applications and awards was similar to previous years.

iv. COP26

Duncan Wingham asked Alison Robinson to provide an update. Alison Robinson commented that there was a huge appetite across UKRI and a wide range of partners to work together on this. Alison Robinson added that the Executive Committee had agreed some priorities for the event:

- the importance of a strong, public facing programme, with efforts in hand to include the RRS *Sir David Attenborough* at COP26
- the need to amplify and support Government messaging by working closely with Cabinet Office and the COP26 team
- the opportunity to showcase UKRI and celebrate the people we fund to show the role of UKRI in investing in future Research and Development to tackle net zero in the UK.

v. NERC Council Recruitment

Duncan Wingham advised that there had been a very successful recruitment round for new NERC Council members and that NERC had identified four new members who we hoped to announce in October.

vi. Professor Dame Georgina Mace

Duncan Wingham informed Council of the sad news of the death of former NERC Council member, Professor Dame Georgina Mace. He added that she had been a major figure in conservation and ecology both nationally and internationally and that NERC had published a news item on its website to offer their condolences to her family.

## **Items for discussion**

### **7. NERC response to Black Lives Matter (NERC 20/14)**

7.1 Alison Robinson introduced this item and explained that the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement had prompted NERC and UKRI to consider a wide range of diversity issues.

#### Diversity within NERC itself and the environmental sciences community

7.2 One of the issues which had emerged was the lack of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) diversity amongst NERC employees both within Head Office and NERC research centres. This reflected a wider issue with diversity across the environmental sciences which NERC hoped to partly address by working in partnership with Higher Education Institutions and centres to remove barriers and promote diversity with additional ideas included as part of the emerging NERC approach to the Spending Review.

7.3 Sue Donaldson added that UKRI were concentrating effort on improving networking opportunities, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and recruitment processes to improve diversity across the organisation.

7.4 Council highlighted the importance of looking at diversity more broadly while also including BAME aspects. It was also suggested that any future action and solutions be guided by the

BAME and other relevant communities.

Grants: examining for bias within funding processes

- 7.5 Susan Waldron outlined recent concerns with bias in the assessment process for NERC funding which had identified a lower success rate for BAME applicants. Susan Waldron advised that NERC would be taking both a retrospective and forward look at the data to identify whether there was a problem with bias and the aim was to present a paper to Science Committee in November with a potential further discussion by Council in December. Graham Underwood advised that Science Committee were keen to discuss this issue and added that it would be important to consider gender balance in addition to the BAME aspect.
- 7.6 In summary, Duncan Wingham thanked Council for their consideration and noted it was important to discuss these issues in a timely way. In relation to NERC's own processes, Duncan Wingham confirmed to Council that the Executive would continue to shape the NERC approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and would report back to Council following discussion at Science Committee about grants.
- 8. NERC organisational response to the impacts of COVID-19 on international activity (NERC 20/27)**
  - 8.1 Susan Waldron introduced this item and explained that the paper outlined the impact of COVID-19 on international research and the ways in which UKRI and NERC had been providing support for a range of activities.
  - 8.2 Council were pleased with the support being provided and suggested that it would be important to ensure sufficient testing capacity on the ships for any future operational activity and were assured plans were in place.
  - 8.3 Duncan Wingham added that a huge amount of work by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) had been required to ensure the season remained open for 2021 and extended thanks, on behalf of NERC Council, for their efforts.
- 9. Balancing NERC's Delivery Plan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: Highlight Topics (NERC 20/28)**
  - 9.1 Susan Waldron introduced this item and reminded Council that they had agreed in June to re-open the Highlight Topic call to invite legacy COVID-19 ideas. A top ranking was provided within the paper based on the Science Committee discussion.
  - 9.2 Susan Waldron explained that it had been decided that both sets of ideas would be considered jointly, with decisions made on scientific merit rather than taking an approach to ringfence part of the budget to support the legacy COVID-19 research.
  - 9.3 Graham Underwood explained that Highlight Topics ideas came from the community and were ranked by Science Committee based on the criteria outlined in the paper ensuring balance across the NERC portfolio. He added that some of the ideas in the legacy COVID-19 areas came from the NERC Hackathons held during the summer and that Science Committee agreed with the proposed approach to assess the ideas on merit.
  - 9.4 Council members were supportive of the decision to assess the proposals on quality to ensure the best research was funded. Council noted the reduction in submissions to the call and queried whether there were any reasons for this. Graham Underwood commented that the ideas being received for Highlight Topics, in comparison to previous calls, were larger and more collectively written which may partly explain the reduction in numbers.
  - 9.5 Council asked whether the gender balance was appropriate. Susan Waldron advised that

