

Our strategic objectives provide the framework for how we will achieve our vision and realise our principles, through world-class:

People and careers

- Balancing our funding to attract and retain global scientific leadership; and building communities of solutions-focused researchers.
- Collaborate across UKRI to develop a talent programme that nurtures disciplinary and interdisciplinary working.
- Develope a deep understanding of our communities and use their insights to evolve our portfolio and to shape new funding practice
- Work with our community to promote greate diversity and inclusion across environmental science

Places

- Embedding a sustained approach to placebased funding at local and regional level
- Create and upgrade environmental infrastructures that unlock innovation and economic potential
- Maximise our investment within the UK through partnerships which allow research communities to work together at scale and develop clusters of expertise and investment
- Support UK environmental scientists to work with local communities internationally

Ideas

- Focus our discovery science portfolio on excellent, ambitious and high-risk science; work in partnership across UKRI to develop a collective, interdisciplinary discovery science programme.
- Pursue strategic programmes taht address the critical environmental challenges of clmate change, biodiversity and habitat loss, and pollution.
- Co-create sceintific exploration of laargescale, complex interactions within Earth system.
- Increase our investment in public engagement with environmental science.

Innovation

- Build resilience of businesses, infrastructure and supply chains to environmental impacts and changing consumer opinion.
- Pursue positive outcomes for business and the environment that minimise the environmental impacts of consumption.
- Realise the potential of sensing and monitoring technologies, artificial intellegence and digital twinning, autonomous and remote sensing, and high-performance computing to create new information services.
- Create the world's first national system to measure the UK's total greenhouse gas emissions.

Impacts

- Embed environmental science within UKRI's Strategic Themes.
- Sustain the UK's sovereign capability to advise and inform UK Government policy on the state of UK and global environment.
- Determine the effectiveness and accelerate the adoption of nature-based solutions.
- Maintain the UK's position as a leading nation in international environmental science.

Supported by a world-class organisation:

- Act as 'one UKRI', aligned to the new operating model, stripping out bereaucracy and becoming more efficient to deliver NERC and shared priorities.
- Ensure NERC commissioning is informed by high quality diverse scientific expertise and advice.
- Demonstrate the ongoing impact of NERC funding.
- Become environmentally sound across our head-office and institute operations while enhancing scientific productivity.

We will embed the UKRI principles of diversity, resilience, connectivity and engagement across all our work, to support an outstanding research and innovation system.



Approach to Reporting

This report covers the period April 2024 to March 2025 inclusive. The report tracks performance against our ambitions as set out in the 2022 <u>Strategic Delivery Plan</u>, including identifying the learning from the delivery period and actions to improve our performance.

The structure follows the NERC Strategic Delivery Plan, itself informed by the <u>UKRI Strategy</u> <u>2022-2027</u>. Each of the six strategic objectives (world class people, places, ideas, innovation, impacts and organisation) has a summary slide, followed by a slide for each of the four ambitions identified as part of the strategic objective.

Each ambition is given a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating. This is based on an assessment using quantitative and qualitative indicators (including what the indicator tells us about progress); and learning and action (plans to maintain or achieve a Green rating). Quantitative indicators use data selected to add value to assessment of progress and potential to indicate a direction of travel. They are chosen for their insight into each ambition, aligning to UKRI measures where possible.

To provide a holistic assessment of our performance, we include a financial summary slide, a report of our actions in support of our DEI Living Action Plan, and a summary of our performance over the lifetime of our Strategic Delivery Plan.

Strategic Delivery Plan Report 2024-25 | Financial Overview

Financial Overview

£'m	Full Year Budget	Full Year Actuals	Variance to Budget
Discovery Science	66.0	63.7	2.3
Strategic Research & Innovation	66.4	60.9	5.5
Postgraduate Training	33.9	32.9	1.0
Fellowships	9.0	7.8	1.1
National Capability	122.2	125.5	(3.3)
Opening up Environmental science	2.2	1.6	0.4
Enabling Change	2.0	1.6	0.4
Core capital	28.2	25.2	3.1
TOTAL Core Research & Development	330.0	319.8	10.2
UKRI funds*	61.3	55.8	5.4
Operational Expenditure	9.7	11.7	(2.0)
TOTAL Non-Core Research & Development	71.0	67.5	3.4
Antarctic Logistics & Infrastructure (resource & capital)	95.3	100.3	(5.0)
Copernicus	9.5	9.5	0.0
International Sciences Partnership Fund (ISPF) ODA	0.5	0.5	0.0
International Sciences Partnership Fund (ISPF) Non-ODA	3.7	3.7	0.0
Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)	6.2	6.2	0.0
Total Ring fenced funding	115.1	120.2	(5.0)
GRAND TOTAL NERC	516.1	507.4	8.6

^{*}Includes SPF, FIC, GCRF, Newton, NPIF, C-19 interventions, Carbon Fund, Tactical fund and Copernicus

Figures are subject to audit before spend is finalised.

24/25 RAG ratings for our SDP ambitions

RAG definitions

RED

Significant gaps in the portfolio with substantial activity required to achieve research priority / operational commitment.

