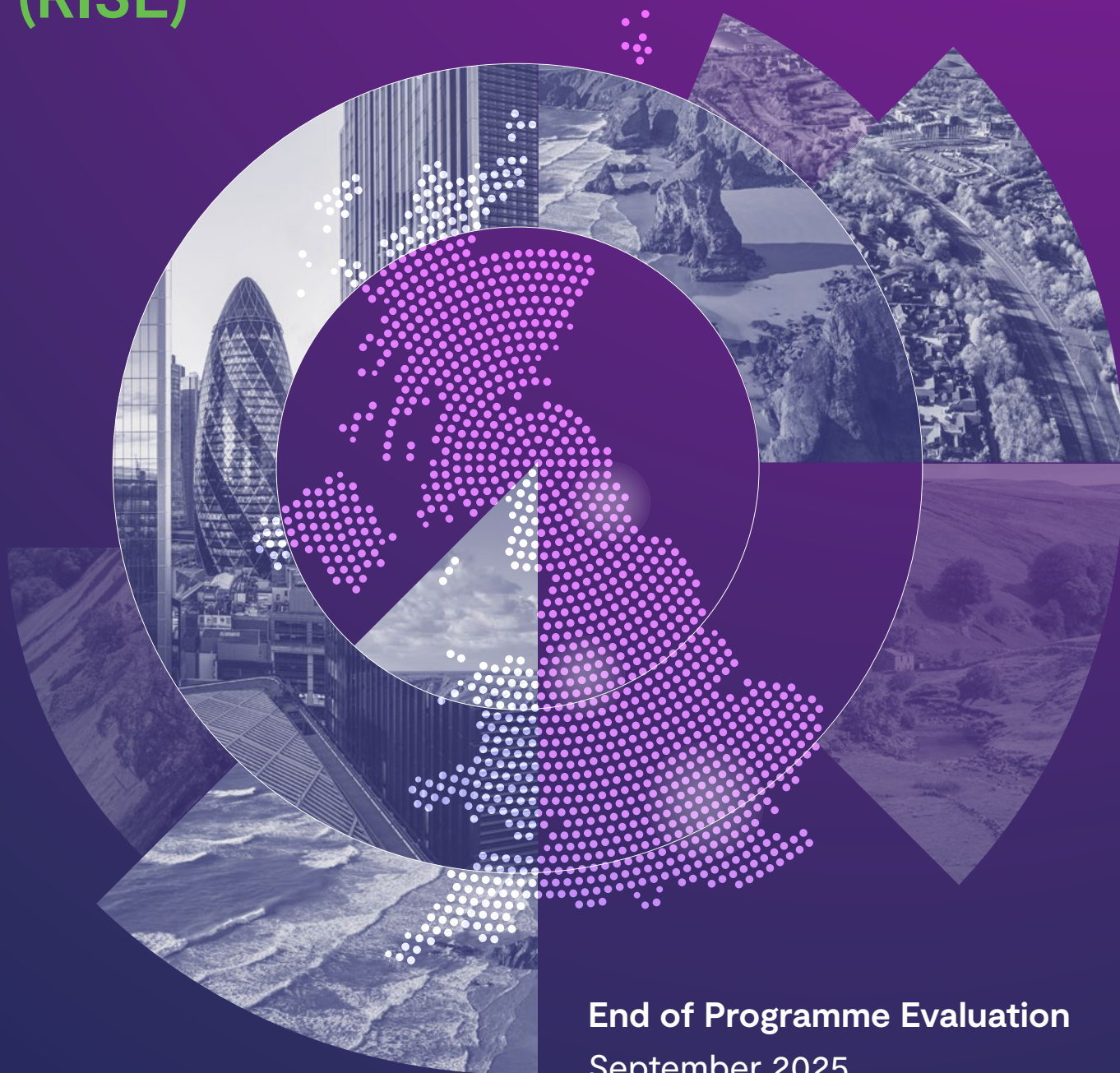


Regional Impact from the Science of the Environment (RISE)



End of Programme Evaluation
September 2025

Foreword

People experience and benefit from the natural environment across a range of spatial scales – from local to national and beyond. Regional scales are particularly useful for developing and applying environmental science. This is because regions have distinct climates, geographies, and natural resources that can be analysed and managed as environmental systems. Regional studies are also useful for engaging with communities on collective challenges and opportunities around where they live.

The Regional Impact from the Science of the Environment (RISE) programme has explored the benefits of developing and applying environmental science in 4 regions: Yorkshire, London, the West Midlands and the South West. It has covered a wide range of specialist topics and has shown how scientific expertise and community experience can be coupled to protect, manage and improve different environments. It has also contributed to the health, economy and sustainability of each region. This report summarises the findings of an evaluation panel that reviewed how well RISE has fulfilled its remit to show how science can inform stewardship of the environment at a regional scale.

The studies in each region have focussed on particular specialist topics: catchment science in Yorkshire, air quality in the West Midlands, community water management in London, and the use of “natural capital” methods to manage coastal risks, fisheries and land use in the South West. The work has included local case studies whose findings are applicable to similar situations in each region and beyond.

Although RISE studies have related to specific regions and topics, they have many common features. For example, they have all included economic factors and aspects of human or ecosystem health. Also, they have all attracted major extra resources from stakeholders in government, industry, academia and communities. The impact of RISE is not only scientific but extends to how people engage and collaborate. At every stage, RISE studies have involved scientists and communities with different levels and types of expertise and experience. Consequently, “buy in” to science-based solutions has been assured from the start.

The RISE programme has run for 7 years and was extended because of the COVID pandemic. The scientists in each region and the management team at UKRI/NERC showed great resilience and leadership during COVID, enabling the programme to deliver as intended - and more. RISE’s most enduring legacy is probably its development of the “next generation” of practitioners in environmental science and community engagement. It has done this by involving early-career scientists in place-based knowledge exchange and applications. This is a technical and cultural legacy that bodes well for stewardship of regional environments in the future.

Professor Roger Timmis
Chair of RISE Evaluation Panel



Regional impact from the science of the environment (RISE) End of programme evaluation



Executive Summary

This report summarises the evaluation by an independent panel of NERC's Regional Impact of Science of the Environment (RISE) programme, conducted in September 2025. RISE was a £17.1 million NERC investment that aimed to connect research organisations with businesses, policy bodies and communities to translate environmental science into practical innovation for regional benefit.

The programme funded four five-year awards across two rounds (2017–2019). The evaluation primarily assessed progress against its four objectives, identifying exemplars and areas of best practice. It also aimed to identify learning and insights for future investments with similar ambitions.

As a secondary activity it also offered the opportunity to gather strategic insights on the effectiveness of the programme's place-based funding approach, including the role of universities, infrastructure needs and evaluation metrics.

Key programme successes

Place-based investments

The RISE programme has demonstrated the value and potential of long-term, place-based investment in environmental science that is co-created and co-delivered with diverse partners.

Strong partnerships

RISE engaged with stakeholders from the outset to identify regionally important challenges and focus on the co-design and co-delivery of solutions. RISE successfully built lasting collaborations between academia, authorities, regulators and communities; creating engagement models now replicated elsewhere.

Enduring impact

Follow-on funding, active communities of practice and legacy tools show collaborations have outlived initial funding.

Cultural shift

Researchers and stakeholders adopted more open, co-creative approaches to environmental problem-solving.

