



Natural
Environment
Research Council

60
years
of NERC



Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) Executive Director of Science

Candidate Prospectus
June 2026

Job Identification



Job title	Executive Director of Science
Council	NERC
Salary	£94,931 to £117,800 per annum (dependent on skills and experience)
Appointment term	Full time or Part time (minimum 0.8 FTE) Open Ended, secondees and transfers welcome from universities and institutes where relevant, minimum duration 3 years
Base location	Primarily based at Polaris House, Swindon, with hybrid working as well as frequent travel for key meetings
Closing date	Wednesday 8 July 2026 at 23:55
Interviews	Interviews are expected to be held in person on w/c 3 August 2026 in London

Welcome



Hello!

We're a great Research Council - come join us – as Executive Director of Science at NERC, I'll give you the power to shape and deliver our entire research funding portfolio.

Our budget annual budget is over £550m and we work across UKRI driving research and innovation in climate science, environmental resilience, biodiversity, and clean energy. Our scientific reach covers pole to pole, the deep earth to upper atmosphere and terrestrial, freshwater and marine systems science. We fund major infrastructures such as the RRS Sir David Attenborough, our polar research vessel, to ensure we can reach places across all parts of the globe to research how our world is changing and bring evidence to the fore to inform how to act. This is such an exciting moment to join NERC as we and UKRI continue to evolve in response to scientific opportunity, global challenge, and national need.

I have created this new role to bring energy and clear leadership to an exciting and demanding role. I am supporting this role with the authority to deliver across NERC's entire research funding portfolio, from curiosity-driven research through to our investments in wider government and societal priorities and our six world-leading research centres. In 'bucket speak' this role covers all our investments in Priority Bucket 1 and our wider priority strategic and societal investments in Priority Bucket 2.

I regard our Executive Director of Science as the key interlocutor to our research community from which we nurture and grow, through our research investments, emerging areas of environmental science and build new capabilities, including identifying the talent and the skills sets we need to remain cutting edge on the international stage.

Through your leadership, effective management and strong governance of a substantial research budget, you will help us grow the outputs (data, models, insight, tools, skills) that when integrated across UKRI present the basis from which to deliver outcomes that support and drive societal and economic growth across the UK.

Welcome (cont.)

In launching this recruitment campaign, we in NERC are committed to fair and open recruitment processes and actively encourage and hope to see applications from a wide range of diverse backgrounds.


I hope you find the information in this pack of interest, and we look forward to receiving your application.

Professor Louise Heathwaite

NERC Executive Chair



About UKRI



UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and is the UK's largest public funder of research and innovation. We invest more than £10 billion each year to advance knowledge, improve lives, and drive growth.

UKRI brings together nine councils: seven disciplinary Research Councils of which NERC is one; Innovate UK, the UK's innovation agency; and Research England, which supports research and knowledge exchange at higher education institutions in England. As a UK-wide organisation, UKRI works across all four nations, in close partnership with devolved administrations and funding bodies, to support place-based priorities and maximise the impact of research and innovation across the whole of the UK.

Through our Councils and the vital national capabilities provided by our institutes, centres and units, UKRI supports, delivers and champions the creativity and vibrancy of research and innovation in the UK, for the benefit of society.

UKRI is currently undergoing a significant organisational transformation to strengthen how we deliver our mission. This change programme is designed to ensure that we have the right skills, capabilities and operating model to respond effectively to opportunity and challenge, enabling a more agile and joined-up investment. Our approach is structured around three overarching research and development priorities, set out in detail in the [Explainer: UKRI budget allocations – UKRI](#):

- **Priority Bucket 1:** Curiosity driven research
- **Priority Bucket 2:** Strategic government and societal priorities
- **Priority Bucket 3:** Innovative companies

About UKRI (cont.)



Each Council holds the domain-expertise in their area of science and drives investment in curiosity-driven research to advance knowledge. The application of the outputs and outcomes of this investment collectively support all parts of UKRI in delivering strategic government and societal priorities and helping companies scale and grow. UKRI is establishing new programmes across the second and third priorities each led by an executive chair Senior Responsible Owner, for NERC this is the Clean Energy portfolio and wider priorities for climate, adaptation, environment and resilience, with a strong focus being on the eight Modern Industrial Strategy high growth sectors.

