



Natural
Environment
Research Council

Minutes of the 29th meeting of NERC Council in UK Research and Innovation (redacted)

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

Twenty-ninth meeting of NERC Council in UK Research and Innovation held at Wotton House, Dorking on Thursday, 12 June 2025.

Members present:

Professor Louise Heathwaite (Chair), Cathrine Armour (part, via Teams), Professor Richard Bardgett, Professor Hannah Cloke, Professor Peter Cox, Professor Kevin Gaston, Professor Mike Kendall, Michael Lewis (via Teams), Clare Matterson, Rashik Parmar, Professor John Pyle

Observers:

Professor Gideon Henderson, CSA, Defra, Charlie McNichol-Fardon, Chair, Future Leaders Council

NERC Directors (Head Office):

Kim Bond (NERC Chief Operating Officer), Dr Kate Hamer (NERC Director of Strategy and Analysis), Dr Rupert Lewis (NERC Deputy Executive Chair), Wendy Selby-Brown (NERC Finance Business Partner), Dr Tracy Shimmield (Interim Director Research and Skills), Michaela Simpson (NERC Director People, Culture and Operations), Dr Iain Williams (Director, Strategic Partnerships)

Apologies: Nick Folland, Professor David Hannah, Jen Jamieson-Ball

Other attendees:

Dr Liam Haydon, (items 4-8), Robyn Thomas (item 10, via Teams), Frances Burstow (item 11, via Teams), Hugh Harris (item 12, via Teams), Jordan Lips (items 14-15, via Teams), Anna Angus-Smyth (item 16)

Secretariat: Helen Page, Katrina Lewis

Introductory items

1. Executive Chair's welcome, unconfirmed minutes of the 28th meeting of NERC Council and Decisions and Actions (NERC 25/09, NERC 25/10)

- 1.1 Louise Heathwaite welcomed members to the twenty-ninth meeting of NERC Council and noted that apologies had been received for the meeting from Nick Folland and David Hannah.
- 1.2 Louise Heathwaite welcomed two of the newly appointed NERC Council members, Professor Richard Bardgett and Professor Peter Cox to their first meeting.
- 1.3 Louise Heathwaite welcomed Dr Rupert Lewis and Kim Bond to their first Council meeting adding that there would be an opportunity to introduce themselves later in the meeting.

- 1.4 Louise Heathwaite advised Council that this would be the last meeting for Professor Gideon Henderson and Dr Tracy Shimmield and thanked them for their support for NERC.
- 1.5 Louise Heathwaite reminded members to advise Helen Page of any relevant updates to their Declaration of Interests.
- 1.6 Louise Heathwaite asked if there were any vested interests in any of the items being discussed today. None were declared.
- 1.7 Louise Heathwaite congratulated the following who had recently been announced as Fellows of the Royal Society:
- **Professor Marie Edmonds** FRS; Head of Department and Professor of Volcanology and Petrology, Department of Earth Sciences, University of Cambridge
 - **Professor Sue Grimmond** FRS; Professor of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, Department of Meteorology, University of Reading
 - **Professor Jim Hall** FREng FRS; Professor of Climate and Environmental Risks, School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford
 - **Professor Jane Hill** OBE FRS; Associate Dean for Research, Faculty of Sciences & Department of Biology, University of York
 - **Professor David Pyle** FRS; Professor of Earth Sciences, Department of Earth Sciences, University of Oxford
 - **Professor Claire Spottiswoode** FRS; Visiting Research Associate, Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge
- 1.8 Louise Heathwaite asked members for any amendments and matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting. No amendments were made, and the minutes of the twenty-eighth meeting were confirmed as an accurate record.

2. Executive Chair's Update (Oral)

- 2.1 Louise Heathwaite informed Council that Tom Adeyoola had been appointed as the new Executive Chair, Innovate UK. She added that Professor Ottoline Leyser would step down as UKRI CEO in June and that Siobhan Peters, UKRI Chief Finance Officer, would cover the accounting officer responsibility until Sir Ian Chapman started in August. Louise Heathwaite informed Council that an induction meeting would be held with Ian Chapman in June adding that the information pack which was being compiled would also be shared with Council members.