Impact

RISE attracted an estimated additional £132 million from private and public sources, nearly eight times the original £17.1 million UKRI investment, and generated an estimated £69 million gross value added (GVA)¹.

Beyond financial returns, it:

- strengthened partnerships
- raised public awareness
- supported training
- engaged over 259 non-academic organisations

Publications have been cited in 68 policy documents globally. Over a third of RISE publications (37.8%) were co-authored by non-academic organisations (including government, facilities, business and charities).

RISE publications received two to five times more citations compared to publications published in the same year and a similar research area (x field citation ratio = 4.1).

1. Aggregated figures from individual end of project reports

The RISE programme has delivered significant impact by leveraging

£69

million

Financial and economic impact

RISE attracted an additional £132 million funding from an initial £17.1 million investment, producing an estimated £69 million GVA to the UK economy.



Regional project focus

The projects targeted specific UK regions, enabling focused research and regional impact. (regions: Greater London, south-west, Yorkshire and the Humber, West Midlands).

259+

organisations

Broad organisational engagement

The programme involved over 259 non-academic organisations, enabling extensive collaboration and multi-sector partnerships.



68

citations

Policy influence and citations

RISE research influenced policy across Europe, North America and Africa with citations in 68 policy documents.



Innovation in environmental governance

The programme fostered cultural change and developed innovative tools and governance models for lasting environmental impact.



SWEEP

Decision-support tools for land management and natural capital accounting.



iCASP

Governance frameworks for flood risk management.



WM-Air

Data-driven air quality models for regional policy.



CAMELLIA

Participatory governance models for water management.



Programme progress against objectives

Objective

1

The panel concluded that RISE demonstrated very good performance in using significant NERC investment to connect institution specific research excellence with the key businesses, policy bodies and other stakeholders particular to their location(s) to bring about tangible outcomes.

The panel commended the programme for its pioneering approach to collaborative research, successfully engaging a diverse range of partners across sectors, including over 259 different non-academic organisations.

This breadth included practitioners, policy makers, communities and regulators, ensuring the right partners were involved at the right time to drive meaningful outcomes and lasting change.

The programme was recognised for pushing boundaries and setting a strong foundation for future collaborations.

 **iCASP**
Yorkshire

 **CAMELLIA**
London

 **WM-Air**
West Midlands

 **SWEEP**
South-west



Benefits arising from effective partnerships:

iCASP Transforming catchment management research into practical applications for flood mitigation, drought resilience and sustainable agriculture across Yorkshire.

SWEEP Enhancing the ‘natural capital’ of the South-west by providing businesses and policymakers with tools to manage coastal hazards, sustainable fisheries and land use.

CAMELLIA Providing integrated water management solutions to enable sustainable housing growth in London by breaking down ‘silos’ between infrastructure, planning and environmental regulation.

WM-Air Influencing major regional investments and supporting the development of the first West Midlands Air Quality Framework.

Objective

2

The panel concluded that RISE demonstrated very good performance in conducting a coherent programme of high impact, focused, co-designed and co-delivered research translation and innovation activities

The panel found strong evidence of impactful translation activities across the programme, including:

- academic outputs
- policy guidance
- digital tools
- capacity-building efforts

These were underpinned by strong evidence of collaborative design and stakeholder engagement.

While co-design was consistently well-executed, evidence of co-delivery varied across projects, and challenges were apparent in sustaining these practices. Legacy planning was highlighted as essential, requiring continued funding and institutional support.

**£132
million**

Economic returns

At the point of assessment, RISE generated a nearly eightfold return on investment, attracting an additional £132 million from a £17.1 million investment.



Societal and cultural impact

RISE fostered cultural change, building trust and embedding co-creative approaches among multiple stakeholders, for example iCASP directly informed Defra's Environmental Land Management scheme (ELM).

**6,175
citations**

Research and innovation outputs

The programme produced 258 publications, 6,175 citations and one patent, 68 policy documents citing RISE research and nine datasets influencing global policy documents. RISE publications received two to five times more citations than similar research in the same year.

Examples of research outputs include:

SWEEP

SWEEP's research underpinned the world's first Marine Natural Capital Plan, which has led to the protection of five commercially important fish species.

iCASP

An online tool developed by i-CASP, which has been embedded into health and wellbeing training packages delivered by three different health partnerships locally and nationally.

CAMELLIA

A water management tool developed by CAMELLIA, which was used to inform:

- the Environment Agency's 'Systems Approach to Integrated Water Planning' working paper
- seven policy and planning case studies used by the city authorities of London and Manchester

WM-Air

The first West Midlands Air Quality Framework adopted to enable, drive and coordinate future air quality policy actions across all local authorities. This led to a further £1.5 million central government and £370k regional funding.

Objective

3

The panel concluded that RISE demonstrated very good performance in attracting resources and contributions from other sources of funds relevant to the ambition of the proposal.

The panel praised the programme's impressive resource mobilisation, with the programme achieving significant returns on UKRI investment through match funding and in-kind contributions, including education and community-building efforts.

The strength of partnership and collaboration achieved as part of objective 1 was recognised as a significant factor in the projects' ability to attract additional funding

and support. It also provided a demonstrable measure of the value of time spent investing in partnerships.

The flexibility of the funding model enabled diverse forms of contribution, though the lack of standardised metrics made comparison challenging. The panel recognised that lower total amounts should not be equated with a weaker performance against this objective.



SWEEP

Engaged

200+
stakeholders

across farming,
business and local
authorities.

Delivered

£11.5
million

in economic benefits
through collaborative
land management
strategies.



iCASP

Co-created
solutions with

50+
partner

organisations.

Supported

£120
million

flood risk investment
decisions, reducing
community
vulnerability.



WM-Air

Involved

30+
regional
authorities

and health agencies.

Improved air quality
policy impacting

£2.8
million

residents in the
West Midlands.



CAMELLIA

Engaged

1000+
London
residents

in participatory water
management.

Developed governance
models influencing

£4.5
billion

urban infrastructure
projects.

Objective

4

The panel concluded that RISE demonstrated very good performance in creating durable collaborations between the academic and non-academic participants.

The panel identified strong early signs of durable collaborations, including sustained communities of practice, legacy assets and follow-on funding. PIs across all four RISE collaborations have gone on to secure additional collaborative funding. SWEEP and Wm-Air were particularly successful, obtaining 13 and 10 collaborative grants respectively, while CAMELLIA and iCASP each secured 2. It is worth noting that CAMELLIA and iCASP had only just completed their RISE projects at the time of this assessment.

They emphasised that lasting impact depends not only on financial continuity, but also on cultural and behavioural shifts among partners, which were evident but uneven across the programme.

Systemic challenges, such as the need for institutional commitment, support roles and national-level continuity mechanisms, were noted as critical to sustaining collaborative momentum beyond individual projects.



Programme design, delivery and evaluation: key reflections

The panel identified several cross-cutting challenges that affected the ability to fully assess programme performance.

A key challenge was the limited evidence for how collaborations, co-delivery and partnership functioning operated in practice, with much of the available data remaining research-centric rather than practice-oriented.

Establishing credible counterfactuals was also difficult due to pre-existing partnerships and differing project start and end dates, which created inconsistencies in the availability of evidence and hindered aggregation across awards.

