

Application Pack for the NERC Science Committee Chair Appointment

August 2025

Closing date for all applications: Friday 26 September 2025

Interviews: Date to be confirmed

Date of first meeting: 21 & 22 January 2026
(Prep meeting – 8
December 2025)

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Welcome

Thank you for your interest in leading the Natural Environment Research Council's Science Committee. This is an exciting opportunity to contribute to the development of current and future funding priorities and investments. As Chair, you will be responsible for leadership of the committee ensuring business is carried out efficiently and effectively. You will lead the committee in supporting an excellent and sustainable UK environmental science community, and in working collegiately to offer advice and recommendations to NERC Council and NERC Head Office.

Over the past year, Science Committee have provided recommendations to maximise science excellence in strategic research programmes, offered advice on training investments, NERC infrastructure, Carbon Budgets, Diversity & Inclusion, and input into the NERC Forward Look.

We are looking for an individual who possess a range of expertise and experience in research and innovation relevant to the higher education sector. You should have a range of subject matter knowledge appropriate to NERC's areas of research, innovation, training and capital.

You will need to be committed to investing your time to this role; but, in return, you will gain important committee leadership experience and have the opportunity to contribute to the future of environmental science.

This pack provides more detail about the Science Committee and the specific skills and experience we are looking for. Please consider applying.

Introduction

NERC is the UK's leading funder of environmental science research, investing over £330 million each year in cutting-edge research, postgraduate skills and innovation in universities and research centres.

Rapid developments in environmental science are transforming understanding of the Earth System through a combination of new technologies for data acquisition, such as autonomy and remote observation and sensing, and increasingly sophisticated analytics that allow data to be exploited in new ways for new insights. NERC is uniquely placed to take advantage of these transformations and generate new knowledge and understanding, having research programmes acquiring data across the whole earth system – the geosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, and cryosphere, along with ocean science capabilities and satellite observations.

As we continue the transition to a green economy, environmental technologies and insights are becoming increasingly important to business and to society, both directly for innovation and growth, and in helping to build resilience through improving predictive power particularly in weather and climate, and resilience to natural hazards.

NERC's [Forward Look](#) identifies three long-term priorities where environmental science can deliver outcomes that improve lives and livelihoods – green growth, environmental security, and responsible innovation. NERC delivers these priorities within the overall UKRI R&D framework of curiosity research, research for innovation and growth, and research to support government priorities. Our funding supports the UK as an international leader in evidence-driven environmental policy through strategic investment in researchers, innovators, facilities and data, which together deliver a world-leading environmental science capability.

NERC is part of UK Research & Innovation, a body which works in partnership with universities, research organisations, businesses, charities, and government to create the best possible environment for research and innovation to flourish. UKRI brings together 7 disciplinary research councils, Research England and Innovate UK.

Through these 9 Councils, UKRI maintains and champions the creativity and vibrancy of disciplines and sector-specific priorities and communities. We work together in innovative ways to deliver an ambitious agenda, drawing on our collective great depth and breadth of expertise and the enormous diversity of our portfolios.

If you would like to learn more about UKRI, you can read the [UKRI Strategy 2022-2027](#), and also see more about each of the nine Councils' current priorities in their [delivery plans](#).

For further information on NERC, please see: [NERC website](#).

Role and responsibilities of NERC Science Committee

Science Committee brings broad strategic perspective and expertise to support the development and delivery of the UKRI-NERC strategic priorities, investments, and policies.

The committee advises the Executive and Council across NERC's research, innovation, training, and national capability portfolio, and recommends NERC strategic research and innovation investments.

Members sit on the committee as individuals, rather than representing a particular organisation, and will provide advice on:

- how to support an excellent and sustainable UK environmental science community that seizes opportunities, in UKRI and international contexts, to achieve the following goals:
 - advance the frontiers of knowledge
 - address government, UKRI and NERC strategic priorities
 - deliver beneficial economic and social impacts
- priority areas for future rounds of NERC strategic research and innovation investment.
- commissioning, effectiveness and performance of NERC and UKRI investments including: discovery science; strategic research and innovation; postgraduate training, fellowships and early career support; national capability; scientific infrastructure and capital; international partnership and subscriptions.
- NERC funding policy for all the above funding streams, and ambitions to increase diversity in environmental sciences.
- conduct, responsibility, sustainability and equality, diversity, inclusion (EDI) in relation to NERC investments.

Provide recommendations for new NERC investment:

- Strategic Research and Innovation Programmes – assess submitted proposals against published criteria and recommend which proposals should be funded by NERC.
- Strategic Research and Innovation Highlight Topics - assess submitted ideas for Highlight Topic against published criteria and recommend which should go forward to a funding call, and at what level of expenditure.

When reading the 'Terms of Reference' and 'Overview' information; please note that a governance review has recently been undertaken to streamline our structure and better align with the responsibilities of NERC Council within UKRI. As a result, the Science Committee will adopt a slightly revised remit from January 2026. In line with the emphasis on growth and innovation outlined in the NERC Forward Look and the Spending Review, the committee will be renamed the Science and Innovation Advisory Committee. This change is intended to signal our broader focus and attract individuals with innovation expertise during upcoming recruitment cycles.

Terms of reference are available: [Science Committee terms of reference](#)

Actions of the Science Committee and its members are subject to the UKRI NERC governance framework. Members are expected to conduct themselves in a way that ensures that UKRI's business is carried out efficiently and effectively, and also to adhere to the highest standards of professional and ethical practice, as outlined in the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#)

Role and responsibilities of NERC Science Committee Chair

NERC is looking to appoint a new Chair to its Science Committee with expertise as set out in the person specification section.

The Chair is responsible for leadership of the Science Committee (SC) and for working with the Executive to ensure its overall effectiveness.

