



NERC Science Board 70th Meeting

Summary of Discussion

8 November 2017, University of Edinburgh

Members Present: Professor Angela Hatton (Chair), Professor John Brodholt, Professor Lora Fleming, Professor Rosemary Hails, Professor Tamsin Mather, Professor Richard Pancost, Professor Andrew Shepherd, Professor Rowan Sutton, Professor David Thomas, Professor David Vaughan, Professor Susan Waldron, Professor Mathew Williams,

Ex Officio: Professor Duncan Wingham, Professor Tim Wheeler.

Apologies: Dr Jennifer Collier, Professor Alberto Naveira Garabato, Professor Ian Poll.

Other Attendees: Dr Ned Garnett, Dr Caroline Culshaw, Professor Mark Bailey, Professor Graham Underwood, Mr Robyn Thomas.

Secretary: Lyndsey Jones

Key issues discussed

CE Update

The Board heard about developments in the funding landscape, the opportunity for NERC to engage more with businesses to support environmental science contributions to the industrial strategy, and the opportunity for NERC to articulate how environmental science provides solutions to environmental issues.

The CE reported progress in transitioning NERC's advisory structure under UKRI. The new NERC Council is expected to take on some of the current Science Board responsibilities, but current bodies with ongoing business will need to run in parallel until new structures can be implemented.

The CE drew the Board's attention to the RCUK mapping exercise of the UK distribution of EU science funds, and the recent announcement on the NERC website about the decisions on independent status of CEH and NOC.

HydroJULES update

The Board heard about the ambition for HydroJULES to deliver a complete 3D model of the terrestrial hydrological cycle and the plans for leadership and community engagement. The Board recommended that a broad constituency of technical experts, researchers and users are consulted to achieve a wide critique of plans.

Highlight Topics

The Board considered available headroom and the required level of competition in the HT round and prioritised ten topics to publish in the fourth highlight topic grant round. A total of £24 million was allocated to the round and the Board recommended that the Executive implement procedures to exceed the funding cap in exceptional circumstances so that proposals requiring large research infrastructure are not disadvantaged. The Board was positive about the spread and quality of the ideas presented.

Strategic Programme Area scoping process

Science Board agreed changes to the SPA scoping process: to make the cases shorter and more focussed on articulation of the strategic opportunity, and to improve communication of Board feedback at the scoping stage.

CDT shortlisted areas of training priority

Science Board considered the shortlisted areas and provided comments to the Training Advisory Board on the scope and strategic relevance of the topics.

Early Career Researcher evaluation

The Board noted progress in the evaluation and the invitation to participate in a collaborative workshop in February 2018 to explore the outcomes and provide recommendation to NERC on future activities relevant to ECRs.

Research and Innovation priorities for NERC

Science Board discussed how NERC can use building blocks of data analysis, state of knowledge and horizon scanning, and statements of user demand as evidence to help identify research and innovation priorities. The Board will hold a workshop in the new year to explore the topic in more depth.

UKRI capital roadmap

JCAG members updated the Board on plans to develop NERC input to the UKRI infrastructure roadmap. Science Board noted the ambitious timeline and recommended that the community ideas process proceed at pace.

Standing items

The Board confirmed the minutes and noted the finance report, forward agenda and portfolio analysis.