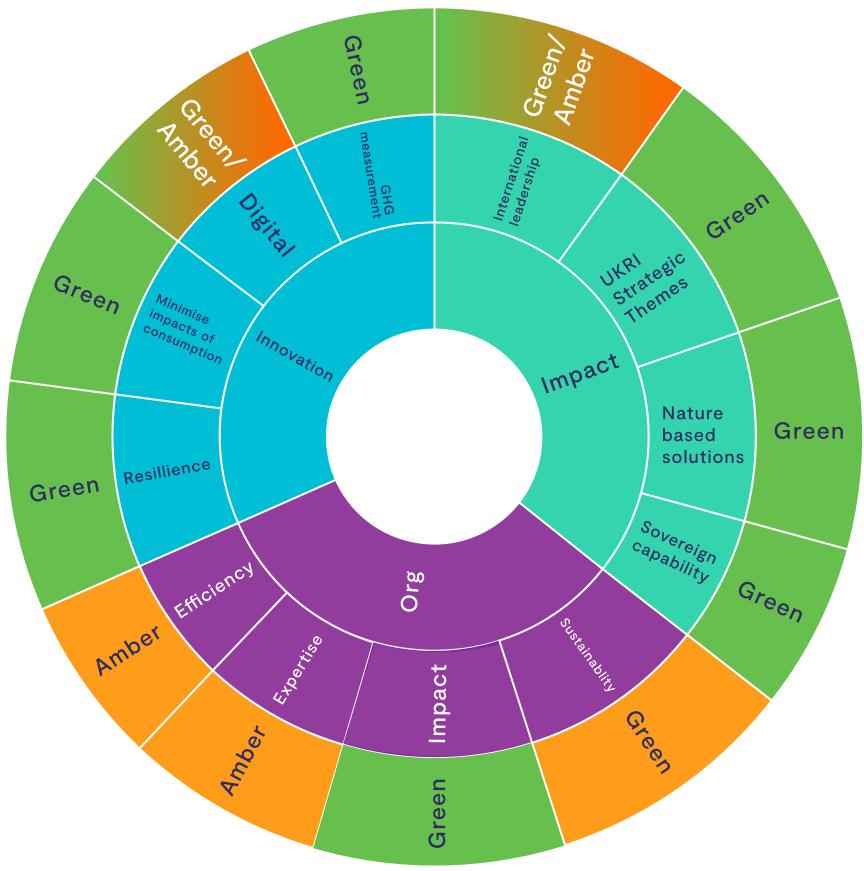
AMBER

Activity towards achieving the ambitions is progressing but further activity is required to build the portfolio.

GREEN

Well balanced portfolio of activity with the potential to deliver the ambitions of the research priority / operational commitment assuming adequate portfolio management.





Delivery Plan: overall summary tracker

RAG definitions

RED

Significant gaps in the portfolio with substantial activity required to achieve research priority / operational commitment.

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Activity towards achieving the ambitions is progressing but further activity is required to build the portfolio.

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Well balanced portfolio of activity with the potential to deliver the ambitions of the research priority / operational commitment assuming adequate portfolio management.

KEY

→ Maintaining the ambition

Progress towards ambitions

Backwards step

Ambitions

People	March 2024	Forecast March 2025	March 2025	
Balance portfolio; Solutions-focused researchers		→	1	A, A, G
Interdisciplinary talent		1	-	R, R/A, R/A
Insight		→	†	A, A, G
Diversity & Inclusion		→	→	A, A, A
Places				
Place-based funding		→	→	A, A, A
Infrastructure		→	→	G, G, G
Clusters		→	-	G, G, G
International partnerships		+	1	G/A, G/A, G

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→ Maintaining the ambition

Progress towards ambitions

Backwards step

Ambitions

Ideas	March 2024	Forecast March 2025	March 2025	
Discovery Science		+	1	G, A, A/R
Climate change, biodiversity, pollution		-	+	G, G/A, G/A
Co-create large-scale science between our Centres and other research institutes		→	-	G, G, G
Public engagament		-	-	G, G, G
Innovation				
Resilience		→	→	G, G, G
Minimise impacts of consumption		→	→	G, G, G
Digital		1	-	A, G/A, G/A
GHG measurement		\	†	G, A, G

Delivery Plan: overall summary tracker

RAG definitions

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KEY

→ Maintaining the ambition

Progress towards ambitions

Backwards step

Ambitions

Impact	March 2023	Forecast March 2025	March 2025	
UKRI Strategic Themes		→	→	G, G, G
Sovereign capability		→	→	G, G, G
Nature-based solutions		→	→	G, G, G
International leadership		↓	1	G, A, G/A
Organisation				
Efficiency		1	+	G, G/A, G
Expertise		→	→	G, G, G
Impact		→	→	A, G/A, G/A
Sustainability		↓	→	G, A, G

Progress 2022-25

The NERC Strategic Delivery Plan 2022-25 set out ambitions ranging from specific programmes such as <u>Greenhouse Gas</u> <u>Emissions Measurement and Modelling Advancement</u> (GEMMA) to broad interventions in the research system, such as embedding an approach to place-based funding.