The Chair will:

- ensure the committee carries out its business efficiently and effectively
- ensure the committee actively supports NERC in making informed decisions about priorities
- work with the Executive in planning and conducting committee meetings effectively (including agenda setting)
- ensure papers and other information for the committee are appropriate for the decisions they have to make and aligned to SC Terms of Reference.
- ensure the committee answers to its terms of reference (including planning of forward agenda for programme of SC meetings)
- ensure Science Committee members know their roles and responsibilities.
- support the members in their involvement with the committee's work
- represent the view of the committee and its outcomes to NERC Council by attending NERC Council meetings.
- lead, in consultation with the Executive, on the committee's composition and development
- chair interview panels and engage in recruitment process for new members
- participate in the induction of new members.
- undertake an annual assessment of Science Committee members
- invest significant time; expected to be up to 30 days pa.

Person specification

Applications are sought from individuals who possess a range of expertise and experience in research and innovation across the higher education sector. You should have a range of subject matter knowledge appropriate to the Council's areas of research, innovation, training and capital.

Our ideal candidate will have the enthusiasm and time to commit to advise us on how we can best achieve our [delivery plan](#) ambitions and [forward look](#) for environmental science.

Essential skills

We are seeking a candidate that has the following skills:

- ability to communicate well and lead the committee to work collaboratively to support members to challenge the Science Committee's debates.
- understanding of the environmental challenges confronting the world based on a deep understanding of environmental science with a whole-systems, solution-focused approach.
- recognised expertise as an environmental scientist
- the ability to impartially chair a complex, strategic meeting, and ensure that when required, Science Committee reaches agreed decisions
- an understanding and appreciation of the role of the NERC institutes alongside that of the Higher Education Institutions. An appreciation of the UK environmental research system, including university and institutional settings.

Appointments

The successful candidate will be appointed by the Natural Environment Research Council, on the recommendation of a selection panel.

The Chair will be appointed for a period of three years, subject to annual performance review.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion

We want to welcome you. We believe that everyone has a right to be treated with dignity and respect, and to be provided with the appropriate opportunities and tools to flourish and succeed. We believe in an ethical and trusted working environment that is attractive and accessible to everyone who is interested in developing their career with us.

We value diversity of thought and experience and are committed to creating systems that value difference so that everyone can feel welcomed, included, and nurtured throughout their time with us.

For further information, please visit [How we support EDI in the workforce](#)

At NERC, as part of UKRI, we are proud to be users of the disability confident scheme. We guarantee to interview all disabled applicants that meet the essential criteria for any of our vacancies. There is a section on the application form to indicate if you would like to be considered under this scheme.

Reasonable adjustments

We want to make our recruitment processes as well as participation in our boards and panels accessible to all, such as making adjustment for people with a disability.

If you have any queries regarding the application process, if you would like this application in a different format (for example, accessible PDF, large print, easy read, audio recording or braille), or if you would like to discuss how we can support your application please email:

swindongdsadmin@nerc.ukri.org

Please contact us in advance of the closing date to allow us enough time to make reasonable adjustments ahead of the closing date.

[Accessibility statement for our website – UKRI](#)

Should your application be successful, we will work to fulfil your requirements to enable you to fully participate in board and panel meetings.

Please let us know in advance if you would like to discuss in confidence how we can support you, or if you require an alternative way to submit your application:

swindongdsadmin@nerc.ukri.org

Meeting arrangements

Location

Meetings will be held in various UK locations and also virtually.

Honorarium (and availability)

As Science Committee Chair, you will be expected to dedicate up to 30 days each year (which includes three to four Science Committee meetings each year, and four NERC Council meetings). Some Science Committee meetings will be virtual, and some will be face to face. An honorarium of £6850 pa, together with reasonable travel and subsistence costs will be reimbursed in accordance with [UKRI travel, subsistence and expenses policy](#)

How to apply and how members will be selected

To apply, candidates should:

submit a CV (limited to two sides) and a completed application form for the attention of Gemma Davies to: swindongdsadmin@nerc.ukri.org by 4pm on the 26 September 2025.

Information on this role, this pack and the application form can be found on the below page under 'NERC Science Committee Chair vacancy'

[Advise UKRI and our councils](#)

Once the deadline has passed, all applications (CV and application forms) will be passed to the selection panel. The panel will review the applications against the person specification. The panel will agree which applicants will be selected for interview. Further particulars will be provided to candidates selected for interview.

At the final appointment stages, where applicants are as qualified on merit, the selection panel will seek to achieve a balanced membership in terms of, for example, diversity (including geographical diversity), expertise, and experience. The successful candidate will be appointed by the Natural Environment Research Council, on the recommendation of the selection panel.

If you have any questions about the recruitment process, please also contact Gemma Davies.

Timescales

The anticipated timescale for selection and appointments are in the table below:

Activity	Timing
Role advertised	18 August – 26 September 2025
Deadline for applications	4pm 26 September 2025
Shortlisting decisions sent to candidates	TBC
Interviews	TBC
Appointments confirmed	2 - 3 weeks after interviews
First meeting	21& 22 January 2026 (prep meeting on 8 December 2025)

[Meeting dates are published here](#)

The Seven Principles of Public Life

In 1995, the Committee on Standards in Public Life defined seven principles, which should underpin the actions of all who serve the public in any way.

Consistent with the Commissioner's Code of Practice, applicants will be assessed on merit, and all candidates for public appointment will need to uphold the standards of conduct set out in the Seven Principles of Public Life. These will be tested as part of the selection process and the selection Panel must satisfy itself that all candidates for appointments can meet these standards, which are:

Selflessness

Holders of Public Office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or other friends.

Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity

Carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.