



**Natural
Environment
Research Council**

NERC Science Committee 13th Meeting

Summary of Discussion

27 April 2022 via zoom

Members Present: Professor Graham Underwood (Chair), Professor Nicola Beaumont, Professor Mike Bentley, Professor Jane Hill (from 10.20), Dr Anna Jones, Professor Christine Maggs, Professor Stefan Reis, Professor Simon Vosper, Dr Doug Wilson, Professor Dan Parsons, Professor David Viner (until 14.20) and Professor Helen Williams.

Apologies: Dr Adrian Baker

Ex-Officio: Professor Susan Waldron (NERC Director, Research and Skills)

Other Attendees: Whole meeting: Dr Sarah Turner (NERC Associate Director, Strategic Programme Generation & Delivery). **Item 3:** Candice Snelling (NERC Head of Sustainability). **Item 4:** Professor Sir Duncan Wingham. **Item 5:** Jennifer Jennings (NERC Associate Director, Discovery and Highlight Science, Talent and Skills) and Katie Tearall (NERC Head of Talent and Skills). **Item 6:** Clive Hayter (NERC Associate Director NERC Portfolio & Programme Review), Ashley Abrook (NERC Programme Manager National Capability), and **Item 6 & Item 7:** Jemima Brinton (Senior Programme Manager, Strategic Programme Generation & Delivery). **Item 8:** Sarah Webb (NERC Associate Director International, Business & Policy Intelligence).

Secretary: Gemma Davies

Key issues discussed

Executive Chair update

Duncan Wingham gave an update on the spending review (SR), noting the process is almost complete. He also updated on the PhD landscape, the Fellowship scheme, the launch of the UKRI strategy, and UK's association to Horizon Europe.

NERC Diversity and Inclusion Living Action Plan (2022-2025)

Science Committee advised on opportunities and risks arising from implementation of the NERC Diversity and Inclusion Living Action Plan. The plan sets out our strategic priorities for the coming 4 years, with a detailed action plan that will be refreshed, at least annually, to ensure objectives are being met and delivering impact.

DTP Commissioning the future of the Talent and Skills portfolio to best support UK environmental science

Science Committee heard the plans for ensuring NERC's training offer i) remains fit for the purpose of developing the next generation of environmental scientists whilst ii) meeting national skills ambition and priorities set out in the UKRI strategy and the R&D people and

culture strategy, and iii) managing the opportunity within budgetary boundaries and the outcomes of the recent spending review. Science Committee advised on points that should be considered as part of the cohort training review, advised on key considerations relevant for Council discussion, and noted the plans for commissioning the third round of Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs).

Discipline Balance, including collective and cross-Council activity.

Science Committee reviewed NERC's Discipline balance of the current research & innovation portfolio supported by NERC core budget investments in the context of UKRI and other funder investments led by NERC.

Big Ideas series Funding

The Committee advised on the launch of the Big ideas pipeline that will be launched in Summer 2022. This will link in to a wider UKRI 'pipeline' for strategic investment ideas that are ambitious scale (>>£10m investments) and scope, requiring interdisciplinary, cross council communities to work together to achieve real-world outcomes. Science Committee offered advice on how to promote the pipeline, help shape the scale of NERC Big Idea submissions and facilitate connections between communities, along with advice on the environmental challenges within the five UKRI Themes, where NERC could play a lead role.

Approaches to sustainable research

Science Committee noted the evolution of the Research and Skills Sustainable Research thinking and advised on the approach to take for a potential pilot research call around encouraging more sustainable research. This discussion included advising on the definition of sustainability that should be used, and the reviewing and categorising of proposed options.

Standing items

The Committee confirmed the minutes and noted feedback from the Council meeting and the information papers: Discipline Balance; Financial Forecasts, and the forward agenda.