



## Natural Environment Research Council

### NERC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan 2020-2021

#### Purpose

This plan sets out how NERC will implement and deliver the ambitions of the UKRI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Vision to address the specific needs of the NERC community.

#### Vision

This EDI Plan builds on the previous work NERC has done to drive EDI improvements. Our focus on continual improvement means that we will now go above and beyond our statutory duties and focus on continual improvement to be a beacon for EDI across the environmental science community. Achieving a high level of EDI within NERC will provide an excellent foundation and environment for our research and innovation priorities to flourish. We will continue to ensure that our employees feel welcomed, included and valued, and that we are funding the best of the best, regardless of their background. In addition, we will seek to promote the importance of EDI across the wider NERC community.

UKRI have a clear ambition for the UK to be the most diverse, inclusive and fair research environment in the world. Over the next five years, this vision will be delivered as a key priority across all its component parts: *“Everyone has a right to be treated with dignity and respect, and to be provided with opportunities to flourish and succeed in a supportive environment.”* (UKRI Strategic Prospectus 2018)

#### What do we mean by EDI?

The Equality Act (2010) identifies nine protected characteristics to which NERC as a public body must give due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. These protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

EDI isn't just about the protected characteristics. NERC will also seek to promote diversity and equality of opportunity in all its forms. This will include consideration of characteristics such as neurodiversity, social mobility, whether someone is a carer, and geographical location (e.g. rural/urban). This is consistent with the UKRI approach.

It is similarly important to consider the cumulative effects of prejudice and inequality on individuals with more than one protected or underrepresented characteristic. For example, the experience of Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women in the environmental science community is different to those of BAME men or white women. Issues can be missed by focusing on individual characteristics, and the disadvantage for those with multiple characteristics is often more pronounced.

Promoting EDI is not about tokenism or prioritising any one group over another. It is an acknowledgement that different people face different barriers, and therefore need varying levels of support to thrive both personally and professionally.

## Approach

NERC is committed to addressing equality, diversity and inclusion challenges and will do so by adopting the following UKRI approach:

UKRI Approach	How will NERC do this?
Lead by example	NERC will ensure that its activities and processes reflect evidenced effective EDI practice where possible. Our EDI ambitions and progress against this will be transparently reported to the public.
Be and be seen to be diverse	NERC will showcase, promote and encourage EDI across all aspects of its public presence, including challenging assumptions and showcasing environmental science as a sector which is open to all.
Take a systems-wide approach	NERC recognises that inequality and prejudice exist throughout all stages of the research service. We will work with partners to promote EDI across the environmental science sector.
Be evidence-informed and data driven	NERC will prioritise enhancing its data set to develop our understanding of where EDI challenges exist, including developing the data infrastructure to collect data across all protected characteristics in all aspects of our operation. We will also ensure that any interventions are effectively measured to evidence impact and learn from outcomes.
Influence and incentivise	NERC recognises its responsibility to act as a leader and role model to the environmental science community and will seek to influence the wider environmental science community where possible.

## Priorities

This one-year EDI Plan is intended to set a foundation for NERC's future EDI work. NERC recognises that its data in particular is not in a strong position compared to other research councils, which means that there may be additional challenges and priorities that will be identified as we increase our understanding of the EDI challenges NERC faces. Based on our current understanding, the following are our priorities for the coming year.

- Building a coherent dataset**  
 NERC does not have complete or reliable data in a number of areas, including a low response rate for staff disclosing their protected characteristics. Additionally, in many areas NERC has historically only collected data on four protected characteristics – gender, ethnicity, age and

disability. In order to accurately identify where issues exist, NERC must prioritise increasing its evidence-based understanding of its operations and collecting data across the full spectrum of protected characteristics. Our analysis, baselining and benchmarking of our data will allow us to identify additional priority areas as new issues are discovered. For instance, it is anecdotally accepted that the NERC community loses women between the ages of 35-45 but it is not understood where exactly they are being lost from and why.

- **Changing culture to promote EDI**

Slow turnover in many areas of NERC has manifested in slow culture change, and some strong differences in approach to EDI between younger and older generations. Change will be driven through systematic culture change such as challenging existing bias, transparently addressing any issues of discrimination or exclusion as they arise, communicating the evidence-based benefits of EDI, and promoting EDI as something that everyone at NERC sees as part of their day-to-day role. We will embed EDI awareness and initiatives into organisational culture at every level.