ACTION: Information pack prepared for Ian Chapman to be shared with Council members

- 2.2 Louise Heathwaite reminded Council that the campaign to recruit new Council members was in progress with an application deadline of 16 June and asked current members to promote this opportunity. She added that NERC was also separately recruiting a Senior Independent Member with an application deadline of 27 June.
- 2.3 Louise Heathwaite informed Council that Kate Hamer and Michaela Simpson had been confirmed in their roles as Directors of Strategy and Analysis and People, Culture and Operations respectively and Council congratulated them on their appointments. She added that an internal campaign to recruit a Director of Major Programmes was underway and NERC would also shortly advertise the role of Director, Research and Skills.
- 2.4 Louise Heathwaite noted that the Spending Review had been announced the previous day, adding that Kate Hamer would provide an update later in the meeting.

- 2.5 Louise Heathwaite reminded Council that she was the Executive Chair lead for the Clean Energy Superpower Mission, one of the Government R&D missions, with a recruitment campaign for Challenge Directors for each of the missions currently underway.
- 2.6 Louise Heathwaite commented on the success of the launch of the *Forward Look* (FL) which had been held at the Royal Society on 2 June. She added that the FL had been presented to the UKRI Executive Committee, noting that it had been well received with other councils keen to emulate NERC's lead in developing a similar document. She extended thanks, on behalf of Council to Kate Hamer and Liam Haydon for their excellent work on the FL.
- 2.7 Louise Heathwaite informed Council that the Infrastructure Roadmap had been delayed to autumn 2025 to better align with the Spending Review process and to allow the incoming UKRI CEO an opportunity to be involved in the refresh.
- 2.8 Louise Heathwaite commented that there had been significant change in the NERC Executive over the past year, adding her thanks to the team for their valuable support. She noted that the restrictions which were currently in place, especially with regard to headcount, were driving changes including the recent review of NERC governance which would be discussed later in the meeting.
- 2.9 Gideon Henderson asked whether the delay to the Infrastructure Roadmap would impact the bids which were due to be made in August. Louise Heathwaite confirmed that this would not impact on the ability to bid into the Infrastructure Fund and Iain Williams added that there would be a discussion later in the meeting on the NERC submission to the UKRI Infrastructure Fund on Environmental Data Research UK (EDRUK).
- 3. Introductions from the new NERC Deputy Executive Chair and NERC Chief Operating Officer (Oral)**
- 3.1 Dr Rupert Lewis introduced himself as the new NERC Deputy Executive Chair. He previously held the role of Chief Science Policy Officer at the Royal Society and also previously led the Government Office for Science (GO-Science).
- 3.2 Kim Bond introduced herself as the new NERC Chief Operating Officer. She previously worked for c. 20 years at the Ministry of Defence where she worked in HR, project and programme management, strategy, policy and operational delivery.

Items for discussion

4. Council retreat: discussion of outcomes (Oral) Slide, item 4

- 4.1 Kate Hamer introduced this item which provided an opportunity to reflect on the NERC Council retreat held the previous day.
- 4.2 Liam Haydon outlined the key themes which had been discussed at the Council retreat, presenting a visual illustration which had captured discussion under the following headings:
- the year ahead and the importance of the *Forward Look*
 - pitch activity focused on priorities within the *Forward Look*
 - World café 1: deliverables and timescales – Green Growth, Environmental Security, Responsible Innovation
 - lightning session to explore new approaches to deliver the *Forward Look* led by participants
 - World café 2: approaches and opportunities – Green Growth, Environmental Security, Responsible Innovation, frontiers of knowledge and National Capability and Partnerships

- 4.3 Liam Haydon invited Council to share reflections on the retreat, noting that the visual illustration might still be revised if any key points were missing.
- 4.4 Council agreed that the retreat had been a success, had been well-structured and interactive. In discussion, the following points were highlighted:
- the important role NERC has in facilitating connections, ‘convening the convener’
 - the importance of working with industry and in joining with initiatives that were not necessarily led by NERC
 - how to unlock the wealth of data and information that sits within NERC
 - protecting what works well
 - the importance of focusing on opportunities and solutions and remaining adaptable and agile
 - acknowledgement that issues are systemic not stand alone
 - the importance of AI
 - the importance of embracing opportunities for effective partnership working, for example with ARIA
 - consideration of re-packaging growth to resonate better, for example, emphasising improvements to quality of life/living standards
 - potential use of a Council member blog/opinion piece to promote NERC
- 4.5 Council commented that the *Forward Look* had provided an excellent focus for this year’s retreat and had made it easier to prepare in advance and to contribute on the day.