Whilst the programme's flexible funding model enabled context-specific innovation, it also introduced variability in reporting formats and processes, complicating assessments of what worked systematically versus contextually.

The panel therefore emphasised the need for shared metrology from the outset, alongside improved evidence gathering of how well processes are working.

Finally, they also highlighted that the long-term sustainability of partnerships depended on institutional support, administrative capacity and dedicated facilitation roles, all of which should be embedded more explicitly in future investments.



List of acronyms

RISE	Regional Impact from the Science of the Environment
NERC	Natural Environment Research Council
UKRI	UK Research and Innovation
PEG	Programme Executive Group
SRO	Senior Responsible Officer
PI	Principal Investigator
SWEEP	South West Partnership for Environmental and Economic Prosperity
iCASP	Yorkshire Integrated Catchment Solutions Programme
WM-Air	West Midlands Air Quality Improvement Programme
CAMELLIA	Community Water Management for a Liveable London
DSIT	Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
STFC	Science and Technology Facilities Council

Acknowledgements

NERC would like to thank the chair and members of the independent evaluation panel for providing their expertise and time for this activity. Their considered, constructive and expert opinions have been extremely useful.

Lessons learned from this evaluation will be used to inform and provide guidance to NERC and UKRI when considering the design and delivery of investments with similar ambitions to RISE.

Our gratitude is also extended to the individual awards who contributed their time and resources to the evaluation evidence pack.

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Brief introduction to RISE

The NERC-funded Regional Impact from Science of the Environment (RISE) programme was a £17 million investment designed to bring research organisations together with businesses, policy bodies and other actors contributing to regional economic development. Its purpose was to deliver significant regional impact from NERC environmental science.

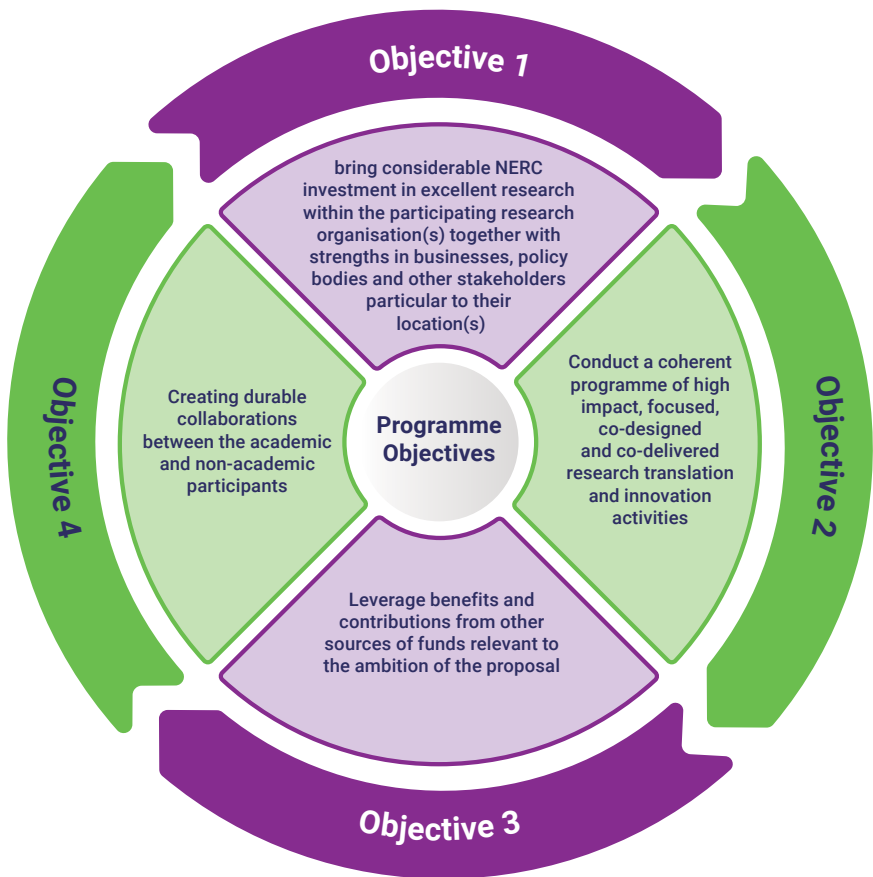
The initiative built on the earlier Environmental Science Impact programme, maintaining a strong focus on translating environmental research into regional benefits, an ambition aligned with the UK’s Industrial Strategy 2017.

The overarching goal of the RISE programme was to achieve transformative impact from NERC environmental science through the following objectives.

Under the RISE programme, NERC funded four projects across two grant rounds. The programme was overseen by a Programme Executive Group (PEG), chaired by the NERC Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) (or their delegated authority), with membership including project Principal Investigators, NERC delivery team representatives and external experts.

Projects were tasked with applying existing environmental science research to address local environmental challenges through collaboration and partnership with key stakeholders. As research translation initiatives, they brought together academics, policymakers, businesses and community partners to co-design and deliver impactful, locally relevant activities.

The four funded projects are described below. For the purposes of this evaluation and related documentation, the term ‘programme’ refers to the collective activity across all four projects, while ‘project’ (or ‘award’) refers to the individual funded activities under each grant.



South-west partnership for environmental and economic prosperity (SWEEP)

1 Feb 2017 - 31 Jan 2023

Value: £4,118,113

NERC Reference: NE/P011217/1

SWEEP delivered economic and community benefits across the south-west while protecting and enhancing the region's natural resources, with a particular focus on water management. The programme was a collaboration between:

- the University of Exeter
- Plymouth Marine Laboratory
- the University of Plymouth.

At the core of SWEEP's mission was the commitment to reverse the long-term decline in natural capital (the natural assets that underpin economic growth), well-being and prosperity.

SWEEP's work was structured around the following impact themes:

Safeguarding natural capital

Protect and enhance natural capital to increase resilience across the region.

Integrated policymaking

Support decision-making that drives natural capital-led economic growth.

Restoration for benefit

Restore natural capital to generate economic, social and environmental benefits.

