

NERC Council Meeting Summary of discussions

**19 May 2016
London**

Members present:

Professor IL Boyd, Sir A Cleaver (Chair), Ms J Davenport, Mr N Folland, Ms L Heasman, Professor AL Heathwaite, Professor EA Hill, Mr I Khan, Professor Dame GM Mace, Professor G Orpen, Professor DIA Poll, Mr IR Simm, Ms C Tacon, Professor DJ Wingham (Chief Executive), Lord Willis, Professor L Yellowlees.

Apologies: Professor Dame J Slingo, Ms A Robinson (Director of Corporate Affairs and Change Management).

Representative of the Secretary of State: Dr S Ellis.

NERC Directors (Head Office and Centres): Mr PJ Fox (Chief Operating Officer), Professor Ed Hill (Director, NOC), Professor T Wheeler (Director of Science and Innovation).

Other attendees: Professor A Hatton (SB Chair), Dr S Davies (IAB Chair), Dr P Heads (Associate Director, Strategy and Evidence).

Secretary: Dr AJ Turner.

Key issues discussed

Planning for the Spending Review period 2016-2020

NERC Council noted that the NERC Delivery Plan had been submitted to BIS. It reports NERC achievements against the strategic priorities of the NERC Strategy *The Business of the Environment*, budget breakdowns and examples of key NERC investments made during the last year, such as the marine robotics centre and air pollution studies in Asian mega-cities. Last year, NERC spent 41% of its budget on research, 37% supporting national capability in environmental science and about 13% on skills and training, with remaining % focused on supporting innovation and research for international development.

NERC Council discussed the planning for the new substantial research funds for international development, such as the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and Newton Fund. NERC will contribute to Foundation GCRF research calls with other Research Councils, leading the Foundation research call on Resilience, and develop NERC National Capability to support and deliver ODA initiatives. NERC Head Office staff are contributing to GCRF planning activities across the Research Councils, GCRF Town Hall meetings and a specific NERC Heads of Department meeting. Potential impacts of the new ODA research funds on NERC strategic and discovery science funding were presented and discussed.

NERC *Joint Strategic Response* (JSR) research aims to support excellent science in partnership with other funding organisations such as Government Departments, UK and international Research Councils, and international organisations. The JSR programme currently has a requirement for an average of at least 50% co-funding across these programmes. NERC Council agreed to remove the UK Government Departments from this calculation so as not to restrict the potential contribution of NERC science to UK environmental policy in the case of any declines in Government R & D budgets.

NERC Budget Planning for the Spending Review period 2016/17 to 2019/20

NERC Council approved the high level NERC budget, excluding the Antarctic Logistics and Infrastructure partition, which is separately allocated by BIS.

Defra's high-level evidence plans

Professor Ian Boyd, Defra's Chief Scientific Adviser, presented the conclusions of his review of Defra's evidence needs *The Future of Evidence in Defra*.

Relocation of the Halley VI Antarctic research station

Professors Jane Francis and David Vaughan gave an overview of the British Antarctic Survey plans to relocate the Halley VI research station to the other side of an expanding crack in the Brunt ice shelf. The move to a new site will be accomplished over two years, starting in the Antarctic summer of 2016/17. The recent BBC television *Horizon* programme presented by Peter Gibbs featured the science and logistics for the Halley VI move.

Chief Executive update

Professor Duncan Wingham tabled details of a wide range of visits and engagements undertaken by the Chief Executive. He reported in more detail the White Paper setting out the Government's plans to reform the higher education and research system *Success as a Knowledge Economy* and the naming of the new polar research vessel the *RRS Sir David Attenborough*.

Governance, Responsibility and Ownership (GRO) programme

Council received an update on the Governance, Responsibility and Ownership (GRO) programme of work. GRO is the NERC programme to consider the future ownership and governance of NERC's research centres. Council noted that a BIS/NERC joint governance board has been set up to oversee the GO programme.

Reports will continue to be presented to future Council meetings as this programme of work progresses.

Standing items

Council noted a number of standing items including the six-monthly progress report, rolling programme of business and reports of the Science Board meeting of 20-21 April and the ARAC meeting of 25 February.

Date and time of next meeting

The next NERC Council meeting will be held on 14 July 2016.