The breadth of scope and scale means that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' tracking of our work. Where we did set specific targets or activities we have met them: this includes GEMMA, investing more in public engagement and discovery science, and participating in collective UKRI activity on talent and strategic themes. Other ambitions have required deeper changes in how we work, for example integrating the opportunities of novel technologies across our portfolio. In these ambitions we are confident we have seen significant progress but also recognise there is more to do. These ambitions will continue into our Forward Look and future Strategic Delivery Plans.

Over the delivery plan period we have much to be proud of. We have delivered a step change in our infrastructure, with new geological test beds and a national infrastructure to predict and measure floods and droughts, as well as upgrading our atmospheric and polar capabilities. Through the UKRI Strategic Themes we have co-created activity tackling pressing challenges such as delivering green growth, building resilience in coastal communities and ensuring the UK's land use choices benefit people and the environment. And we have convened across UKRI to meet the needs of business, for example through the <u>Circular Fashion Network Plus</u> and our work on green finance and valuing biodiversity.

Highlights include:

Highlights:

Anticipating the need for clear evidence on emerging technologies and acting accordingly with the Modelling Environmental Responses to Solar Radiation Management (SRM) programme

Testing a new approach to stimulating interdisciplinary activity through our Changing the Environment programme

Developing, in partnership with Defra, work to improve the UK's planning for climate change and mitigate risks including floods, extreme heat and food price shocks through the £15m Maximising UK adaptation to climate change research programme

Launching a programme to create scalable nature-based solutions, managing water risks, mitigating land degradation and restoring mangrove forests to provide equitable resilience to people and ecosystems across Sub-Saharan Africa

Trialling new low carbon fuels, and becoming the first public sector organisation globally to achieve the Carbon Trust 'Route to Net Zero' standard, reflecting our high level of commitment to carbon reduction across our operations

People and Careers

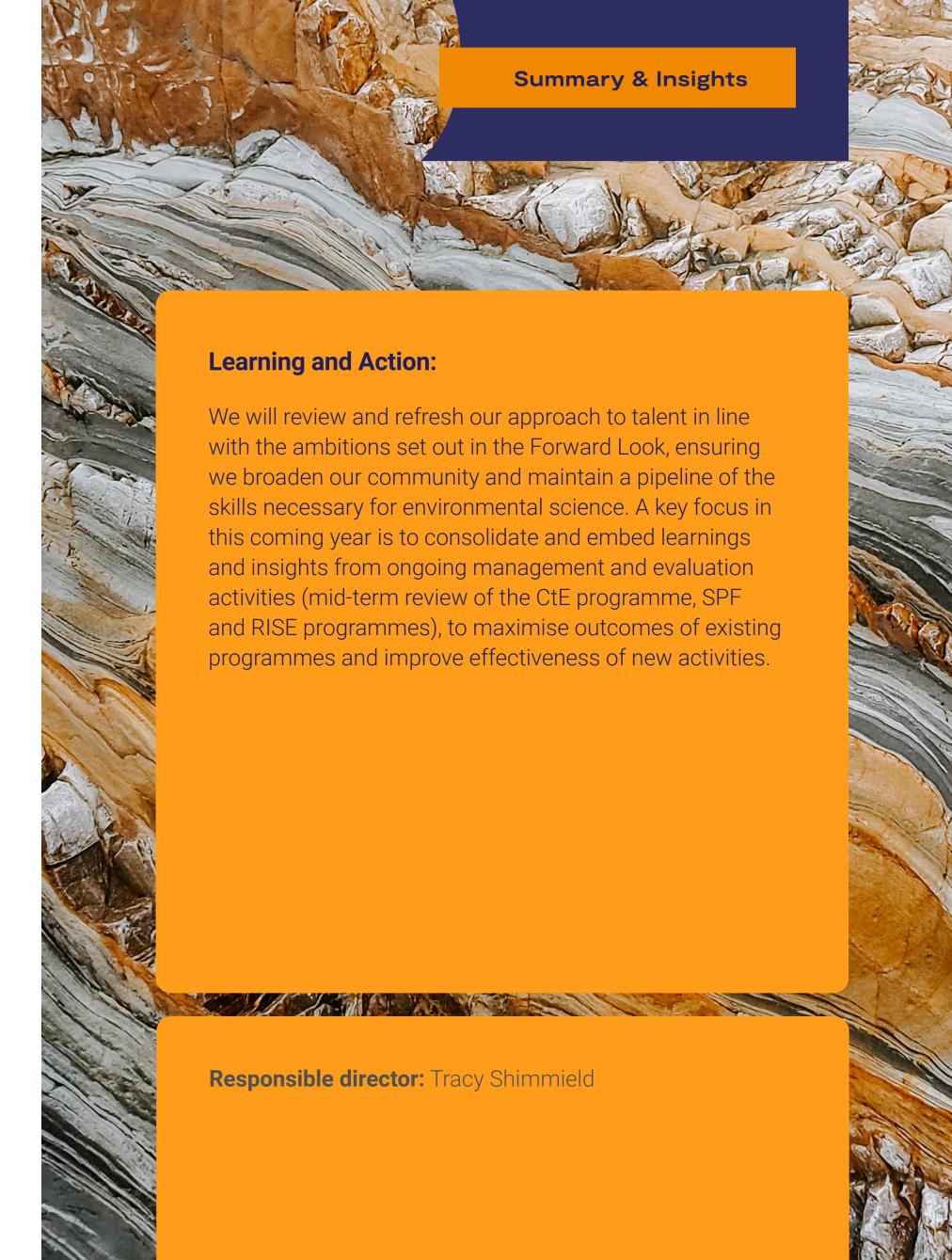
NERC is championing the value of environmental research skills as part of a cross council collective vision to support of a more diverse talent pipeline. We are building bridges and working collaboratively with other disciplines to collectively maximise our impact.

