



**Natural  
Environment  
Research Council**

## **NERC Science Committee 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting**

### **Summary of Discussion**

**13 & 14 May 2020, via Teleconference**

**Members Present:** Professor Graham Underwood (Chair), Professor Sir Duncan Wingham (Executive Chair), Dr Adrian Baker, Professor Lora Fleming, Professor Alberto Naveira Garabato, Dr Anna Jones, Professor Christine Maggs, Professor Tamsin Mather, Professor Richard Pancost, Professor Andrew Shepherd, Professor David Thomas, Professor David Viner, Professor Simon Vosper.

**Ex-Officio:** Professor Susan Waldron (NERC Director, Research and Skills)

**Apologies:** Professor Sir Duncan Wingham (13th only). Dr Douglas Wilson.

**Other Attendees:** Whole meeting: Dr Sarah Turner (NERC Associate Director, Strategic Programme Delivery). 14<sup>th</sup> May: Dr Iain Williams (NERC Director, Strategic Partnerships).

**Item 5:** Dr Iain Williams (NERC Director, Strategic Partnerships), Tom Robinson (Senior Programme Manager, Capital), Dr Nichola Badcock (Head of Capital) and Dr Jennifer Jennings (Associate Director, Strategy and Insight); **Item 9:** Dr Hannah Collins (NERC Associate Director, Strategic Programme Generation) and Annette Ewence (Senior Programme Manager, Strategic Programme Generation); **Item 10:** Dr Jennifer Jennings (Associate Director, Strategy and Insight), Dr Beth House (NERC Head of Productive Environment) and Dr Simon Gardner (NERC Head of Digital Environment).

**Secretary:** Gemma Davies

### **Key issues discussed**

#### **NERC Institutional Capability Programme for Environmental Solutions (changing the environment programme) and Discovery Science - 'Pushing the Frontiers' update**

The Committee were updated on the above, noting the postponement of the announcement of the 'Institutional Capability Programme for Environmental Solutions' due to COVID-19 disruption. The Committee noted the new name for this initiative, 'Changing the Environment Programme'

Science Committee provided advice on the selection of the peer review panels and assessing the success of the new 'Pushing the Frontiers' call.

## **Highlight Topic Update**

Science Committee reviewed data to ensure that there is no evidence of gender bias in the award of Highlight Topic grants. In reviewing this data, SC considered that EDI/BAME equality needs to be reviewed further within the context of other NERC funding streams, schemes and awards. This work would align with the UKRI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to embed equality, diversity and inclusion at all levels. Science Committee recommended for Council to set a timeline and delivery date for this work.

## **Infrastructure Options for UKRI Funding**

The Committee discussed strategic infrastructure options and provided advice to improve the science case of the highly rated options and suggested members of the community who could “champion” these and provide a significant contribution to the development of the science cases.

## **Executive Chair update**

The Committee heard about the drive of UKRI to make available as quickly and effectively as possible anything from the science base to address COVID-19 pandemic. UKRI seek as far as able to stabilise the financial position of the research base and financial impact on the institute sector, and to consider the impact of COVID-19 on research priorities.

## **Research and Innovation responses to COVID-19**

The Committee provided feedback on the topics for COVID-19 pandemic related research and innovation that could be pursued during the June hackathon events along with the proposed themes of an “Ideas Series” planned for June/July 2020.

## **Achieving Delivery Plan Ambitions**

The Committee provided further advice, in two new areas that have been approved by Council as priorities for scoping and investment: ‘Coupled economic and environment systems’ and ‘Digital Environment’. SC advised that the ‘*The Economics of Biodiversity*’ and the ‘*Balancing the environment and economy across supply chains*’ ideas were strong, and that the ‘*Applying AI and data science to deliver environmental solutions*’ and ‘*Utilising citizen-generated data to support environmental monitoring and management*’ ideas still needed further development.

## **Standing items**

The Committee confirmed the minutes and noted the forward agenda