- **Removing barriers of opportunity**

The traditional use of binary targets as a way of increasing EDI has been useful in increasing the representation of women and ethnic minorities at a senior level. However, despite this benefit to senior individuals, these targets have not removed systemic barriers or improved the day-to-day experiences of underrepresented groups. NERC will move away from binary targets towards a focus on equality of opportunity, ensuring that barriers to participation and inclusion at all levels are removed as far as practicable. This includes examining where our timescales and criteria for success inadvertently create barriers for certain groups of people.

- **Improving the representation of ethnic minorities**

NERC is overwhelmingly White, with low levels of BAME representation. This is an issue across the whole environmental science community, which will need input from other funders, research organisations and HEIs to fully address. NERC will use this year to identify where its internal culture and processes make it difficult for BAME individuals to enter and thrive, and we will also work with other research organisations and HEIs to make it clear that environmental science is open to anyone regardless of their background.

- **Capitalising on local talent**

NERC aims to be attractive local employers for jobs which do not require a specialist background in environmental science, such as administrative roles. NERC will compare workforce data to local population pools to ensure that we are attracting diverse employees from the local population.

## Measuring success

Successful delivery of this plan will be reflected in our ability to demonstrate that EDI is embedded across all of NERC's activity. As per the UKRI approach, we need to ensure that any EDI interventions are having a demonstrably positive impact on the issue that we are attempting to address. This means that we will rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of the actions within this EDI Plan. We will use key performance indicators where this is useful, although in general we will focus on continuous improvement rather than binary targets.

Where it is not possible to provide quantitative data against an action, we will provide a narrative assessment of what has been achieved. This narrative will be created through conversations with

staff members and the internal EDI working group, and annual interviews with key officers who are responsible for changes in their directorates. Additionally, we will both communicate and reward successes.

The evidence we collect will feed into the growing UKRI EDI evidence base. Performance against this plan will be reported to the NERC Management Board annually, with a summary published on the NERC website on an annual basis.

#	Action	Employer, funder or decision-maker	Principal lead	What does success look like?	Target completion/ review date
<b>I. Embed and sustain an inclusive working culture within NERC that enables all staff to flourish</b>					
1.1	Establish and promote a voluntary network of EDI champions across NERC to raise awareness and identify issues.	E	Joe Moss, Sustainability Engagement Manager	EDI champions drive ambitious change internally.	Apr-20
1.2	Embed EDI as a key part of the NERC induction and appraisal processes to ensure that all new staff are aware of their EDI responsibilities.	E	Tanya Robinson and Carol Exton, HR Business Partners	Comprehensive EDI section is included in NERC induction and appraisal processes.	May-20
1.3	Raise awareness of and celebrate a diverse set of religious and cultural festivals throughout the year.	E	Emily Burford, Internal Engagement Officer	Staff awareness of different religious and cultural events increases. Staff feel appreciated and included.	May-20
1.4	Produce guidance documents for staff around the use of EDI acronyms, terminology and categorisation.	E	Sarah Tranter, Corporate Social Responsibility Manager	All staff members are able to consistently and confidently talk about EDI issues in an appropriate manner.	May-20
1.5	Showcase and celebrate the contributions that our diverse staff members make to NERC, including through diverse imagery on our website	E	Sarah Tranter, Corporate Social Responsibility Manager	Staff feel proud to work in a diverse environment. Other staff with underrepresented protected characteristics feel valued and inspired.	Jul-20
1.6	Directors to role model appropriate behaviour and understand specific EDI issues in their areas, including how they're going to address them.	E, F, D	All directors	All directors are able to demonstrate their contribution to the EDI agenda.	Dec-20