One example is the collective talent transition where NERC, BBSRC, MRC, and EPSRC took a joined-up approach to scientific advancement and skills. The joint Engineering Biology Focal Award exemplifies the strategy for bringing together diverse expertise to develop future leaders in this critical multidisciplinary field.

We continue to build on our strategic partnerships with the Centres and the four Changing the Environment (CtE) HEIs; enhancing interdisciplinary skills in the use of shared digital technologies and offering opportunities for collaboration on environmental challenges. The Changing the Environment Programme ran two systems thinking master classes for ECR's, with discussions on challenges and opportunities in interdisciplinary and systems thinking careers. This is helping to drive change in interdisciplinary career culture, so that it becomes central to future environmental science research.

In the past year, we have:

- Supported a UN Treaty to end plastic pollution through the Agenda Setting Fellows (ASF) programme, funding a long-term Fellowship charged with convening the R&I community to develop the plastic pollution agenda in support of the International Treaty on Plastic Pollution.
- Improved our diversity and inclusion openness and accountability by making annual diversity disclosure for grants, workforce and senior boards via UKRI.
- Supported the academic community to build policy capability through NERC and ESRC's Policy Engagement Training programme. Three rounds of the training have taken place over the last year and have equipped over 750 researchers to translate their environmental, economic and social science research into policy insights and real world impacts.



Places

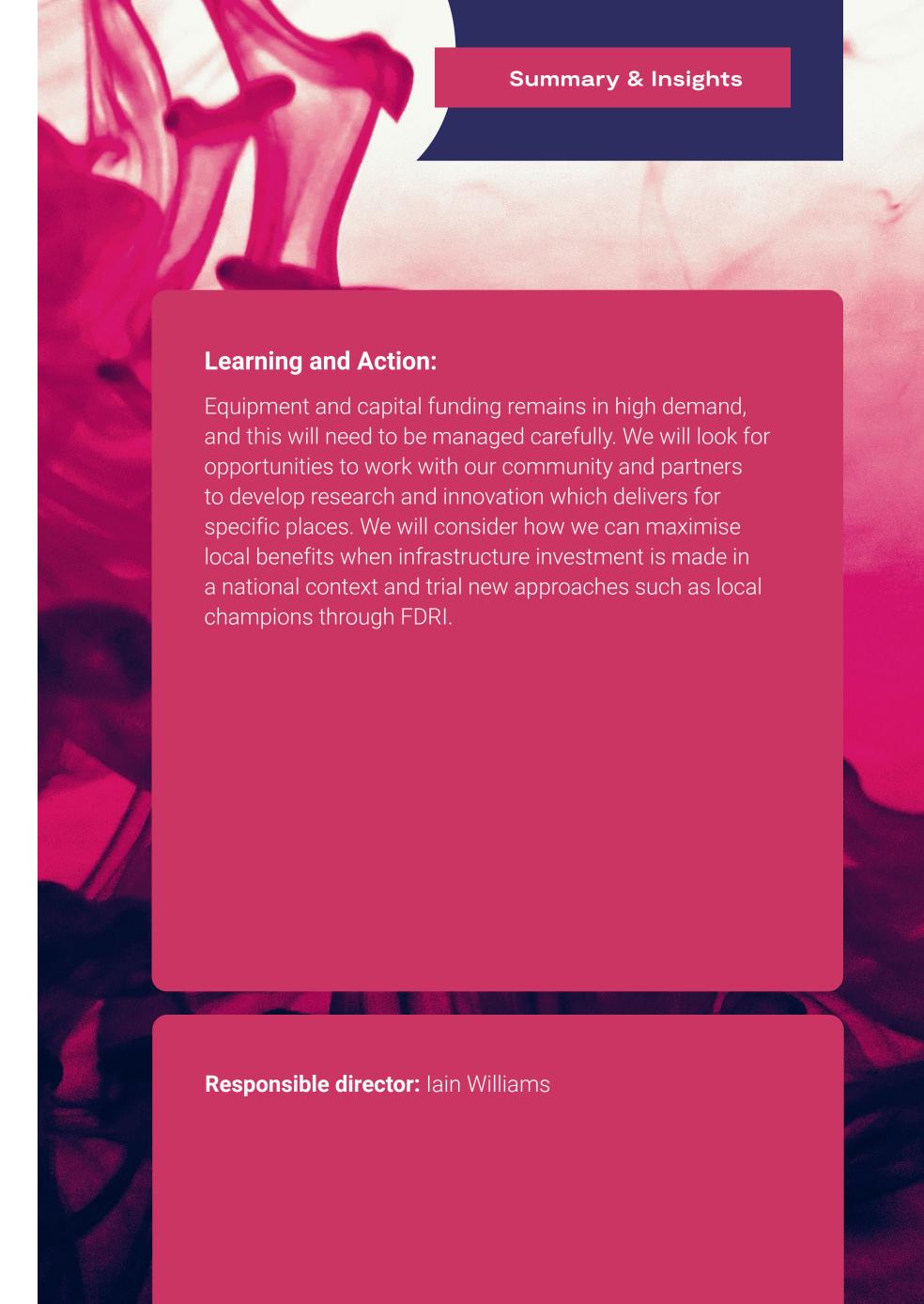
We are supporting environmental science that benefits local communities in the UK as well as internationally. As part of our commitment to research infrastructure that benefits people and places across the UK, NERC launched the <u>Floods and Droughts</u> <u>Research Infrastructure</u> (FDRI). This is a digitally connected infrastructure which uses near real time data on UK rivers to improve our capacity to predict the location and intensity of flooding and manage water supplies, keeping the public safe and minimising damage.

