



**Natural  
Environment  
Research Council**

## **NERC Science Committee 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting**

### **Summary of Discussion**

**7 July 2022 via zoom**

**Members Present:** Professor Graham Underwood (Chair), Professor Nicola Beaumont, Dr Adrian Baker, Professor Mike Bentley, Professor Jane Hill, Professor Christine Maggs, Professor Stefan Reis, Dr Doug Wilson, Professor David Viner (absent 11am to 12).

**Apologies:** Dr Anna Jones, Professor Dan Parsons, Professor Simon Vosper, Professor Helen Williams

**Ex-Officio:** Professor Susan Waldron (NERC Director, Research and Skills) joined at 10am

**Other Attendees:** Whole meeting: Dr Sarah Turner (NERC Associate Director, Strategic Programme Generation & Delivery). **Item 3:** Professor Sir Duncan Wingham. **Item 5:** Nichola Badcock (NERC Head of Capital – Strategic Partnerships), Dr Iain Williams (NERC Director, Strategic Partnerships). **Item 6:** Dr Iain Williams (NERC Director, Strategic Partnerships), Jemima Brinton (Senior Programme Manager, Strategic Programme Generation & Delivery). Lizzie Garratt (NERC Head of Atmospheric & Polar), Simon Kerley (NERC Head of Terrestrial, Freshwater & Earth), Wendy Matcham (NERC Head of Resilient Environment), Liz Rowse (SPM, Strategic Programme Generation & Delivery, Healthy Environment), Mike Webb (NERC Head of Marine). **Items 7 & 8:** Jennifer Jennings (NERC Associate Director, Discovery and Highlight Science, Talent and Skills)

**Secretary:** Gemma Davies

### **Key issues discussed**

#### **Executive Chair update**

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

He also updated on the continued challenge to reach an agreement on the UK's association to Horizon Europe; on the creation of new cross - council Strategic Themes in the UKRI delivery plan, explaining that he is the Executive Chair for the 'Building a Green Future' theme for which he is considering establishing an Advisory Council; and on the reduction in FTE and Opex budgets and efficiency challenges that NERC and UKRI are facing.

#### **Finance update**

Science Committee noted the programme resource budget and forward variances to 2024/5 for all funding lines.

## **Infrastructure Pipeline**

The UKRI Infrastructure Fund supports investment for large-scale (typically >£20M) and long-term (>10 year) infrastructures. Science Committee discussed the relationship between the infrastructure pipeline and research funding, in order to generate world-leading science. This discussion enables Science Committee to make informed decisions that are relevant to existing or new infrastructures at appropriate times in relation to the NERC infrastructure pipeline, this is important to raise awareness and develop opportunities for their use. Science Committee also noted the infrastructure that exists and is planned. Science Committee agreed that this information is useful when considering funding e.g., Highlight Topic ideas, as it is useful to know what is already happening or already in the pipeline.

## **Achieving Delivery Plan ambitions: SRI Investments**

Science Committee reviewed and advised on the development and strategic fit of four NERC investment concepts (Strategic Programme SP investment), and three UKRI areas intended for cross Council [and wider] investment. Science Committee advised on how to improve and enhance the environmental science contribution to achieve UKRI strategic ambitions. Advice offered included ensuring there are clear outcomes and impact, focusing on the scientific knowledge gaps and delivery, and to review what has been done previously to ensure any investment would add value.

## **HT Feedback plan for approval**

Science Committee discussed plans for capturing and providing feedback to members of the NERC community following Science Committee assessment of Highlight Topic Ideas submissions. Science Committee were supportive of the new scoring proforma, noting that those who would previously have received no feedback, will now receive templated feedback.

## **Diversity & Inclusion in NERC Discovery Science Funding**

Science Committee's comments on diversity data and reports will help inform NERC's understanding of its data and development of the [NERC Diversity and Inclusion Living Action Plan](#), for example, whether interventions may be required for future funding opportunities and consequential responses.

Science Committee welcomed the sharing of data and noted the understanding of intersectionality produced to date and offered advice on how this consideration could be developed further. Advice included the use of qualitative interviews, mentoring and support programs for applicants, and the use of a specialist to review the data.

## **Standing items**

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