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1.7	Centres to continue to demonstrate their EDI practices to the level of their chosen accreditation schemes e.g. Athena SWAN, Investor in People and Disability Accreditation.	E	Nicky Poulter and Mariella Giancola, Heads of HR at BGS and BAS	Charter mark-level performance is maintained across NERC's Centres.	Dec-20
1.8	Ensure that all imagery in public engagement is diverse and inclusive e.g. at Impact Awards, Annual Showcase	E, F, D	Hannah King, Senior Public Engagement Programme Manager	The public and other external stakeholders see NERC as an inclusive, welcoming community	Dec-20
<b>2. Create, use and share evidence to improve the design and delivery of EDI in the NERC community</b>					
2.1	Perform a gap analysis of NERC's EDI data to identify where data is missing or incomplete, including where we're not collecting all protected characteristics.	E, F, D	Sarah Tranter, Corporate Social Responsibility Manager	NERC has a strong understanding of the data it has, and what data it needs to collect to align to sector best practice.	May-20
2.2	Benchmark NERC's EDI performance against other UKRI councils and sector best practice.	E, F, D	Sarah Tranter, Corporate Social Responsibility Manager	NERC understands how its EDI performance compares to other councils and sector best practice	May-20
2.3	Establish a mechanism for conducting an annual baselining exercise of the environmental science community, including consideration of which protected characteristics should be included.	F	Matt Viner, Senior Insight and Analysis Manager	NERC has a strong understanding of the benefits of repeating the baselining exercise, how to do this and when.	Jun-20
2.5	Identify, investigate and begin to tackle the barriers for staff to disclosure their personal protected characteristics on Oracle.	E	Tanya Robinson and Carol Exton, HR Business Partners	Proportion of staff who disclose protected characteristics increases.	Dec-20

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2.6	Look at NERC's role in supporting career mobility, particularly at early stages and for people with underrepresented characteristics.	F	Katie Tearall, Head of Talent and Skills	NERC understands the barriers that underrepresented groups face with regards to career mobility.	Dec-20
<b>3. Innovate to ensure our policies and processes remain fair, efficient and free of bias</b>					
3.1	Review the EDI learning and development offers across Head Office and Centres to ensure that these offer a joined-up and comprehensive offer to staff within the UKRI framework.	E	Tanya Robinson and Carol Exton, HR Business Partners	All staff are aware of their legal duties and are able to proactively contribute to the EDI agenda.	Jun-20
3.2	Review the process for the biannual Honours for NERC to embed EDI, to maximise opportunities for candidates from underrepresented groups.	D	Carla Yorukoglu, Insight Manager	Robust methodology is in place to allow for an inclusive and diverse list of candidates in the Honours List.	Jun-20
3.3	Identify and understand the specific barriers preventing underrepresented groups from sitting on NERC council and sub-committees, and identify actions to ensure no one is disadvantaged by the process.	D	Michelle Wickenden, Head of Governance, Assurance and Performance	NERC has fully considered all barriers for a wide variety of groups. Actions are supported by evidence of what works elsewhere.	Sep-20
3.4	Review our funding and peer review processes to identify biases and barriers.	F	Avril Allman, Head of Research and Funding Operations	NERC is assured that funding processes and success criteria are fair and not unfairly impacting certain groups.	Sep-20
3.5	Analyse the difference between NERC staff composition and the local employment pools to identify any areas of underrepresentation.	E	Tanya Robinson and Carol Exton, HR Business Partners	NERC understands where there are differences between the workforce and local population and what the barriers may be.	Dec-20

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<b>4. Collaborate strategically with our partners to embed EDI across the environmental science sector</b>					
4.1	Embed EDI in the decision-making process for public engagement grants and projects to ensure that we are engaging effectively with a broad range of communities.	F	Hannah King, Senior Public Engagement Programme Manager	NERC funded public engagement activity is more inclusive.	Jun-20
4.2	Establish effective networks to discuss and share best practice across environmental science domain (e.g. NERC top funded HEIs who are leaders in EDI, Polar Network, mariners and pilots) to identify and implement good practice.	E, F, D	Joe Moss, Sustainability Engagement Manager	Best practice and learning from other stakeholders are implemented at NERC.	Dec-20
4.3	Work with other funders, research organisations and HEIs to promote environmental science as a diverse and open sector, particularly at entry (undergraduate) level.	E, F, D	Jo Thompson, Head of Engagement	Joint working promotes diversity within the wider environmental science sector.	Dec-20