NERC is working with ESRC, AHRC, and Defra on a cross-government UK Nature Initiative, led by FCDO, to coordinate nature-focused research across UK government departments. A global survey launched in 2025 is identifying priority nature-based research areas in Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Small Island Developing States.

We are developing our understanding of the regional economic and place-based impact of NERC funded research, including improving the data we supply as part of the cross-UKRI Place reporting. The RISE (Regional Impact from Science of the Environment) Programme recently presented the significant achievements of the funded projects, demonstrating the impact of environmental science research on regional economies and communities. One such example includes SWEEP, which has leveraged £78m of funding and supported 327 FTE jobs in the South West.

In the past year, we have:

- Worked in alignment with the British Council and with Brazilian, Swiss and Bavarian partners to deliver a £4 million ISPF contribution to the Amazon+10 initiative. Five UKRI funded projects are starting in 2024/25 seeking to increase knowledge of biodiversity and socio-cultural diversity of the Amazon.
- Initiated work on demonstrator projects to de-risk autonomous marine science, with £4M funding from the UKRI Infrastructure Fund.
- Delivered a Strategic Equipment call for mid-range equipment that requires development to create national assets



Ideas

NERC is continuing to support important environmental research into the effects of climate change. The Tree-MiME project, part of the Urgency Grant programme, at Imperial College is examining tree microbial and methane responses to extreme drought in the Amazon, contributing valuable insights into ecosystem responses to climate change. The NERC-NSF funded International Thwaites Glacier Collaboration (ITGC) is entering its final year. Research in West Antarctica is unveiling a rapidly changing environment that will have profound implications for global sea level rise over the coming decades and centuries. Studies suggest that immediate and sustained climate change mitigation (decarbonisation) will have a positive albeit delayed effect, slowing the pace of the retreat and the ensuing ice loss.

We responded to the emerging scientific and public debates on geoengineering with the Modelling Environmental Responses to Solar Radiation Management (SRM) programme, which uses modelling to explore positive and negative impacts of solar radiation deployment. The project will also seek public views on this research area to ensure future decisions are informed by acceptability and the needs of citizens.

NERC continues to open up environmental science to members of the public. 2,200 people attended our showcase 'Archwiliwch ein planed - Explore our Planet' in Cardiff Bay, South Wales. 870 people toured RRS James Cook alongside 417 primary pupils visiting Techniquest from 8 local schools. This year, NERC is partnering with the Natural History Museum to launch the Fixing Our Broken Planet exhibition which opened in April 2025. The display is engaging visitors with nature-based solutions to the environmental challenges of our time.

In the past year, we have:

- Funded the £6.4M joint NERC and ESRC Economics of Biodiversity Programme and Integrating Finance and Biodiversity Programme aiming to accelerate the embedding of biodiversity into financial decision making. Lead project researchers are working on the Task force of the Biodiversity Credit Alliance (BCA), which has led the development of High-Level Principles for biodiversity credits
- Re-engaged participants in our Public Dialogue in the development of the NERC Forward Look, bringing the public into our decision-making.
- Funded the Greenhouse Gas Removal Demonstrators programme which contributed to the second State of Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) <u>report</u>. This report compiles an estimate of the total amount of CDR currently being deployed around the world.

Summary & Insights

Learning and Action:

Discovery Science is under significant pressure from the transition to the funding service and challenges securing peer review. We will assess the impact of these changes on our efficiency and take appropriate actions, such as implementing the observer scheme to address declining panel participation rates and enhance diversity.

Responsible director: Tracy Shimmield

Innovation

NERC has focused this year on developing new partnerships with industry, helping to grow businesses while mitigating their impact on the environment (such as carbon emissions and pollution).

We have for the first time secured co-funding from the offshore energy industry as part of the Valuing Marine Artificial Infrastructures (£5M) call. This will support the health of the marine environment and reduce the liability for decommissioning infrastructure at the end of its life (estimated at £24billion). NERC has also contributed £3M and provided resources to support the launch of the EPSRC-led Sustainable Industrial Futures initiative. This investment will establish a virtual centre of excellence that will co-develop with industrial partners the solutions for both decarbonisation and environmental net gain.