5. HMG Spending Review (Oral)

- 5.1 Kate Hamer introduced this item to provide an update on the Spending Review (SR) which had taken place the previous day. Liam Haydon observed this item.
- 5.2 Kate Hamer explained that, whilst the detail remained to be developed, there were some headlines which she could share with Council including:
- Government Research & Development (R&D) investment to increase to £22.6 billion over the next four years
 - Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) R&D budget rising to £15.2 billion, an increase of £1.3 billion, over the next four years
 - £500 million R&D Missions Accelerator Programme expected to leverage £1.5 billion in private investment
 - £410 million for a Local Innovation Partnership Fund
 - Industrial Strategy due for publication later in June
 - £1 billion to scale up the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) to fund breakthrough R&D designed to catalyse future growth
 - investment of up to £750 million in a national supercomputer at Edinburgh University
 - support for global talent
 - £2 billion over the SR to implement the AI Opportunities Action Plan which UKRI will help to deliver
 - £600 million investment to launch Health Data Research UK
- 5.3 Kate Hamer added that spending will be reviewed by the government every two years. She noted that some departments had been more successful than others in the SR which may have some impact on partnership working.
- 5.4 Kate Hamer explained that the UKRI allocation was not yet known although the expectation remained that UKRI would receive close to a ‘flat real’ allocation.
- 5.5 Kate Hamer added that, included within the SR publication, were requirements for

departments to draw up efficiency plans and noted that DSIT was reviewing its sponsorship model to further explore efficiency gains in working with arm's length bodies.

- 5.6 Gideon Henderson commented that, whilst the settlement demonstrated the importance of science, the reality might be below 'flat real'.

[Cathrine Armour joined the meeting]

6. NERC Council Finance Report (NERC 25/11)

- 6.1 Wendy Selby-Brown introduced this item to outline the position for the previous and current financial years.
- 6.2 Wendy Selby-Brown reminded Council that NERC was subject, along with the other research councils, to budget re-sets in 2024/25 and that these targets had been met.
- 6.3 Council expressed thanks to Wendy Selby-Brown for managing the budget successfully in what had been a difficult year.
- 6.4 Council asked how NERC would successfully deliver the *Forward Look* in a time of financial constraint. Louise Heathwaite commented that it would be important to work in partnership with others to deliver the ambitions of the *Forward Look*.

7. Progress against our Strategic Delivery Plan 2022-2025 (NERC 25/12)

- 7.1 Liam Haydon introduced this item which was a retrospective look at progress made in delivering the ambitions within the 2022-2025 NERC Strategic Delivery Plan (SDP) over the past year.
- 7.2 Liam Haydon commented that there was currently no requirement from UKRI to provide reporting on progress made.
- 7.3 Liam Haydon informed Council that the report highlighted that the majority of the ambitions had been given a 'green' rating, adding that some ambitions had been rated 'amber/green' or 'amber' and two had been rated as 'amber/red' which was a slight improvement on the previous year. He added that progress had been made in some areas with regression in others rather than progress across the board.
- 7.4 Council asked for clarification on the ambition related to discovery science asking whether the amber/red rating applied to process or delivery. Louise Heathwaite reminded Council that Robyn Thomas would provide an update on UKRI funding change later in the meeting.
- 7.5 Council welcomed the progress report which succeeded in presenting complex information in a simple way. Council asked whether a similar approach might be adopted for the *Forward Look* to help move that into the delivery stage.
- 7.6 Kate Hamer replied that learning from the 2022-2025 SDP reporting would be taken forward to inform reporting against the new SDP and *Forward Look* and that opportunities to improve and reinforce the information captured would also be considered.
- 7.7 Louise Heathwaite commented that there would be an increased focus on the outcomes of funding going forwards and that it would be important to make a stronger case that NERC funding delivered outcomes.
- 7.8 Council suggested that other forms of media such as videos or visuals might help to promote these outcomes more successfully.

8. NERC Strategic Delivery Plan 2025-27 (NERC 25/13)

- 8.1 Kate Hamer introduced this item and explained that there was a requirement under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 for the research councils to publish Strategic Delivery Plans (SDP). As the current plan had ended in March 2025, a new SDP was, therefore, required to cover the period up to the end of the current UKRI strategy.
- 8.2 Kate Hamer explained that the new SDP would be framed around the six pillars contained within the UKRI Strategy. The SDP would be signed off by Ottoline Leyser and would be published in October this year.
- 8.3 Gideon Henderson asked for clarity on whether the SDP would be for one or two years. Kate Hamer responded that it would effectively cover one year, providing information on commitments we will make through our one-year allocation from phase 1 of the SR.
- 8.4 Council noted the plans and suggested the SDP might be viewed as a one-year implementation plan in this context.