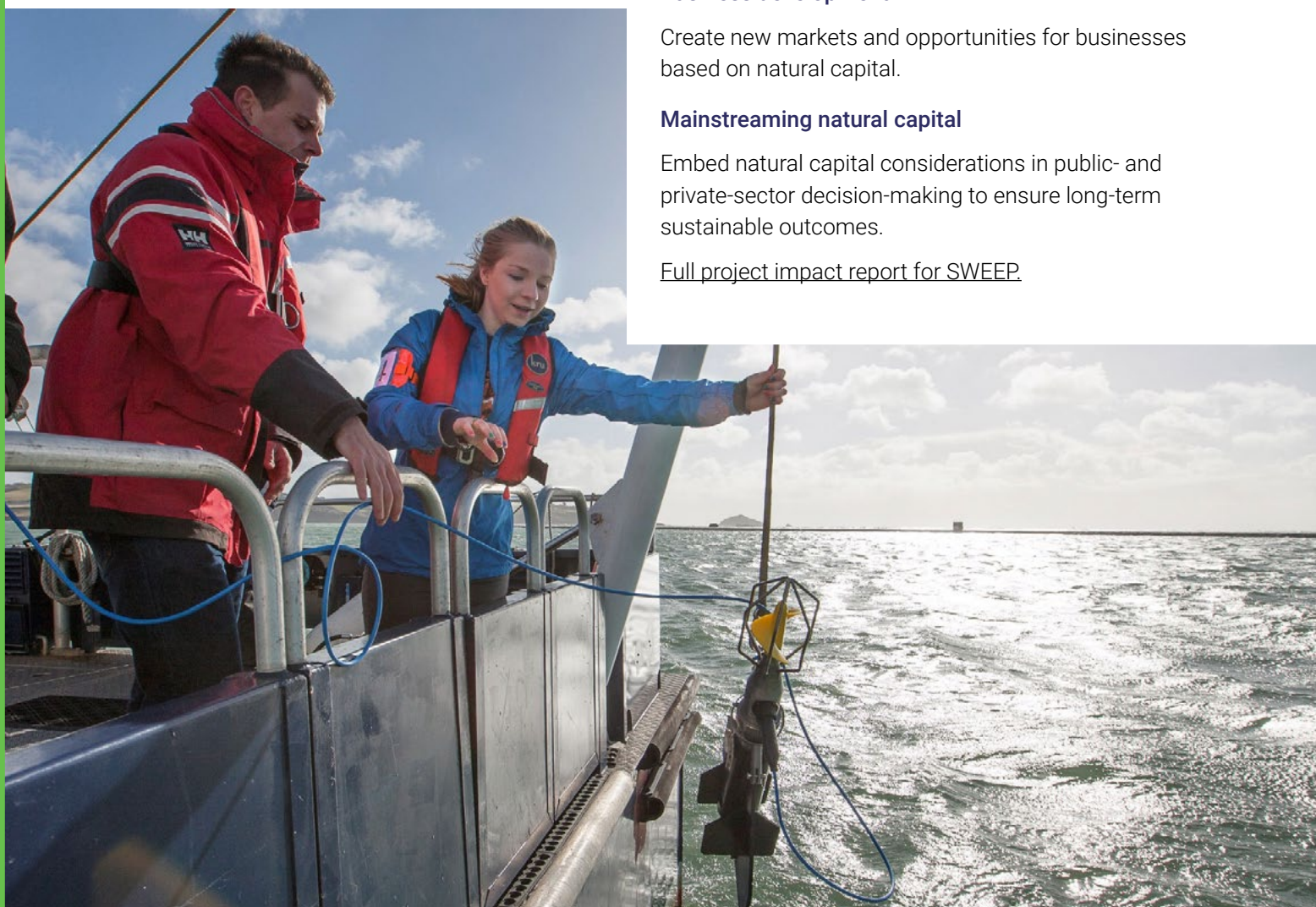
Business development

Create new markets and opportunities for businesses based on natural capital.

Mainstreaming natural capital

Embed natural capital considerations in public- and private-sector decision-making to ensure long-term sustainable outcomes.

[Full project impact report for SWEEP.](#)



Yorkshire integrated catchment solutions programme (iCASP)

1 Feb 2017 - 31 Jan 2024

Value: £4,821,201

NERC Reference: NE/P011160/1

iCASP delivered benefits for Yorkshire by applying environmental science to real-world catchment management challenges. Its projects were based within the Yorkshire Ouse Drainage Basin, an area home to around 6.7% of the UK population.

The main aims of iCASP were:

Economic impact

Generate over £50 million of benefits for Yorkshire's economy by influencing investments, identifying cost savings and creating new products and jobs.

Expert network

Build a robust network of catchment management experts to support collaborative knowledge exchange and capacity building.

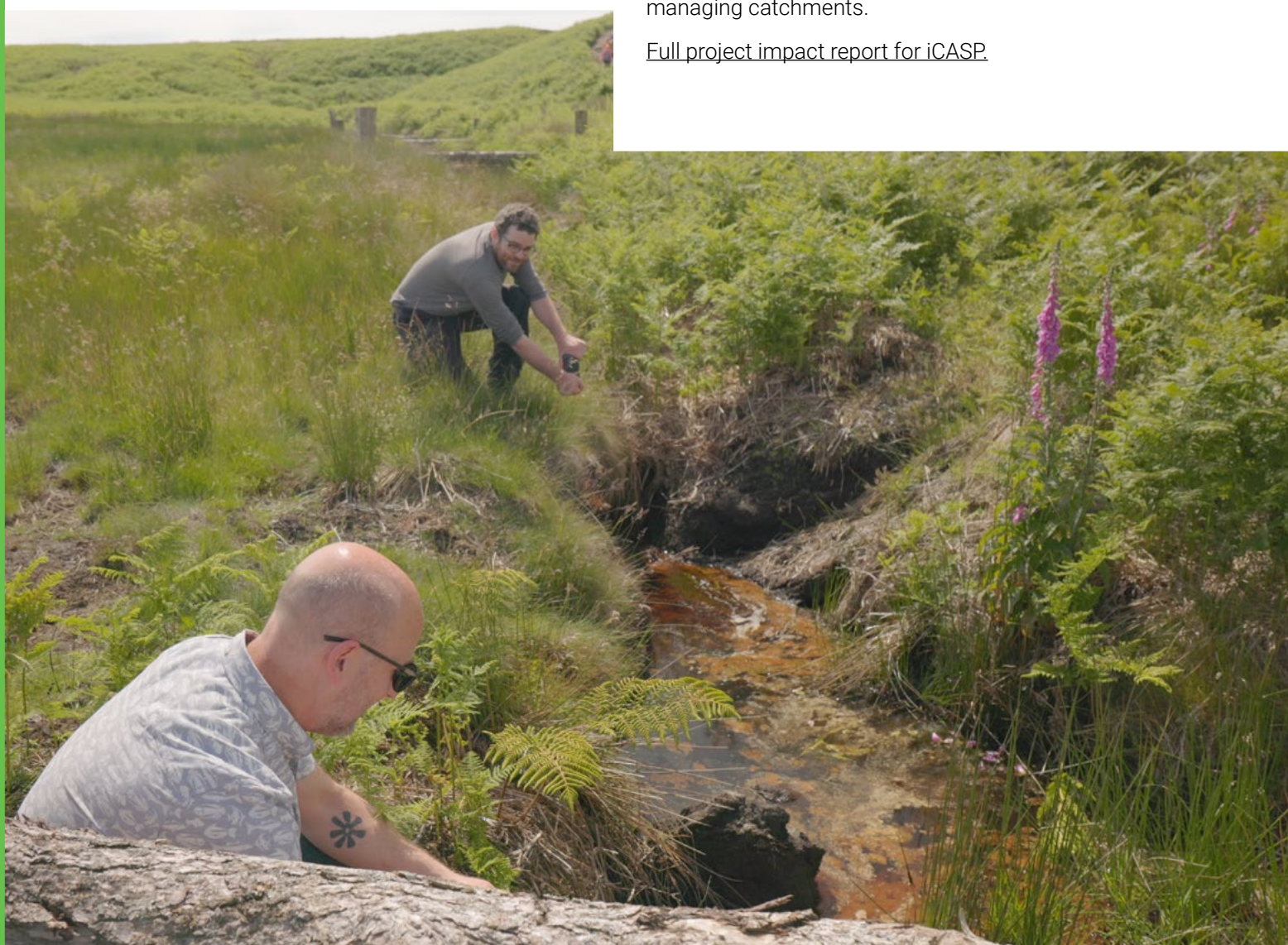
Policy and strategy support

Inform policies and strategies at local and regional levels, ensuring that environmental science underpins decision-making.