NERC continues to use our whole system understanding of the environment to improve decision-making in the public and private sectors. To help the aviation industry become more sustainable, and improve policy around aviation emissions, we have launched with a £29m programme on non-CO2 emissions from aviation with the Department for Transport, the Department for Business and Trade and the Aerospace Technology Institute. To support the financial sector in integrating biodiversity data and environmental considerations in their risk analytics, planning and asset management, we launched with Innovate UK the Integrating Finance and Biodiversity for a Nature Positive Future programme.

NERC's Centres together completed a <u>landscape review</u> of net zero aerial capabilities for environmental research. NERC has supported next generation aerial capability for bathymetry and geophysics as demonstrators for how environmental science can be delivered through this new technology. One asset will be utilised in FDRI, showing the rapid pace of adoption and the wider applicability of such investments.

In the past year, we have:

- Developed, through the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Measurement and Modelling Advancement (GEMMA) programme, an Emission Dashboard that will become the delivery mechanism for measured GHG data to policy makers in government and industry
- Supported 30 projects through the <u>Circular Fashion Network Plus</u> seeking to explore novel areas and fill gaps in knowledge in textile manufacture and recycling
- Supported projects commencing under the Innovation in Environmental Monitoring programme. £12m NERC, IUK and Defra funding was invested across three years for the development of new sensing systems and monitoring capabilities to address environmental challenges.

Summary & Insights

Learning and Action:

Our models of working with Innovate UK are improving but still often have research and industry in parallel, so we can do more to deliver truly collaborative working. We will also focus in the coming years on the ambitions set in the Forward Look relating to responsible innovation and increasing entrepreneurship in our community.