9. Implementation of the NERC Governance Review (NERC 25/14)

- 9.1 Rupert Lewis introduced this item and explained that, given the role of Council as advisory, and the opportunity to look to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in decision making across NERC, it had been decided to conduct a review of NERC governance. Following the review, it had been decided to transition the current NERC Management Board into a NERC Executive Team meeting and to incorporate the early career element represented by the Future Leaders Council (FLC) into the existing NERC governance structure. He added that NERC would retain the NERC Assurance Board (NAB) and the current Science Committee (SC) would transition to a Science and Innovation Advisory Committee.
- 9.2 Michaela Simpson highlighted the diagrams which were included as annexes to the paper which clarified the flow of information between the NERC boards and committees. She added that the paper contained a timeline for communicating the changes which allowed for the Chairs of both the Future Leaders Council and Science Committee to speak with members before receiving formal notification from NERC.
- 9.3 Michaela Simpson explained that providing opportunities for Future Leaders Council members to join existing boards/committees was a positive step forward and would provide more opportunities for early career members.
- 9.4 Charlie McNichol-Fardon added that the FLC had been a great success and had achieved its aim of ensuring early career perspectives were heard as evidenced by the second annual report produced by the FLC. She considered this was a good opportunity for the members, who were already leaders in their fields, to use their expertise on other NERC boards/committees. Charlie McNichol-Fardon thanked Council for its role in establishing the FLC and for its support over the past two years. Council thanked Charlie McNichol-Fardon for her excellent leadership as Chair of the FLC.
- 9.5 Council expressed some disappointment that the FLC would not continue, especially given it had only been in existence for two years. Council added that it would be important to ensure there was a tangible plan with specific actions to continue to support those earlier in their careers, for example, consideration of a protected place on NERC Council for an early careers member.
- 9.6 Council noted that one of the advantages of the FLC had been to introduce a significant number of early career people into the NERC governance structure, adding that not all of these would be suitable for roles on either Science Committee or NERC Council.
- 9.7 Louise Heathwaite informed Council that the UKRI Board was keen to see earlier career

appointments, including for Council, as part of a wider diversity ambition. She explained that it would be important to be more proactive in recruiting early career members, including via direct approaches. It would also be important to provide appropriate mentoring and ensure the recruitment process and interviews supported those earlier in their careers. Louise Heathwaite added that the FLC had previously been involved in limited discussions and that this new model would widen access to discussions outside of their current remit. It was agreed to proceed as outlined in the paper but to keep progress in recruiting early career members under review to ensure this model was successful.

- 9.8 Council welcomed the opportunity to review success under the revised model and suggested that mentoring at application stage would also be helpful in addition to mentoring people once they were appointed. Council asked for a more specific action plan which included mentoring and allocating buddies to new members. Council also suggested that it would be important to ensure any advertisement for board/committee roles applied to those early career candidates by specifically saying prior experience would not be a barrier. Louise Heathwaite agreed to consider this in the next recruitment round and to reflect on whether to introduce a specific role on NERC Council for an early career member.

ACTION: Action plan to be developed on how best to support early career members both at application stage and in their roles

- 9.9 Council welcomed the opportunity to refocus Science Committee (SC) including the increased focus on innovation and asked whether SC might also focus more on strategy including a focus on under-represented strategic areas. Tracy Shimmield responded that this was under consideration, adding that it would be necessary to look at both the remit and the focus on strategy going forwards. Louise Heathwaite informed Council that Rupert Lewis would have interim responsibility for SC from July 2025 following Tracy Shimmield's departure.

- 9.10 Gideon Henderson asked whether there were implications in transitioning the NERC Management Board to the NERC Executive Team and also asked about the process for Council members to join the NERC Assurance Board (NAB). He added that it might be worth considering the skills required for NAB when recruiting new NERC Council members. Louise Heathwaite confirmed that NERC Council members would join NAB when the current NERC Non-Executive Directors tenures ended and these would be drawn from either current or new Council members, adding that expertise in risk would be an advantage.