this information was not provided to Science Committee when assessing the Highlight Topics although the information could be available in principal. She added that the historical information available on the gender balance of successful applicants had not shown any gender bias previously. It was agreed to look at the information from this call and report back to Council.

**ACTION: Susan Waldron to report back to Council on the gender balance for Highlight Topics**

**DECISION: Council agreed to the proposal not to ringfence a proportion of the budget to ensure COVID-19 legacy Highlight Topics received support.**

## **10. NERC Council – outcome of the annual self-assessment (NERC 20/29)**

10.1 Nick Folland introduced this item and thanked Council for their contributions and discussions as part of the self-assessment exercise.

10.2 Nick Folland summarised that the exercise had demonstrated that there was strong support amongst members for the professional organisation and chairmanship of the Council meetings including the comprehensive Council papers and the way in which actions were progressed.

10.3 Nick Folland commented that there were some suggested areas for improvement:

- The role of Council members to act as advocates and ambassadors for UKRI and NERC
- Contributing to the development and implementation of UKRI strategy
- Encouraging collaborative working across the UKRI Councils and improving the relationship between Council and the UKRI Board
- Diversity of Council: being diverse in every sense although with a particular regard to ethnic diversity.

10.4 In summarising the discussions held with Council members, Nick Folland acknowledged that Council welcomed the attendance and contribution of NERC Directors at Council meetings. In response to an enthusiasm for influencing future agenda items, Nick Folland reminded members that the standing item on the Rolling Programme provided an opportunity to contribute to agenda items but that Council members were also welcome to contact him, Duncan Wingham or any of the NERC Directors if they wished to suggest items for discussion.

10.5 Nick Folland made one final comment which related to the current necessity to hold NERC Council meetings remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, he expressed a concern that the lack of opportunity for informal interaction was a negative consequence and asked for suggestions on how we might replicate this informal interaction in a virtual way which would be of particular value to our newer members and those joining soon.

**ACTION: Council members were invited to provide suggestions on how to improve informal interaction whilst meeting virtually**

10.6 Sue Donaldson congratulated Council on the comprehensive and far-reaching self-assessment exercise. She suggested an additional action might be included on whether the effectiveness of the Council was diminished in any way by only meeting virtually.

10.7 Council were supportive of the suggested actions and the opportunity to improve informal interaction, especially for new members and suggested that time be allocated to making introductions when they joined. Nick Folland agreed that it would be helpful to consider this issue and suggested establishing a buddy system for new members.

**ACTION: time to be allocated for new members to be introduced to the existing members and establishment of a buddy system to be considered**

10.8 Duncan Wingham commented that the discussion on prioritising funding distribution had been delayed until the Spending Review outcome was known. He suggested that an earlier discussion on this be added to the agenda if preferred. He emphasised that the rolling programme item was a standing item for the purpose of Council input to agenda items but that the Executive were always open to receiving suggestions for the agenda.  
**ACTION: Funding distribution to be added to the December agenda**

**DECISION: Council agreed that they were content with the actions proposed in the paper with the addition of one further action on building social capital for the newer members and those who would join as part of the current recruitment campaign.**

## **11. NERC financial forecasts 2020/21 (NERC 20/30)**

11.1 Victoria McMyn introduced this item and highlighted that this had inevitably been a volatile year financially. NERC were working closely with UKRI to ensure they were fully aware of any risks and pressures on the NERC budget.