Responsible director: Iain Williams

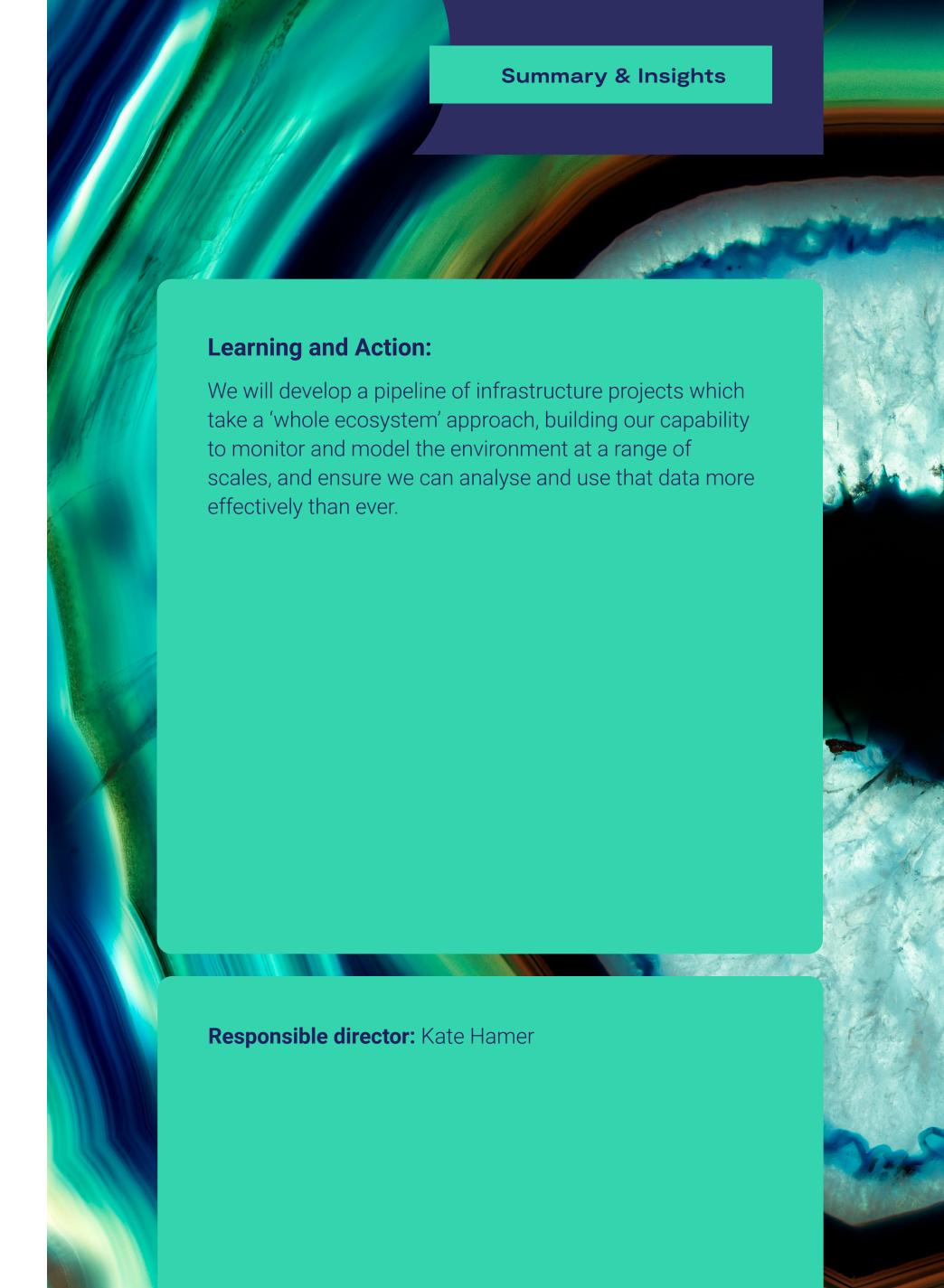
Impacts

NERC continues to play a foundational role in the UKRI Strategic Themes, leading the Building a Green Future theme on behalf of UKRI. In the last 12 months, NERC led delivery of a £25m investment in the Accelerating the Green Economy Centres to support the growth of emerging green industries in economic geographies across the UK. NERC also led the Maximising UK Adaptation to Climate Change (MACC) programme which was co-created by the Building a Secure and Resilient World and Building a Green Future Themes. Together, these investments will boost local economies and build resilience to environmental shocks and climate change.

NERC is leveraging new technology through our infrastructure, building the capability to undertake system-wide observations and measurements. These environmental insights feed into policy making and help to address wider environmental and societal challenges. For example, the RRS Sir David Attenborough has worked in the Southern Ocean and the Arctic, collecting carbon and marine data under ice sheets and ice flows. The ship worked alongside our autonomous marine platforms, which for the first time were launched in one country (Iceland) and recovered by another (UK).

In the past year, we have:

- Invested £2m in the £14.8m <u>Resilient UK coastal communities and seas</u> programme through the Creating Opportunities and Improving Outcomes Strategic Theme.
- Formally launched a co-funded programme with the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) in India 'Understanding geohazard processes and their impacts across India'. UKRI contributed £4.5m from the Building a secure and Resilient world theme to the programme with matched funding from MoES. The programme seeks to build resilience to geohazards in India by understanding better the fundamental physics of geohazard processes, developing new tools and techniques to monitor and identify them and to explore the social and cultural impacts of these hazards on the population of India.
- NERC-FCDO awarded £200k coordination funding to four projects supported under the 'Nature based solutions in Sub Saharan Africa' programme, to enable knowledge exchange and integration across projects and to strengthen collective impact.



World-class Organisation

We are proud that our colleagues within NERC share our values, enjoy their work and are proud to represent the organisation. As we transition to a new Executive team across the organisation we are keen to continue to improve our culture through leadership by example and by fostering openness and collaboration.

It is important that NERC has the agile and resilient workforce needed to deliver our science efficiently. We have utilised the levers available to us for our strategic workforce planning, for example two rounds of the UKRI voluntary exit scheme, helping our structures remain effective for the changing needs of research and innovation. We are committed to removing unnecessary bureaucracy, and have this year reviewed our governance and advisory processes to reduce duplication and ensure they remain fit for purpose. There is a requirement for broader agility in line with the UKRI approach, and we are continuing to work with UKRI to implement further change needed that will support greater efficiency across the organisation.

NERC has an environmental sustainability leadership role within UKRI, within R&I the sector and beyond. It's important that how we operate reflects the science outcomes that we deliver and fund. NERC was the first public sector organisation to certify against the 'Route to Zero' standard – this publicly commits NERC to year-on-year carbon reduction delivered through a comprehensive carbon pathway programme.

In the past year, we have:

- Established a new carbon advisory service to help us make carbon informed decisions in future, completed our comprehensive low carbon fuel trials across our ships and aircraft, and completed installation of NERC's first geothermal heating system at BGS Keyworth.
- Published four impact and outcomes syntheses, each comprising an infographic and set of case studies, which demonstrate the value of the work we do and the positive impact environmental science has for citizens
- Approved the NERC Estates Strategy for 2025-2040 to ensure we have an appropriate estate to meet both current and future business needs by providing a framework for the implementation of the long-term forward look, campus development and management of the estate.

Summary & Insights

Learning and Action:

We are taking action to reduce workload pressures, including how we manage and govern ourselves. Continuing this work will help us become a more efficient organisation, as well as fostering leadership across all levels, improving clarity and decision making. We are analysing the Peer Review College (PRC) to identify gaps in knowledge and expertise and to ensure it is fit for purpose ahead of the return to expert review. It is likely that we will need to recruit to fill these gaps, and it is not clear the community has sufficient enthusiasm for expert review to meet the overall need. On carbon, to meet our emerging carbon budgets we will improve our capability in carbon forecasting and ensure this informs decision making

Responsible director: Michaela Simpson

Diversity and Inclusion

The Living Action Plan (LAP) has offered a means for NERC to monitor and evaluate progress against specific diversity and inclusion outcomes. Since the inception of the LAP we have a much clearer picture of the diversity of our community, our applicants and grant holders. This gives us the necessary baseline to monitor the success of our activities in the medium and long term.

NERC leadership is committed to sustaining and improving the diversity, inclusivity and equality of the NERC workforce and the broader environmental science community. We have had turnover in the leadership of the D&I portfolio, which has impacted the speed of our delivery, and we will look for a more agile approach to this activity in future years to overcome this. NERC is currently reviewing the LAP, and future options for delivering D&I, beginning with a workshop in February 2025.