Practical tools and materials

Produce accessible tools and resources to help practitioners apply environmental science effectively in managing catchments.

[Full project impact report for iCASP](#)



West Midlands air quality improvement programme (WM-Air)

1 Jan 2019 - 31 Dec 2024

Value: £4,000,649

NERC Reference: NE/S003487/1

WM-Air supported efforts to improve air quality in the West Midlands, delivering associated health, environmental and economic benefits for the region. The programme aimed to enhance understanding of pollution sources and levels, and to build new capability to predict air quality, health and economic impacts arising from different policy measures.

WM-Air had three overarching aims:

Situational awareness

Improve understanding of the region's air pollution challenges by providing new measurements and quantifying pollution sources by sector, including real-world on-road vehicle emissions.

Predictive capability

Develop tools to support clean air policies by modelling future air quality and intervention scenarios, evaluating their health and economic impacts and providing guidance on the use of green infrastructure (urban vegetation) to improve air quality.

Application

Apply new understanding and modelling capability to a portfolio of projects addressing partner needs, including:

- major interventions (eg clean air zones)
- infrastructure developments (eg the Commonwealth Games)
- other initiatives across regional and local scales

[Full project impact report for WM-Air.](#)



Community water management for a liveable London (CAMELLIA)

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/environmental-and-water-resource-engineering/research/camellia/>

1 Oct 2018 - 31 Mar 2025

Value: £4,129,083

NERC Reference: NE/S003495/1

CAMELLIA brought together experts in environmental science, engineering, urban planning, socioeconomics and organisational studies with institutional and industry stakeholders, as well as citizens, to co-develop a systems approach to urban water management.

This approach provided integrated solutions to support housing growth in London while sustainably managing the city's water and environmental resources.

This aim was pursued through the following five subsidiary objectives:

Strategic partnerships

Develop partnerships with stakeholder communities involved in, or affected by, water management decisions.

Understanding community perspectives

Work with partners to understand communal perceptions of the water system, associated challenges and shared goals.

Integrated modelling

Collaborate with stakeholders to collate, develop and integrate models representing all interacting components of the urban water cycle, supporting joint modelling of the water environment.

System analysis tools

Develop tools that translate model outputs into a common language, facilitating informed dialogue and decision-making among stakeholders. This enables them to reach agreed solutions for London's complex water management challenges.

Demonstration and upscaling: test the approach and tools through four case studies:

- urban renewal (Thamesmead)
- housing development (Southwark)
- water infrastructure regeneration (Mogden, West London)
- flood risk and water quality (Enfield)

Insights from these case studies will be scaled up to produce London-wide models that support collaborative water management and decision-making across the capital.

[Full impact report for CAMELLIA.](#)



Introduction to the end of programme evaluation

Purpose of the evaluation

NERC was keen to understand how well the RISE programme performed against its four overarching objectives through the collective action of the four awards, and to capture, understand and celebrate its successes.

Equally important was the opportunity for NERC to learn from the experiences of project and delivery teams about what has worked well and what has not, in order to inform the design and delivery of future investments with similar ambitions.

The purpose of this evaluation was therefore to establish:

- how well the RISE programme performed against each of its objectives
- the key successes and impacts of the RISE programme
- what the main areas of learning have been so that they can be used by NERC, UKRI and the research community to inform the design and delivery of future investments, projects and activities that adopt a place-based funding approach to driving regional impact

NERC developed a set of evaluation questions in consultation with the four projects, which are presented in Table 2.

An independent peer review panel (hereafter referred to as 'the panel') assessed evidence provided by NERC and the projects against an assessment criteria rubric (see annexes 1 and 2 respectively).

The panel evaluated the programme against objectives 1 to 4 so that key conclusions could be drawn (pp 22-23) and some strategic perspectives offered on place-based research in general (p 23).

Audience

The findings from the evaluation will be made publicly available through NERC's externally facing website. The audience for these findings include:

- NERC
- UKRI councils
- UKRI policy and evaluation colleagues
- DSIT
- the four individual project teams and their partners and stakeholders
- members of the RISE Programme Executive Group (PEG)
- the broader environmental science community
- other funders
- the UK taxpayer

Independent review panel

The review panel consisted of Programme Executive Group (PEG) members, UKRI evaluation experts and external experts. The panel membership was as follows:

Roger Timmis Chair, Environment Agency, PEG member

Cathy Parker Manchester Metropolitan University

Charlotte Glass STFC UKRI, Evaluation Programme Manager

Sarah Castell Involve - Senior leader in democratic reform, strategy, public engagement and social research

David Mulligan UKRI, Strategy Lead, Place

Kristel Miller University of Ulster - Professor of Entrepreneurship & Small Business Development

Evaluation questions

RISE programme objectives, evaluation questions and evidence sources



Objective

1

Bring considerable NERC investment in excellent research within the participating research organisation(s) together with strengths in businesses, policy bodies and other stakeholders particular to their location(s)

1a. To what extent was the programme successful in progressing existing, and supporting the development of new collaborations and partnerships that are inclusive of the full range of relevant stakeholder



Project impact reports



Dimensions analysis

1b. What learning and insights about supporting successful collaboration and partnership can be drawn from the evidence that would be of benefit to future place-based investments?



Learning and insights

Objective

2

Conduct a coherent programme of high impact, focused, co-designed and co-delivered research translation and innovation activities

1a. To what extent was the programme successful in progressing existing, and supporting the development of new collaborations and partnerships that are inclusive of the full range of relevant stakeholder



Project impact reports



Dimensions analysis

1b. What learning and insights about supporting successful collaboration and partnership can be drawn from the evidence that would be of benefit to future place-based investments?



Learning and insights



Objective

3

Leverage benefits and contributions from other sources of funds relevant to the ambition of the proposal

3a. To what extent have projects leveraged benefits and contributions by others?

↗ Project impact reports ↗ Dimensions analysis ↗ Learning and insights

3b. What learning and insights about maximising opportunities can be drawn from the evidence that would be of benefit to future place-based investments?

Objective

4

Creating durable collaborations between the academic and non-academic participants

4a. To what extent are the collaborations and partnerships that were active during the funded activities showing evidence of becoming long lasting and durable?