11.2 Victoria McMyn highlighted the positive news regarding the uplift in budget for 2020/21 and explained that further detail on how the additional budget would be allocated was included in the paper. Duncan Wingham added that the uplift of £15 million was significant and welcome.

11.3 Council commented that, at a recent N8 Research Partnership meeting, NERC investment in commercialisation appeared to be small in comparison to the other research councils which was due to a historical strategic decision to embed this elsewhere in the budget. Duncan Wingham added that a broader approach was the right model for NERC.

## **12. Review of the Top Risks at September 2020 (NERC 20/31)**

12.1 Victoria McMyn introduced this item and highlighted some changes which had been made since the last meeting.

12.2 Victoria McMyn highlighted two new risks on the NERC top risks register:

- the risk that NERC does not deliver benefits from an uplift in budgets post Spending Review
- the general risk associated with Health and Safety which was previously removed and added to the UKRI register had now been reinstated following discussion at the NERC Assurance Board.

One risk was also recommended for closure as it had been successfully mitigated:

- COVID-19 virus disruption to Antarctic medical evacuation capability

12.3 Council members were content that the risks were being managed appropriately and no further comments were made.

## **13. Unconfirmed minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of Science Committee: September 2020 (NERC 20/32)**

13.1 Graham Underwood updated Council on the fifth meeting of Science Committee held in September 2020.

13.2 Graham Underwood explained that Science Committee had spent the first day of their meeting looking at the Highlight Topics and had found the large ranking exercise somewhat challenging via Zoom. The second day of the meeting had focussed on future Science Committee business including the review of NERC's Scientific Support and Facilities (S&F)

programmes and National Capability single centre awards mid-term review and commissioning the multi-centre awards.

13.3 Graham Underwood advised that Science Committee was currently recruiting four new members and encouraged Council to consider whether they had any suitable suggestions, noting that the closing date was approaching. Science Committee would be reviewing its Terms of Reference and inviting demitting members to reflect on what changes might be made to help with the current way of working.

#### **14. Minutes of the NERC Assurance Board (NAB): July 2020 (NERC 20/33)**

14.1 Nick Folland informed Council that the NERC Assurance Board was now well established and thanked Victoria McMyn for her contribution.

14.2 Nick Folland highlighted some of the topics under discussion at the last meeting:

- EDI has been added to the Terms of Reference
- NAB had requested additional detail be added to the risk register particularly on mitigation and reviewed the risks which sat at both UKRI and NERC level
- NAB had a discussion on reputational risk and requested some additional background information
- The new Strategic Relationship Assurance Meetings (SRAMs) were now established and reported into NAB. Nick Folland had asked for a diagram to help NAB understand the various assurance mechanisms within NERC and suggested this might be shared with Council once ready
- NAB were pleased that audit outputs would now be circulated. Victoria McMyn would work with the Government Internal Audit Agency to increase visibility
- NAB discussed the Funding Assurance Programme and noted that the National Audit Office were content with this
- NAB had a deep dive on business continuity planning and agreed it was effective, but it would remain important to continue to horizon scan.

14.3 No issues were raised on the minutes.

#### **15. Rolling Programme (NERC 20/34)**

15.1 Duncan Wingham reminded members that this item provided an opportunity for them to suggest items for forthcoming meetings.

15.2 Duncan Wingham confirmed that the December Council meeting would be held virtually rather than in London.

15.3 There was a suggestion that the NERC Council meeting scheduled for December 2021 be brought forward to coincide with COP26 (*1-12 November 2021*) so that NERC Council might visit the RRS *Sir David Attenborough*. Duncan Wingham agreed to consider this.  
**ACTION: The Executive to consider whether the December 2021 meeting might be brought forward to coincide with COP26**

#### **16. Any Other Business**

16.1 Duncan Wingham informed Council that NERC was achieving success with its nominations for Honours. He invited Council to send through any suggestions for candidates which might be put forward for Honours in future.

**ACTION: Suggestions were invited for future Honours nominations**

16.2 Duncan Wingham thanked Council for a productive meeting.

16.3 The meeting was closed.