10. Update on UKRI Funding Change (NERC 25/15) Slides, item 10

- 10.1 Michaela Simpson introduced this item which provided an opportunity for Council to hear about the plans on funding change, including on harmonisation, before handing over to Robyn Thomas, UKRI Funding Service Delivery Authority, to provide an overview of UKRI funding change. Mary Goodchild observed this item.

- 10.2 Robyn Thomas welcomed the opportunity to engage with Council noting that the accompanying paper had outlined some challenges for NERC arising from the changes.

- 10.3 Robyn Thomas explained that the vision for the funding service was to adopt harmonised, simplified and consistent processes and policies to deliver funding opportunities across UKRI. He added that there was an intention to address some of the challenges across the organisation related to volume of applications, expert review and the multitude of guidance and regulation.

- 10.4 Robyn Thomas outlined the current priorities to:

- agree a consistent way of describing applicant-led (curiosity driven) and targeted (strategy driven) modes of research
- agree a consistent approach to expert review where applicant-led would use expert

- review and targeted mode would use assessment panels
- use a tiered approach to decision making enabling a greater use of a variety of assessment tools including randomisation
- provide consistent and valuable feedback from either expert reviewers or panel members

10.5 Mary Goodchild highlighted three key areas from the paper on how the change will be implemented within NERC by drawing attention to:

- Annex C which contained a heatmap with RAG ratings showing the impact of the funding changes for NERC, noting that the majority of areas (marked in green) will have minimum impact
- Point 12 within the paper which outlined the issues and dependencies including having an effective demand management approach
- the return to the use of peer review and consequent implications for resource

10.6 Council was supportive of harmonising processes and asked what effort was being put into the process of peer review given this was a significant pressure on the community. Robyn Thomas explained that the work underway with regard to Demand Management (DM) would look to put in place a framework of measures including whether a single or a suite of mechanisms might be needed.

10.7 Council asked whether there was any information on the outcomes of measures which had been taken in the past to inform the review of DM. Council suggested, for example, that only people who had reviewed a grant might apply for a grant, although Council noted there was no simple solution.

10.8 Council highlighted the importance of reviewing the outcomes and strategic impact of funding. Gideon Henderson suggested that a summary of the outcomes of previous funding should form part of any future grant application.

10.9 Michaela Simpson asked when the outcome of the work on DM would be known as this would be key for implementing the changes. Robyn Thomas responded that the proposal would be discussed by Executive Committee in September and the framework would follow on from this discussion. He noted that it was possible to share early and ongoing thinking with NERC on the direction of travel, but that Council should not wait for a complete framework to be in place before planning for implementation of funding changes and that these can, and should, be considered in parallel. He added that, as part of the regular cycle of review for grant Terms and Conditions, it was intended to consider inclusion for an expectation that those holding grants play a part in reviewing the submissions of other applicants.

11. UKRI Collective Talent (Oral) Slides, item 11

11.1 Frances Burstow, UKRI Director for Talent and Skills, introduced this item to provide an overview of UKRI Collective Talent Funding (CTF). Frances Burstow presented slides.

11.2 Frances Burstow explained that Collective Talent Funding was announced by UKRI as part of the previous Spending Review. The aim was to: ensure we can support disciplinary and interdisciplinary research and skills development; work together to address systemic challenges and reduce bureaucracy and increase efficiency.

11.3 Frances Burstow commented that the key aim had been to add value by working closely together rather than a centralisation of how talent was supported. She added that the research councils retained the role of primary decision maker.

11.4 Frances Burstow outlined some of the key elements of the collective talent funding programme. She noted that, following work to simplify and harmonise how we invest in

doctoral training, NERC was one of the first research councils to have a joint landscape award with BBSRC. She added that a focus for the next Spending Review period would be how to increase opportunities for interdisciplinary capacity building and ensure a sustainable system for funding postgraduate research into the future.

11.5 Frances Burstow outlined the work being done to establish a Fellowship Investment Framework to simplify and harmonise the UKRI offer. She emphasised that collective talent looked beyond investment in studentships and fellowships to how we can support the wider workforce through the 'People and Team Action Plan' and specific interventions to address skills shortages in technical capabilities.

11.6 Tracy Shimmield commented that the joint BBSRC/NERC landscape award had been successful with a strong field of applications. She added that there had been some challenges in establishing the scheme which would be helped by harmonising processes.