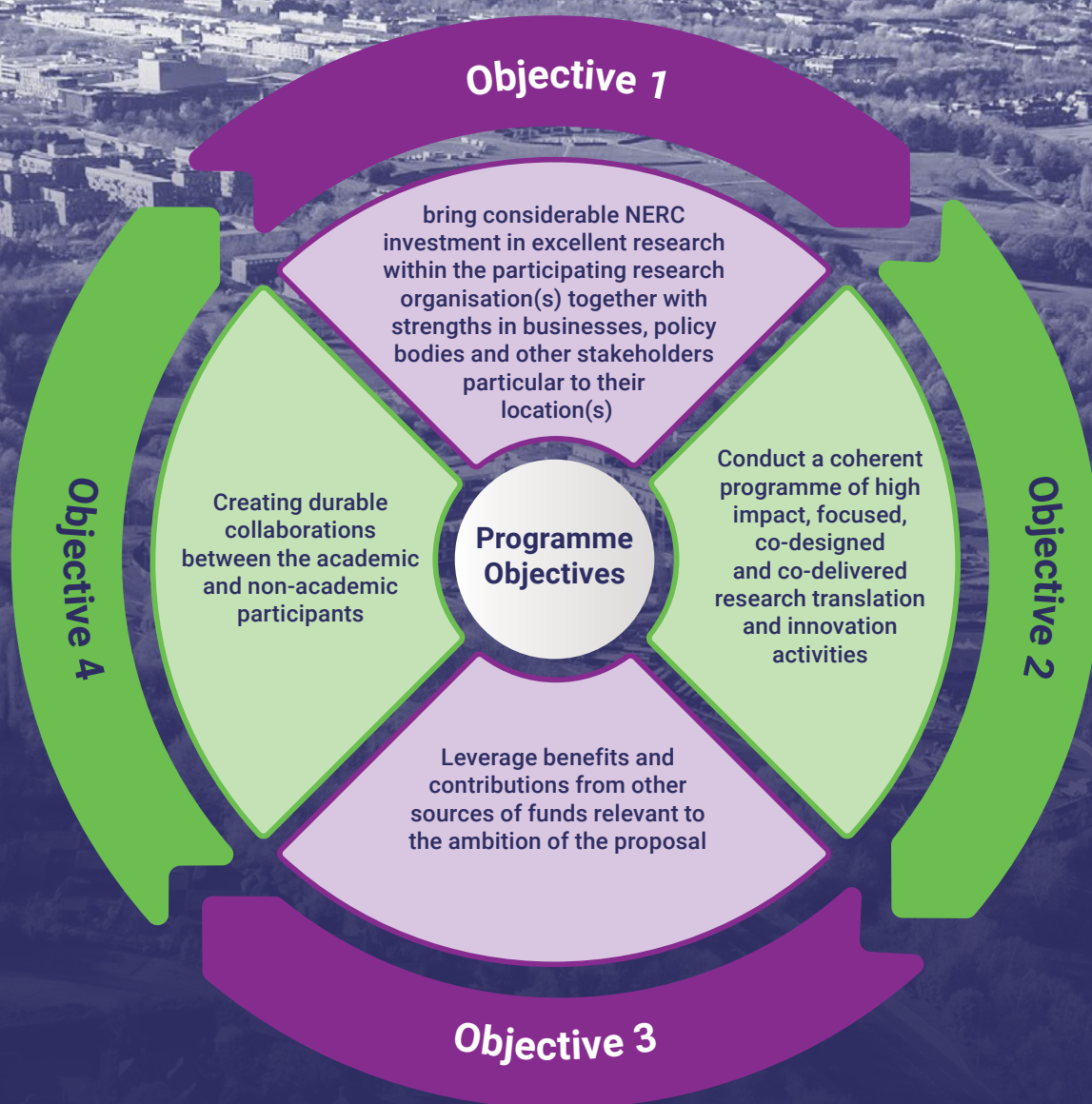
↗ Project impact reports ↗ Dimensions analysis

4b. What learning and insights about what makes collaborations and partnerships enduring can be drawn from the evidence that would be of benefit to future place-based investments?

↗ Learning and insights

Programme evaluation findings

This section presents the findings of the panel relating to how well the programme performed against its objectives, including supporting comments, areas of best practice and relevant recommendations for each of the objectives.



Objective

1

General feedback

Assessment of partnership quality

The panel highlighted the strong cross-sector nature of the partnerships, with over 259 engaged organisations being non-academic bodies. The full spectrum of potential partners was represented in the programme, including:

- practitioners
- policymakers
- communities
- regulators

Individual panel members described the programme as having pushed the boundaries on what's possible in collaborative research, and that it represented a 'pioneering' approach.

The panel would like to have seen more information on diversity, inclusion and how shared decision-making happened in practice within the networks.

Variation and challenges in partnerships

The panel discussed the wide range of regionally relevant partners, but identified some potential disparity in partnership strength, particularly regarding private sector involvement.

They questioned whether such engagement was always appropriate or feasible given the wide variation in aims between the projects, and the difficulties/absence of adequate counter-factuals.

The panel agreed that based on the evidence provided the right partners had been engaged at the right time, as was evidenced by the outcomes and progress made towards delivering lasting change.

Sustainability and support for partnerships

The panel strongly emphasised the need for ongoing support and funding to sustain partnerships, warning against over-reliance on individual effort and highlighting the importance of institutional infrastructure and reward systems.



Clear evidence of productive partnering with relevant and required stakeholders. Evidence from across the programme additionally shows robust attempts to reach partners identified as valuable but which have previously failed to engage.

Minor or no inconsistencies.

Programme highlights

Breadth, reach and high-quality collaboration

The RISE programme demonstrated extensive breadth and inclusivity.

Engaging

259+

non-academic organisations

and resulting in over a third of the publications being co-authored by members of non-academic sectors.

Partners included

- other academic institutions,
- government
- industry
- civil society
- NGOs
- professional bodies
- NHS
- sporting organisations

Some projects (eg CAMELLIA) actively involved citizens through participatory methods.

Projects had clearly identified and engaged with key regional partners, and the panel concluded that their sustained commitment and enthusiasm was evidence of genuine partnership focussing on real-world, relevant problems.

Across the four projects, RISE involved a large and diverse range of participants:

SWEEP

325 partners

iCASP

51 direct

+ 325 engaged

WM-AIR

40

+ 123

CAMELLIA

28

As a result of early commitments to collaboration and partnership, genuine examples of co-design were evident across the projects, resulting in outcomes and impacts emerging earlier than might have been expected.

Projects addressed a broad spectrum of environmental challenges, with participatory approaches evolving to balance citizen engagement against conventional economic metrics.

Examples of outcomes and emerging impact examples include:

WM-Air



Economic benefit: influencing major regional investments and supporting the development of the first West Midlands Air Quality Framework.

£40 million

Example: the project has leveraged and influenced over £40 million of investments and is estimated to deliver a total GVA benefit of £34 million to the region by 2028.

SWEEP



Economic benefit: enhancing the natural capital of the south-west by providing businesses and policymakers with tools to manage coastal hazards, sustainable fisheries and land use.

£35 million

Example: SWEEP has delivered over £35 million in economic benefits to the South-west of England (eg through avoided costs from improved hazard forecasting and business decision-making for sectors like offshore shellfish and wave energy).

CAMELLIA



Economic benefit: providing integrated water management solutions to enable sustainable housing growth in London by breaking down silos between infrastructure, planning and environmental regulation.



Example: while overall project-wide GVA is still maturing, CAMELLIA's nature-based solutions have reduced traditional centralised infrastructure costs (such as wastewater treatment) for local communities, and its research directly supports the delivery of thousands of new homes in London that would otherwise face water-security constraints.

iCASP



Economic benefit: Transforming catchment management research into practical applications for flood mitigation, drought resilience and sustainable agriculture across Yorkshire.

£50 million

Example: From an initial £5 million NERC investment, iCASP has already generated and influenced over £50 million in benefits for the Yorkshire region, including significant cost savings and new funding for environmental projects.

Stakeholder experience of collaboration

- RISE fostered deep, co-developed engagement with academic and non-academic stakeholders
- Academics worked closely with communities, governments and the public sector, prioritising real-world impact
- Impact fellows acted as critical bridges across sectors, and initiatives like the WM-Air Citizens' Panel provided effective models for meaningful public engagement



Non-academic participants benefitted from inclusive, participatory structures, early involvement and empowerment.