About NERC



The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) funds environmental science that is ambitious, creative, and transformative. We have nurtured and curated the environmental science base in the UK for over 60 years since our foundation in 1965. We invest in the research, people, skills, infrastructure and data needed to ensure the UK remains at the forefront of environmental science and innovation on the global stage.

NERC's science spans the entire earth system from the atmosphere to the biosphere, hydrosphere, sub-surface, oceanic and the polar regions. We provide essential national capability through our research centres: the large research infrastructure, services, facilities, and data centres that enable cutting-edge research and make its outputs widely accessible. This includes research stations around the globe, a fleet of ships and aircraft, and satellite technology to monitor environmental change on a global scale. The long-term data which these NERC investments deliver is a critical national resource underpinning evidence-based policy decisions, enabling economic growth and securing the UK's global leadership on environmental issues.

NERC maintains a unique portfolio of national science infrastructure, including polar research stations, Royal Research Ships, satellite technologies, data centres and monitoring stations around the world. As part of UKRI, NERC is responsible for the British Geological Survey, the UK's premier, impartial provider of geoscientific data, mapping and research, and the British Antarctic Survey – the UK's national polar research institute, delivering world-leading interdisciplinary science in Antarctica and the Arctic to understand Earth's climate, ecosystems and ocean circulation.

About the role

We are seeking a dynamic, creative, and respected science leader— someone motivated by delivering impact and inspired by the opportunity to shape the future of UK environmental research.

This is a pivotal leadership role at the heart of NERC and UKRI. With responsibility for a substantial research and innovation portfolio, you will manage a large team and are expected to set the project management and governance structures in place to ensure you invest purposefully to deliver world-leading environmental science that supports growth, informs government priorities and delivers tangible benefits for society. You will shape research programmes, influence system-wide priorities, translate scientific ambition into meaningful outcomes, and most importantly work collaboratively across UKRI to make an impact.

As Executive Director of Science, you will combine intellectual leadership with strong strategic and delivery capability, working across disciplines, organisations, and national boundaries to turn complex challenges into opportunity.

You will have responsibility for developing and delivering NERC's curiosity-driven science portfolio, securing our talent and skills pipeline, reimagining our approach to knowledge exchange and commercialisation, and curating the digital and data outcomes from all these investments including our research centres. You will be expected to align your portfolio with the government's industrial strategy and wider priorities.

You will bring:

- Science leadership and authority across environmental science, with a strong track record of bridging disciplinary boundaries to unlock transformative research outcomes, underpinned by senior-level governance, programmatic leadership and decision making at an executive level.
- Proven senior research innovation and delivery experience gained in universities, national research organisations, or government science departments, with clear evidence of impact, credibility, and successful stewardship of significant portfolios.

About the role (cont.)

- Strategic and tactical vision seeing challenge as a catalyst for research innovation – identifying new ways of working across NERC and within UKRI so our research investments are empowered through collaborating effectively with partners nationally and internationally.
- Inclusive, collaborative leadership, demonstrating credibility, empathy and effectiveness in working with diverse communities, stakeholders and delivery partners.

As a newly created role, the Executive Director of Science offers a rare opportunity to shape a bold, future-focussed agenda for environmental science – advancing knowledge while accelerating the application of research and innovation to deliver economic and societal benefit.

The role has direct responsibility for approximately £300m of NERC investment, spanning curiosity-driven research, talent and skills funding, and strategically prioritised research programmes. You will ensure that these investments deliver impact and align with the new UKRI allocations model which underpins UKRI's evolving transformation agenda.

Responsibility for a further £150m of investment is shared with our NERC Chief Operations Officer (COO), reflecting the symbiotic relationships between NERC research programmes and NERC's operational architecture. You will lead the science requirements development for future NERC research infrastructure, setting the science demand signal for investment in large capital programmes, delivered by the NERC COO.

Success will require both strategic oversight and the ability to adapt at pace, keeping ahead of emerging scientific priorities and rapidly advancing technological and computational capabilities, while supporting teams to deliver at scale.

About the role (cont.)



A core element of the role will be building and leveraging partnerships – across UKRI, with other research councils, government departments and international funding agencies – to maximise the impact of NERC’s investments. This will be particularly important in areas where environmental science intersects with broader national priorities, such as health, energy systems, and resilience in urban and engineered environments. Forging collaborations across UKRI’s new Industrial Strategy programmes will be particularly important.