11.7 Louise Heathwaite asked whether there would be integration with The Funding Service. Frances Burstow confirmed this, noting it would take time to align and adding that establishing a new scheme whilst launching a new funding service had been challenging.

11.8 Council asked whether salary discrepancies between different disciplines would be addressed within the CTF and whether the career framework would help with transition of talent and career trajectories. Frances Burstow explained that salaries were set by universities reflecting market demand and that UKRI only had influence at the doctoral level where it had more of a role setting the baseline for support with flexibility to increase the offer where there were skills gaps. With regard to careers she confirmed that a key emphasis within the new fellowship framework would be how the offer might support career stage, discipline and sector transitions.

11.9 Council noted the bureaucracy/cost in administering schemes, such as the landscape award, and asked whether this could be reduced. Frances Burstow commented that some bureaucracy came from the multitude of schemes and harmonisation and simplification would help with this. She added that UKRI was currently reviewing the full economic cost of doctoral training to ensure it had a clearer understanding of the full cost of delivering training.

11.10 Gideon Henderson asked whether other routes, such as masters' programmes and apprenticeships were also being considered to broaden the offer. Frances Burstow explained that some research councils already incorporated masters funding within their portfolio and this was definitely something NERC could consider if it felt it was needed to address skills gaps. She noted that the AI opportunities plan, announced as part of the recent SR, also contained a masters element. She added that UKRI was encouraging Research Organisations to make use of the apprenticeship route as a way of bringing in a more diverse range of talent.

12. UKRI Update

12.1 Hugh Harris, UKRI Chief of Investment Planning and Strategy, attended to provide the UKRI update.

12.2 Hugh Harris updated Council under the following headings:

- Spending Review
- review of arm's length bodies
- new Executive Chair, Innovate UK
- new UKRI CEO, Iain Chapman
- UKRI objectives/KPIs

- 12.3 Gideon Henderson asked for clarity on where discovery mode science might fit within any prioritisation by the UKRI CEO, noting this was a key area supported by the Science Minister. Hugh Harris responded that the UKRI CEO had a broad focus on 'growth' and citizen outcomes.
- 12.4 Louise Heathwaite asked for more information on the incoming CEO focus on starting from a 'zero sum' perspective. Hugh Harris explained that there was an intention to review the entire portfolio to ascertain where UKRI had strategic advantage and might be genuinely world leading.
- 12.5 Hugh Harris outlined that there remained a focus on efficiency and that it would be important for UKRI to look for ways to demonstrate value for money and alternative ways of framing efficiency going forwards.

13. Update by Chief Scientific Adviser, Defra (Oral)

- 13.1 Gideon Henderson reminded Council that this would be his last NERC Council meeting and commented that he had enjoyed his involvement with NERC over many years. He added that the process was underway to appoint a replacement CSA to NERC Council.
- 13.2 Gideon Henderson provided an update under the following headings:

- Spending Review
- EU re-negotiation/Horizon
- International
- Climate adaptation
- Industrial Strategy
- Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment Programme (R&D programme, Defra)
- UN Ocean Conference/UNEA-7
- Government Food Strategy
- Defra reviews: Cunliffe review; Corry review
- Defra R&D fellowship programme

14. NERC Executive Risk Review (NERC 25/16)

- 14.1 Tracy Shimmield introduced this item and explained that a refresh of the NERC risk framework had recently taken place in collaboration with UKRI. The aim of the refresh was to remove duplication and ensure risks were reviewed regularly.
- 14.2 Jordan Lips, NERC Senior Risk Specialist, outlined the next steps in developing the refreshed Risk Management Framework for NERC. He added that the NERC top risk register would evolve to better align with the UKRI Risk Management Framework and that an objective centred approach to risk management was being adopted within NERC.
- 14.3 Jordan Lips informed Council that the objective focused risks for NERC were included in Annex A of the paper which would act as a basis for a gap analysis for existing risks which would be assessed against the objective themes.
- 14.4 Jordan Lips explained that the next steps would include conducting an extensive review and refresh of existing risks and reframing these against the objective risk structure. He added that it would be important to have an effective risk culture in place within NERC and that he was seeking to implement learning from the security risk culture programme, which he was also leading on, to help with this.
- 14.5 Council was supportive of the approach as proposed. Council asked how reputational risk might be reported given the activity NERC is engaged in.

14.6 Council asked where talent and skills were captured within the framework. Tracy Shimmield confirmed that plans were in place to include this. She added that the risk register also mapped onto the *Forward Look*.