In the past year, we have:

- Awarded the NERC Centres and Changing the Environment grants via the Diversity and Inclusion funding line, to pilot novel approaches to improve diversity and inclusion.
- Scoped and launched with the Future Leaders Council a £4m initiative to "Open up the Environment", to increase representation of diversity and to deliver on the specific D & I action to work in partnership to promote diverse role models.
- Ensured new recruits to our boards balance diversity, in terms of gender, disability, ethnicity and career stage. We have improved our diversity and inclusion openness and accountability by making annual diversity disclosures for grants, workforce and senior boards via UKRI.

Summary & Insights

Learning and Action:

We are reviewing the current LAP and future options to bring a more agile approach to D & I delivery at NERC

Responsible director: Tracy Shimmield

Annex: Reporting Datasets

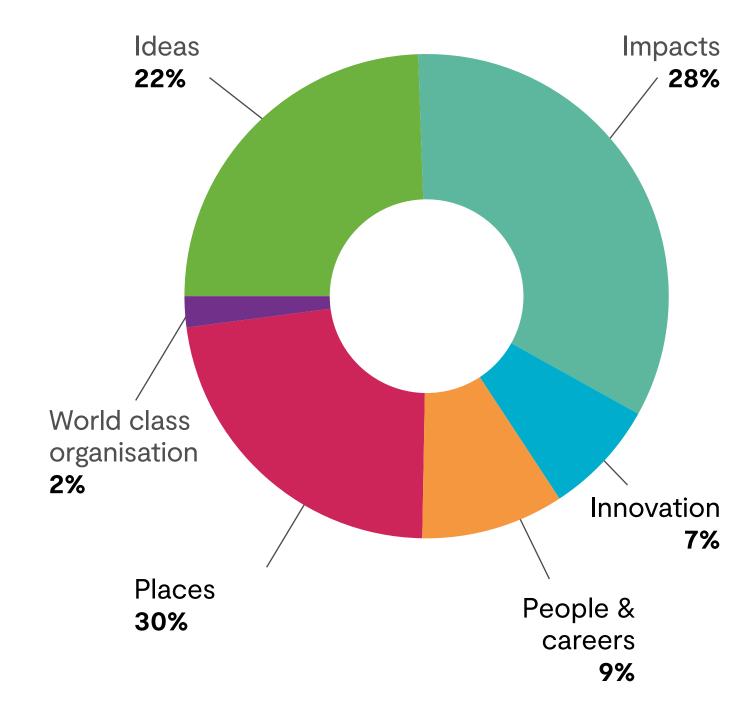




2024/25 spend mapped against our strategic objectives

Delivery plan objective	Estimated total outturn against objective £M	of which £M supports multiple objectives	Net spend against objective £M	% of spend
Ideas	136.9	23.2	113.7	22
Impacts	197.1	53.2	143.8	28%
Innovation	60.8	24.1	36.7	7%
People & careers	61.1	13.1	48	9%
Places	213	60.4	152.6	30%
World class organisation	12.5	0	112.51	2%
		174	507.3	

¹The cross cutting nature of our portfolio means that individual research programmes and investments can map across multiple themes and objectives. The above table shows total estimated spend, the value of investments which are dual mapped and the net spend estimate against each of our objectives.



% of total spend in 2024/25 by delivery plan objective

World leading academic outputs

- The UK is the third most productive country in this field by number of publications behind China and USA. However, the UK has the highest Category Normalised Citations Impact (CNCI) score, which is 1.4 times the global average. This means that publications from the UK have had the highest relative citations impact.
- Publications with NERC
 attributions citation impact,
 measured by Category Normalised
 Citation Impact (CNCI), is 1.66 times
 the higher than the global average

Measure		Gobal Baseline	UK	NERC
Production	Web of Science Documents	942,581	68,169	16,266
	% Global Baseline (Docs)	100%	7.2%	1.7%
Citation impact	Times Cited	15,112,4877	1,622,982	475,152
	% Global Baseline (Cities)	100%	10.7%	3.1%
	% Docs Cited	92%	95%	98%
	Category Normalized Citation Impact	1	1.40	1.66
	Citation Impact	16.0	23.8	29.2
	% Documents in Top 1%	1%	2%	3%
	% Documents in Top 10%	10%	15%	19%
Collaboration	% International Collaborations	34%	81%	74%
	% Domestic Collaborations	66%	20%	27%
	% Industry Collaborations	2%	3%	3%
Open Access	% All Open Access Documents	57%	80%	90%
	% Gold Documents	37%	35%	33%

<sup>1.6

1.5</sup>AUSTRALIA

1.7

OFFRANCE

CANADA

1.2

ITALY

SPAIN
INDIA

1.1

Global share of publications (2019 - 2023) for Clarivate InCites

Geosciences and Environment/Ecology essential science indicator topics

Productivity/impact matrix showing

NERC relative to top 10 most productive countries*

^{*} Publication and citation metrics are produced from Clarivate InCites® using essential science indicator topics: Geosciences and Environment/Ecology for publication years 2019 to 2023