You will command professional esteem and engage proactively with NERC’s diverse science community, drawing on their insights to shape future priorities, while clearly articulating NERC’s strategic direction, particularly with senior academic, public sector and international leaders.

As a member of the NERC executive team, you will work closely with NERC’s Directors to ensure coherence and optimisation across the full research portfolio. This includes NERC Research Centres that receive funding to deliver long-term, large-scale research programmes and critical infrastructure platforms for the environmental science community

Key responsibilities

Reporting directly to the NERC Executive Chair you will have responsibility for:

- Budget delivery of over £300m per year of UKRI's advancing knowledge, talent and NERC-led areas of UKRI's wider priorities budget supporting research institute outcomes. You have shared responsibility for a further £150m with the NERC Chief Operating Officer.
- Staff the leadership management and development of c.80 staff, and an opportunity to shape your team to best deliver against your responsibilities.
- Advancing knowledge through a well-designed programme of curiosity-driven research, talent and skills funding with a view to increasing the rate of conversion of curiosity-driven research (UKRI priority bucket 1) into societal outcomes including innovation and growth (UKRI priority buckets 2 and 3).
- Data-driven investments in scientific infrastructure to deliver NERC's current and future science needs, in order that NERC can effectively task its research centres to deliver the long-term data to support the evolving needs of the environmental science community, as well as working with the Chief Operating Officer and the centres to prioritise NERC's investment in research equipment, facilities and infrastructure.
- Shaping collaboration across new UKRI programmes and aligning with UKRI policies and to inform the latest thinking to continually improve the efficiency and effectiveness of NERC's science funding.
- Driving leverage through strategic opportunities for collaborations that leverage partnerships including international collaboration.
- Supporting research community as our critical point of senior contact, winning trust, and confidence at senior level to pick up the latest intelligence on scientific developments and ensure strong stakeholder relationships with universities and research institutes.
- Liaison across UKRI teams to ensure that NERC delivers the best possible outcomes against our priorities.
- Team working across our executive team to lead and support change in NERC as part of UKRI's transformation, including the evolution of executive team roles and responsibilities.
- Championing equality, diversity and inclusion



Your skills and experience

What we're looking for:

S – Assessed at shortlisting

I – Assessed at interview

S&I – Assessed at both shortlisting and interview

- A strong track record of achievement and established credibility in a senior role relevant to the Environmental Sciences. This can include, but is not limited to, roles from across academia, research institutes, or policy. (S)
- Substantial and diverse experience of working across the UK science funding landscape and a deep understanding of environmental science and its applications relevant to the NERC and UKRI's mission (S)
- A consistent track record of research delivery and governance with an ability to take a broad view across the NERC in formulating strategy and priority areas for future investments. (I)
- An ability to work within a fast-moving environment, troubleshoot problems and resolve issues as they emerge, anticipating obstacles and staying ahead of emerging risks. (S&I)
- Financial aptitude and analytical skills with experience managing comparable budgets – including working with finance professionals to appropriately forecast and plan expenditure, working within delegated budgetary responsibilities. (S)
- Demonstrable programme delivery skills in a research funding or related environment, delivering large research programmes across complex teams. (I)
- Strong leadership skills, demonstrating an ability to work across functional and organisational boundaries to deliver shared goals and outcomes. (S&I)

Desirable Criteria:

- A PhD in a STEM subject, or related experience

Your team is primarily located in the Swindon area. Whilst an ability to lead and build relationships at a distance is beneficial, this is also a role where visibility will be important, so travel to our offices and sites on a regular basis is expected.

Benefits

We recognise and value our employees as individuals and aim to provide a favourable pay and rewards package! We are committed to supporting employees' development and promote a culture of continuous learning. A list of benefits below.

- An excellent defined benefit pension scheme
- 30 days' annual leave in addition to 10.5 public and privilege days (full time equivalent)
- Employee discounts and offers on retail and leisure activities.
- Employee assistance programme, providing confidential help and advice.
- Flexible working options

Please click here for more details on the [Benefits of working at UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\)](#)

How to apply

Applicants are required to provide an up-to-date CV and a statement of suitability outlining their suitability for the role against the required criteria. Please click 'apply' for further information and to visit our careers page.

UKRI is committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion. We encourage applications from candidates of all backgrounds and are open to flexible working arrangements, including job share and secondment opportunities.