14.7 Council asked whether Trusted Research should be included in Theme 5 given the importance of this issue. Jordan Lips explained that it was intended to produce a broader security risk register which Council would have an opportunity to review.

15. NERC Quarterly Risk Review (NERC 25/17)

15.1 Jordan Lips introduced this item and explained that the paper had been updated following discussion with individual risk owners.

15.2 Jordan Lips informed Council that he intended to refresh the quarterly update, identifying co-dependencies and reducing duplication in the top risks. He drew Council's attention to the three risks which were recommended for closure outlined in Section 9 of the paper.

15.3 Council commented that the risk associated with cyber security had not increased and asked whether this was acceptable. Jordan Lips agreed that this needed further consideration and suggested this take place as part of a security deep dive at a future meeting. Louise Heathwaite commented that a further update at September Council would be scheduled to keep the momentum going.

ACTION: Security Risk Deep Dive to be scheduled for September Council

15.4 Charlie McNichol-Fardon asked where the impact or the result of a risk was included in the register, suggesting this might be made more explicit. Jordan Lips agreed and confirmed this would be considered going forwards.

16. Environmental Data Research UK (EDRUK) (NERC 25/18)

16.1 Iain Williams introduced this item, explaining that Environmental Data Research UK (EDRUK) was a NERC proposal for submission of a bid to the UKRI Infrastructure Fund in August. Anna Angus-Smyth attended for this item.

[At the meeting this item was taken after item 9].

16.2 Anna Angus-Smyth informed Council that the aim of EDRUK was to establish a new UK digital infrastructure to access and use environmental data across different sources. She added that this was an ambitious proposal to lead a national activity to join up environmental information, provide access to be able to use it and put in place the tools to facilitate its use. She added that a Strategic Outline Business Case had been developed and an external Gateway Review had taken place with positive feedback received.

16.3 Iain Williams added that the deadline for submission was 1 August 2025 with outcomes communicated in November 2025, adding that it was a lengthy process between submission and funding being implemented, which would include submission of a Full Business Case.

16.4 Council was supportive of the proposal, noting that it was difficult to know what environmental data was available and how to access it. Council asked whether Artificial Intelligence (AI) had been considered as a method to deliver the designed outcomes given this was a fast-moving area and the submission process was lengthy.

16.5 Gideon Henderson supported the proposal noting that AI-ready data was a key theme within government and suggested that the asset value of data also be considered. He noted that there was some crossover with Defra interests and suggested that it would be helpful to have someone from Defra to sit on the steering board if it was decided to establish one.

- 16.6 Council noted that many of the discussions at the Council retreat had included data, highlighting that this was an area of high opportunity. Council suggested that one area of opportunity was Environmental DNA (eDNA) and also asked whether there was information on existing environmental data including how it worked with other systems.
- 16.7 Council commented that it would be important to consider the commercial model for the project and the long-term cost, adding that it would be useful to have an incremental plan for this large project rather than trying to do everything at once.
- 16.8 Anna Angus-Smyth commented that the NERC data centres contained a huge amount of data and it would be beneficial to catalyse the use of that data and connect it to others such as the Environment Agency, Defra and industry. She added that NERC would work with others to build up confidence before considering the full life cost and commercialisation model.
- 16.9 Council highlighted the importance of ensuring the data collected was trusted, machine readable and accessible, noting this would be a significant piece of work.

17. NERC Future Leaders Council update (NERC 25/19)

- 17.1 Charlie McNichol-Fardon provided an update from the FLC meeting held in Edinburgh in May and highlighted two of the topics for discussion at the meeting: Diversity & Inclusion and EDruk.
- 17.2 Charlie McNichol-Fardon commented that the discussion on D&I had considered that there was further work needed on how NERC defined minority groups, that there was a rigidity of funding structures and concern around the pipeline of non-traditional contributors in academia.
- 17.3 Charlie McNichol-Fardon informed Council that the FLC had been supportive of the EDruk submission, noting that the co-design was really important to get a range of perspectives.

18. Rolling programme of business (NERC 25/20)

- 18.1 Helen Page reminded Council that topics for discussion at future meetings might be submitted to her at any point. She added that an internal review of the rolling programme was planned.
- 18.2 Helen Page informed Council that plans had been initiated to hold the September Council meeting in Oxford.

19. Any Other Business (Oral)

- 19.1 There was no further business.