

Questions about ethics

The purpose of this summary is to review what we do as an organisation and to list a series of questions which may help us consider whether or not there are ethical issues to raise. It provides help on how to apply the ethics policy to the work that we do, and prompts questions to ensure we act appropriately.

This summary is illustrative, not prescriptive or exhaustive. Other examples of ethical questions will emerge as the consultation proceeds and as the policy is implemented. These will be incorporated as appropriate.

NERC activity	The sort of questions you should be asking
Setting the NERC strategy – deciding what science priorities we are going to fund and how we are going to develop the organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are our decisions being made by the most appropriate person and is the process sufficiently open and transparent with all interested parties involved, including the public? - Are there any areas of science we should not be covering? - Are we working at the limits of scientific knowledge (and our experience of ethics) and are we making suitable risk assessments? - Are we weighing up local, national and international interests? - Are we ensuring decisions are informing and being informed by government, whilst retaining our independence?
Translating the strategy into science programmes, funding and training schemes that meet the national need and discharge our international obligations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do proposals for research meet legislative requirements? - Do we adequately meet our duty of care to research students (eg checking they are well supported and supervised)? - Do we have the right balance of programmes? - Have we the right processes in place to encourage knowledge transfer? - Are we being open and transparent about decisions involving investment in new, expensive or risky areas e.g. a new research ship? - Are we taking into account cultural considerations?
Translating the NERC strategy into administrative operations and infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In sourcing products from suppliers, are we just choosing the cheapest, have we checked their ethical approach? - Is NERC at work sufficiently green – what is our environmental footprint? - Are we managing our land and building resources sustainably? - Are we paying sufficient attention to the impact we may have on local communities where we have establishments?
Attracting funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If we take this specific commercial funding will it impact on NERC’s reputation for independence? - Are we taking funding from organisations with a reputation for an adverse impact on the environment? - Are we accepting funding from regimes with, for instance, human rights abuses? - What conditions are we accepting on promoting the outcomes of externally funded research? - Are we overstating or sensationalising the issue to extract funding? - Have we adequately weighed up the costs and benefits of this specific external funding stream? - Is there any conflict of interest?
Funding opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are we promoting and offering funding opportunities to all equally? - Are we ensuring fair and open assessment review processes? - Are we ensuring that members of the community feel fairly treated?

<p>Current research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are we, and our fund holders, adhering to appropriate legislation? - Are we, or our fund holders working on animals not covered by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act, eg invertebrates? Under what conditions is this justified? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are we, and our fund holders, working to the highest scientific standards? - Have we, and our fund holders, considered the ethical and environmental impacts of our own research? - Could we, and our fund holders, be accused of “scientific imperialism” - Are we, and our fund holders, respecting and protecting intellectual property rights? - Have we, and our fund holders, checked the likely environmental impact of proposals (eg, use of tracers, sonar, addition of pollutants, effects on rare species/habitats)? - Are we, and our fund holders, taking into account cultural considerations? - Are we ensuring high standards of health and safety for our researchers?
<p>Results and outcomes of research, including knowledge transfer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are we communicating the outcomes and products of our research adequately? - Would we accept investment in a spin-out venture from a company with a dubious ethical reputation? - Might the item/service/product arising from our research create adverse publicity or public reaction? - Is there enough pressure to publish – a moral commitment for recipients of funding? - Are we ensuring appropriate credit to all collaborators and contributors? - Are we being open about our findings? - Are we offering advice freely and openly, and without favour? - Are we respecting and protecting intellectual property rights?
<p>Being a good employer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are we treating all staff to the highest employer standards? - Are we rigorous in implementing health and safety policies? - Are we fully committed to equal opportunity?
<p>Working with others</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are we taking into account cultural considerations? - Could anything we do be perceived as being corrupt? - Are we respecting confidentiality? - Are we protecting individuals?