They reported the experience as “rewarding, interesting, and inspiring.”



Areas of best practice

RISE demonstrated best practice through strategic, inclusive and policy-aligned governance with small, well-supported groups.



Programme design and delivery benefitted from long-term, flexible funding, embedded Impact Fellows, and planning for staff continuity.



Project delivery combined impact-first planning, policy alignment, barrier mapping and agile, structured methods, while cross-project collaboration was encouraged.



Stakeholder engagement was early, sustained, co-designed and tailored using workshops, webinars and neutral spaces, with adequate resourcing.



Impact recording and evaluation used simple, shared systems, supported qualitative evidence, and incorporated legacy, scalability, open access and non-academic impact considerations.

General feedback

Evidence of impactful translation activities

The panel highlighted the programme's diverse portfolio of research translation, including:

- highly cited academic publications
- policy guidance
- digital tools
- communities of practice
- capacity-building activities

They noted strong stakeholder engagement and collaborative design processes, with projects learning from each other and early co-creation examples influencing later initiatives. Some unevenness in impact reporting was observed, likely due to staggered project end dates, with two projects only recently completed. Additionally, certain activities were described with limited detail on substance or impact.

Variation in co-design and co-delivery

While co-design was consistently strong across projects, co-delivery and co-production were more unevenly evidenced. Some participants highlighted challenges in sustaining these approaches and embedding them as standard practice.

Sustainability and legacy planning

The panel stressed the importance of planning for sustainability and legacy, noting that continued impact depends on ongoing funding, diversified support and institutional commitment beyond the project lifecycle.



Strong evidence across the programme that co-creation and co-delivery with stakeholders is a normalised approach.

Programme highlights

All RISE projects demonstrated significant impact, with SWEEP particularly notable for policy influence. Across the programme, projects were positively assessed for both process and outcomes, showing evidence of effective co-design and collaborative translation of research into practice.

The projects illustrate co-creation approaches now being normalised in programmes such as Innovation Accelerators and Local Innovation Partnerships Fund.

All four RISE projects adopted a systems-based approach, mapping environmental sources, pathways, receptors and outcomes for place-based studies. Insights from specialist work were translated for use by practitioners and stakeholders across sectors, including:

- planners
- community groups
- environmental trusts
- utilities
- businesses
- government
- the wider public



A wide range of translation methods were used, including:

- workshops
- videos
- websites
- community participation
- case studies
- studentships
- research publications



These activities were especially effective for planning and health protection benefits, eg air quality improvements and blue-green space benefits. Publications show that RISE outputs were applied nationally, demonstrating effective knowledge transfer beyond project regions.



Project-specific examples of emerging impact

SWEEP

Online hub for sharing best practice, leading to more equitable environmental investments (partners: Dorset Nature, Public Health Dorset, Dartmoor NP, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Plymouth City Council).

iCASP

Community of practice on natural flood management has led to more informed and supported practitioners better skilled in embedding science into policy and practice.

CAMELLIA

Supported the development of the Environment Agency's Systems Approach to Integrated Water Planning through innovative enhanced models, mapping tools and visualisations.

WM-AIR

Adoption of tools and methodologies in the Regional Air Quality Policy to drive improvements in air quality for 2.9 million residents.



Highlights of good practice



Joint development and testing with end-users built trust and collective ownership.



Skill-transfer workshops empowered communities and informed policy/funding decisions.



Programme-level platforms (eg Water Info Hub) enabled sustained access and capacity.



Alignment with decision-making windows and local strategies improved adoption.

General feedback

Assessment of leveraged opportunities

The panel noted an impressive crowding-in of resources, with the programme achieving up to eightfold returns on UKRI investment, including match funding and in-kind contributions.

The panel particularly highlighted the breadth of contributions made and opportunities taken that went beyond simply monetary, such as:

- education
- community building
- public awareness

Evidence was observed that the investment in strong partnering had made a significant contribution to the success.

Variability across projects

There was significant variation in the amounts of resources mobilised between projects, with some attracting higher values than others. The panel was cautious in assuming that lower amounts equated to poorer performance, as context, timing of data collection, opportunity and relevance were different for each. The panel ultimately concluded that while individual projects varied, the overall programme demonstrated strong resource mobilisation.

The panel noted that the absence of a standardised programme-level metrology was a limiting factor in assessing the programme's success against this objective.

Flexibility and evaluation implications

The panel reflected that the programme's flexibility allowed for diverse forms of leveraging, which, while making standardised comparison difficult, also enabled tailored approaches suited to different contexts.



Good evidence that opportunities to attract additional inputs and benefits were actively explored, pursued and successfully secured with results in line with or above expectations for a programme of this size.

Programme highlights

The RISE programme demonstrated strong performance in leveraging investment, sustaining partnerships and generating tangible and long-term impact across all four regional projects.

Collectively, RISE attracted substantial returns on investment, with:

Projects securing over

£132
million

across farming, business
and local authorities

Plus an estimated

£132.6
million

in affiliated investments

And

£69
million

in GVA



Projects also delivered non-financial benefits including enhanced public awareness of environmental risks, education and training of future environmental scientists and strengthened community engagement with sustainable practices.



A further success
was securing

5
years

of funding for British Geological Survey to maintain the Water Info Hub, ensuring platform sustainability and reducing future costs.

Post-programme analysis using Dimensions data shows that RISE collaborators continued to attract new funding, with WM-Air and SWEEP recording the highest number of post-RISE collaborative grants:

WM-AIR

10
grants

SWEEP

13
grants



Similar achievements were observed across other projects, with SWEEP and WM-Air reporting major leveraged and influenced investments from public and private sources and iCASP sustaining local government and regulatory engagement.

This indicates that **RISE investments built capacity, credibility and networks** that appealed to other funders.

Among project examples

CAMELLIA

presented the clearest evidence of documented leverage.



It reported:

£302k

in matched funding

**£1.6
million**

£1.6m in leveraged or matched funding: around eight times the UKRI investment (£17.1m)

And

£400k

from the Environment Agency and city authorities.

Beyond the financial data, RISE generated policy, operational and social value, evidenced by stakeholder feedback such as:

“We can’t not have iCASP: we need iCASP in the region.”

Head of Major Projects, Kirklees Council

“Very little of this would have been possible without the support from WM-Air.”

Head of Environment, West Midlands Combined Authority

Together, these outcomes demonstrate that RISE has delivered strong returns, sustained regional partnerships and embedded environmental science into local decision-making, reflecting very good progress at programme level.

General feedback

Evidence of durable collaborations

The panel found positive early indicators of durable collaborations, including sustained communities of practice, ongoing partnerships and tangible legacy assets such as open access tools and follow-on funding.

Cultural and institutional change

The panel noted that success in this criterion is not solely about securing additional or further funding but also achieving the cultural and behavioural change needed to support future collaborative work.

They observed evidence of these changes with skills and mindsets evolving among both academics and non-academic partners, though sustainability remained uneven (potentially a factor of timing).

Systemic and structural challenges

The panel highlighted the many efforts made by the project teams to ensure programme success in this criterion, but discussed the challenges presented by the broader context, such as:

- the need for institutional rather than individual commitment (for example supporting the use of project administrators and impact fellows)
- the role of professional bodies and the importance of embedding continuity
- evaluation mechanisms at the national level



Strong evidence that the collaborations and partnerships supported through this programme are active.

