

NERC Council Meeting

Summary of discussions

13 December 2017

BEIS Conference Centre, 1 Victoria Street, London

Members present:

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

Representative of the Secretary of State: None.

NERC Directors (Head Office and Centres): Mr PJ Fox (Chief Operating Officer), Professor Ed Hill (Director, NOC), Ms A Robinson (Director of Corporate Affairs and Change Management), Professor T Wheeler (Director of Science and Innovation).

Apologies: Ms Jenny Dibden (Representative of the Secretary of State, BEIS).

Other attendees: Dr S Davies (IAB Chair), Professor A Hatton (SB Chair),

Secretary: Dr AJ Turner.

Key issues discussed

The NERC Chair, Sir Anthony Cleaver, welcomed members and briefly updated Council on progress in recruitment of the new NERC Council in UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Chief Executive update

Council heard an update on the recent successful public engagement event at Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh which saw over 7,000 school children and members of the public come and meet a range of NERC scientists over a long weekend. Council also welcomed the recent parliamentary engagement events at Westminster and Holyrood as an effective introduction to NERC science and an important step in engaging this audience. Professor Wingham then updated council on progress in the establishment of UKRI including introductory meetings with the incoming UKRI Chief Finance Officer.

Council received an update on implications so far of the UK EU referendum. The Chief Executive also briefed Council on a range of considerations in relation to environmental science research centres, including ongoing discussions as to ongoing support for the Hadley Centre and including considerations about the Halley base. Professor Wingham also provided an update on cross-Council work on open access, noting NERC science was currently well-placed in terms of open data.

Finance and risk report

Council received a finance report which set out a predicted balanced financial position for the current financial year to date. Council then turned to the risk report and received an update, noting that there would be an update under the ARAC item on risk assurance when

NERC is part of UKRI structures.

Corporate responsibility reporting including environmental management strategy

Ms Robinson provided an update on the good progress made overall in implementing the NERC corporate responsibility policy. She then outlined the proposed new approach to an environmental management strategy for NERC that would cover all NERC investments as well as its own operations. The strategy would focus on four themes (climate, resource use, living systems, and quality of life) and move to set initial baselines in seven key areas (carbon emissions, waste, water, plastics, food, NO_x, and sulphur emissions) and implement specific commitments over timescales up to 2050. Council welcomed the strategy as an excellent development. It encouraged the executive to consider establishing a programme to allow NERC to demonstrate leadership in this area. It should ensure that this strategy and implementation is used to create impact in this area.

Governance, Responsibility and Ownership (GRO) programme

GRO is the NERC programme to consider the future ownership and governance of NERC's research centres. Council received an update on the Governance, Responsibility and Ownership (GRO) programme of work following the announcement that this programme now proceeds to the next stage, following a successful engagement with BEIS and Ministers. Council heard an overview of the planning and next steps to progress this work to the next decision point. Council thanked the GRO assurance committee for their ongoing support and assistance for this project and in informing work with BEIS officials. Reports will continue to be presented to future Council meetings as this programme of work progresses.

Council also welcomed Sir Keith O'Nions, the newly appointed Chair of the British Geological Survey, who updated Council on good progress in establishing the new governance for BGS. Council welcomed Sir Keith's update, and agreed to the recruitment of the BGS board members.

Overarching approach to National Capability Commissioning: services & facilities

Professor Wheeler gave a short summary of the overarching approach to the commissioning of services & facilities, summarising the approach as one to commission a portfolio of fewer, larger and more innovative facilities that aligns to current and future demand from the environmental science community. Professor Wheeler emphasised that engaging and communicating this change to the community had been a priority for NERC. Council supported this ongoing activity, noting that it would be important to ensure the commissioning process allowed NERC to meet as yet unknown future demands.

NERC in the context of UKRI budget planning

Professor Wingham introduced, in broad terms, the proposed approach to future NERC funding priorities in the light of the UKRI budget. He took some time to describe the structures being put in place to support the injection of additional funding to science and innovation following the Autumn Statement in 2016, and how the Industrial Strategy had

developed over the consultation phase and now provided more opportunity for environmental considerations as a direct contribution to growth and productivity.

Council welcomed the discussion, approved a small variation of £500k to NERC budgets to support the development of a new NERC Strategy and associated approaches to seeking to bring NERC expertise to bear on, for instance, the Industrial Strategy Challenges Fund. Council also welcomed the proposal to begin discussions and development of a new NERC strategy, and emphasised the importance of maintaining NERC's success in commissioning world-class environmental science while also, in addition, looking to bring a solutions focused approach and to build NERC's leadership in cross-cutting and multi-disciplinary research areas. Council also welcomed a developing approach to engaging businesses with NERC science to assist to build this solutions focus.

Standing items

Council also noted a number of standing items including the rolling programme of business, and reports of the Innovation Advisory Board meeting of 19 October 2017 and the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meetings of 11 October and 28 November 2017, including an update on emerging thinking about future risk and assurance frameworks for NERC in UKRI.

Professor Hatton gave the report of the Science Board meeting of 8-9 November 2017, and drew Council's attention to the broad range of highlight topics that will be commissioned.

Date and time of next meeting

The next, and final, meeting of the existing NERC Council will be on 1 March 2018.