



**Natural
Environment
Research Council**

NERC Science Committee 17th Meeting

Summary of Discussion

**26 & 27 April 2023, Cranfield Management Development Centre,
Cranfield University.**

Members Present: Professor David Hannah (Chair), Nicola Beaumont, Professor Michael Bentley, Professor Jane Hill, Professor Christine Maggs, Professor Dan Parsons (26 April and items 8 and 9 on 27 April), Professor Simon Vosper, Professor Helen Williams and Dr Doug Wilson.

Ex-Officio: Professor Susan Waldron (NERC Director, Research and Skills) (left after item 10)

Apologies: Dr Anna Jones and Professor David Viner

Other Attendees: Whole meeting: Dr Sarah Turner (NERC Associate Director, Strategic Programme Generation & Delivery (SPG&D)). **Day 1 only:** Jemima Brinton (NERC Strategic Programme Manager, SPG&D). **Day 2 only:** Iain Williams (NERC Director, Strategic Partnerships) and Jennifer Jennings (NERC Associate Director, Discovery and Highlight Science, Talent and Skills). **Item 3:** Professor Sir Duncan Wingham. (via zoom) **Item 6:** Clare Bond (Chief Scientist, University of Aberdeen) via zoom **Item 7:** Jessica Pollitt (Senior Programme Manager: National Capability) via zoom and Laurent Amoudry (NOC) and Andreas Payo Garcia (BGS) in person.

Secretary: Gemma Davies

Key issues discussed

NERC Finances: Annual discussion

The committee noted the NERC resource budget which is now in the format of a new dashboard.

Executive Chair update

The committee were updated on: the potential implications of the rearrangement of government with UKRI now sitting in D-SIT; on the place agenda; on the opportunities for environmental science and partner investment in '[Building a Green Future](#)', on 'Accelerating the green economy' to pursue net zero challenges; on Simpler better funding.

Strategic Research Investment to achieve [NERC Delivery Plan](#) Ambitions

The committee reviewed proposed investment ideas and recommended those for near-term investment through further scoping towards a full Programme specification.

[CO₂ Storage Research Facility \(CSRF\)](#) and relationship with research funding

The committee noted the planned science for the proposed CSRF and reviewed the science questions that could be addressed and gave advice on the development of these. The committee advised whilst capital funding will be bid for from the UKRI Infrastructure Fund, to be a successful facility, ongoing funding will be needed for a further 15 years for operational costs to deliver an active research programme funded by NERC and DESNZ.

Consideration of the progress made over FY2022/23 for the National Capability Science, Multi-Centre award CHAMFER

NERC [National Capability](#) (NC) supports the UK to deliver world-leading environmental science, support national strategic needs, and respond to emergencies. NC Multi-Centre Science programmes bring multiple NC skill sets together to enable more ambitious science than a single NC could deliver, increasing the returns from investments by generating new science opportunities and leverage of additional benefits via other funding streams.

Conflicts of interest meant that 2 members left for this discussion. Science Committee reviewed the progress made and provided advice to the NERC Executive.

Balancing NERC Doctoral Training Investments to best support UK

The committee noted the new upcoming Council-approved strategy to support the transition to collective training by adjusting the proportion of spend in responsive DTPs and challenged CDTs, facilitating a larger proportion of NERC studentships for cross-UKRI working and additional CDTs. The committee advised on the scope and objectives of DTP and CDT training, to inform Collective Talent working

Evaluation of the pilot round of [Exploring the Frontiers](#)

The committee offered support for this scheme and provided recommendations on the findings of the pilot call. Small projects were welcomed from an EDI point of view. Randomisation in the award process was supported and it was agreed that panels worked well for awards of this size. It was agreed that the aims of the scheme could be clarified by making it clear in the guidance what 'exploring is' and to have exemplars. Managing demand and feedback was also discussed.

EDI in funding calls

The committee advised on proposed options for embedding DEI principles in NERC's research portfolio and grant-making activities.

Feedback from March 2023 Retreat and Council Meeting

The committee noted the 4 themes that were discussed at the retreat: 'NERC digital – from a strategy to transforming environmental science'; 'How can we make the environmental

science research and innovation system more diverse?'; 'Ensuring the Council Dashboard is useful and effective' and 'How can we ensure our infrastructure choices keep the UK at the forefront of environmental science?

The committee noted that the updated Science Committee Terms of Reference was approved by Council.

Standing items

The Committee confirmed the minutes and noted council feedback, the information papers and the forward agenda.