Programme highlights

The RISE programme has laid strong foundations for durable collaborations, with evidence of sustained communities of practice, follow-on funding and long-term legacy tools. Specific examples include:



Sustained collaborative structures with projects such as:

WM-AIR

iCASP

established communities of practice that continue beyond funding, supporting ongoing work on air quality and natural flood management.



Long-term legacy assets:

SWEEP

maintains an online library of nine open-access tools (eg NEVO, SuDS Hub, HaCaCD Toolbox),

CAMELLIA

while CAMELLIA's Water Information Hub continues as a co-created platform for sustainable water management in London and beyond.

Follow-on funding and institutional adoption:

WM-AIR

model has been adopted by the West Midlands Combined Authority, leading to major follow-on awards including WM-Net Zero, WM-Adapt, CLEETS and INHABIT.



Totalling over

£14 million

Cultural and behavioural legacy: the programme fostered a new generation of applied environmental scientists and strengthened community awareness, with several non-academic partners stepping up to sustain RISE initiatives independently.

Programme design, delivery and evaluation: panel reflections

The panel highlighted several cross cutting challenges and learning points that influenced the panel's ability to assess programme performance.

Evidence

A central theme was the difficulty of making assessments on specific aspects of the programme's ambitions around collaboration, co delivery and partnership functioning using the metrics and data sources available. Whilst the programme clearly demonstrated strong partnership engagement, the panel noted that much of the evidence remained research centric.

More robust, practice oriented methodologies for evidencing how collaborations functioned in practice, steps taken to ensure inclusion, and shared decision-making would be required for higher scoring in future evaluations.

The panel recognised that this gap cannot be addressed by UKRI alone but will require sector wide collaboration to develop appropriate approaches and indicators.

Counterfactuals

Across the translation activities the panel observed significant challenges in constructing credible counterfactuals, given the presence of pre existing partnerships and heterogeneous project starting points. This limited the ability to attribute observed outcomes to programme processes.

The staggered nature of project end dates also resulted in uneven reporting of co design and co delivery, making it difficult to form fully comparable judgements across awards.

To strengthen the ability to evidence impact for future investments, the panel emphasised the need for establishing from the outset a shared metrology to capture diverse forms of translational work, including qualitative measures of stakeholder experience, behavioural change and the evolution of collaborative practice.

Flexible funding model

The flexibility of the programme's funding model was repeatedly highlighted as both a strength and a challenge. While flexibility enabled bespoke approaches and context specific innovation it also created inconsistency in reporting formats, scope and timing.

This variability made programme level comparison difficult and complicated the assessment of whether particular aspects such as co delivery or resource mobilisation were systematically effective or context dependent. The panel concluded that a more consistent framework for documenting programme processes without constraining adaptive delivery would enhance the strength of future evidence.

Sustainability and legacy

Finally, the panel identified systemic issues influencing the longevity and sustainability of partnerships, such as institutional infrastructure, administrative support, and dedicated facilitation roles.

Many of the positive results were achieved despite limited capacity or inconsistent support structures, which constrained the sustainability and evaluability of collaborative processes.

Strengthening institutional mechanisms, embedding continuity planning and recognising partnership coordination as core funded activity were all highlighted as important considerations for future investments.

Conclusion

The RISE programme has demonstrated the value and potential of long-term, place-based investment in environmental science that is co-created and co-delivered with diverse partners. It has succeeded in advancing research translation, embedding collaborative practice, and mobilising a wide range of actors including those from policy, industry and civil society around shared regional challenges.

Across projects, the programme has generated tangible tools, new governance models and a shift in the culture of engagement between science and practice.

However, the evaluation also revealed challenges around the sustainability of activities beyond the end of funding, consistency of impact reporting and the need for institutional and sector level support for sustained collaborative working.

To the credit of the individuals involved, many partnerships have continued and some have grown into new initiatives, but sustaining the 'infrastructure of collaboration' remains dependent on institutional commitment, professional coordination and dedicated resourcing.

The overall conclusion is that RISE has achieved its objectives as an innovative, systems-oriented investment, but future place-based programmes should integrate lessons on governance, legacy planning and evaluation design to ensure that impacts are both measurable and enduring.

Key take-home messages

Strong collaborative foundations

RISE has successfully built durable partnerships between academia, local authorities, regulators and communities, leading to new models of engagement and co-production that are already being replicated elsewhere.

Evidence of enduring impact

Early indicators, including follow-on funding, continuing communities of practice and long-term legacy tools, show that many collaborations have transitioned beyond their original projects.

Cultural and behavioural change

The programme has helped shift attitudes and practices among both researchers and stakeholders, embedding more open, co-creative approaches to problem-solving and environmental management.

Variability and evaluation challenges

Differences in project timing, scope and reporting approaches have made comparison difficult. A standardised impact tracking and legacy framework would enhance consistency and learning across future investments.

Sustainability and resourcing gaps

Long-term success depends on continued coordination and institutional support. Embedding professional facilitation, open-access data platforms and clear ownership models from the outset will be essential for maintaining momentum.



Regional impact from the science of the environment (RISE) End of programme evaluation

Lessons for future programmes

- build in legacy and continuity planning from the start
- resource coordination, communications, and relationship management as core functions, not optional extras
- align governance and outputs with policy frameworks and regional priorities
- maintain flexible funding mechanisms to support diverse forms of collaboration and impact
- simplify impact tracking and enable qualitative narratives of change alongside quantitative metrics

Additional strategic perspectives from the panel

As well as drawing the above conclusions, members of the evaluation panel offered some additional general perspectives on the conduct and evaluation of place-based research. These perspectives are points of emphasis or strategic comments and are included for completeness:

The role of universities as place-based anchors and brokers

Projects that involve place-based organisations and local environmental challenges are substantially facilitated by universities, who play a brokerage role between participants.

The convening power of universities and their capacity to bridge across sectors and stakeholders has helped to 'anchor' RISE projects, and they have been central to why the RISE collaborations worked.

RISE has highlighted that higher education establishments have a strategic value as conveners and facilitators of place-based research in their regions.

Long-term, trust-based partnerships as place-based research infrastructure

The key conclusions rightly emphasise the importance of sustained relationships, especially with local actors in partnerships. But there's a further framing opportunity here: any enduring partnerships, particularly when universities support capabilities beyond research, begin to resemble place-based infrastructure. They represent embedded capacity that persists beyond individual projects: something UKRI and policymakers increasingly value for programme legacy.

Metrology and evidence-base for evaluating place-based research

Place-based research poses particular challenges for evaluation. For example, there is generally no counterfactual evidence to use as a comparator for assessing what lesser progress would have been made without the research so the positive difference made by the research can't be seen against this baseline.

Place-based programmes highlight communities and their experience of, and aspirations for, their environments. There is a continuing need to develop new and appropriate metrics for evaluating the full impacts of place-based research on communities, for example, the impacts on societal behaviours, wellbeing, and public understanding.

New metrics should complement the existing metrics for economic contributions and academic citation.



Annex 1 Evidence pack

(see separate document)

Annex 2 Assessment criteria rubric

(see separate document)

Annex 3 NERC responses to insights and recommendations

(see separate document)



