



Natural Environment Research Council – Stakeholder Audit

Executive Summary
October 2015

Methodology

Quantitative research

ComRes interviewed 250 Natural Environment Research Council stakeholders online between the 5th June and 30th June 2015. Stakeholders fell into the following categories, broadly reflecting the make-up of the Natural Environment Research Council’s stakeholder database:

Stakeholder group	Number of completes
Media	6
Government & BIS	33
Business	69
Academic	91
Third sector	31
International	2
Research Council	3
NERC board	15
Total	250

Initial approach emails were sent by NERC’s stakeholder managers to stakeholders, after which ComRes sent personalised email invitations to the online survey. A total of 1,109 stakeholders were approached by ComRes, of whom 250 completed the questionnaire – representing a response rate of 23%.

Please note that, as with all stakeholder research, this sample is comprised of respondents who opted in to participating in the research. Fieldwork was monitored throughout to ensure that the breakdown of the final sample broadly reflected the Natural Environment Research Council’s stakeholder database.

Qualitative research

ComRes interviewed 26 Natural Environment Research Council stakeholders by telephone between the 5th June and 30th June 2015. Stakeholders fell into the following categories, broadly reflecting the make-up of the Natural Environment Research Council’s stakeholder database:

Stakeholder group	Number of completes
Government & BIS	6
Academic	10
Third Sector	4
Business	6
Total	26

As part of the initial quantitative survey, stakeholders were asked to indicate whether they would be happy to participate in a follow up qualitative interview. Invitations to participate were then sent to these stakeholders who had opted in, and qualitative interviews lasting around between 20 and 30 minutes were conducted by ComRes’s trained interviewers. It is important to note that, as with all stakeholder research, the sample is self-selecting – all stakeholders who participated in the quantitative research were asked to opt-in to participate in the secondary phase of qualitative interviews.

To ensure an accurate reflection of stakeholder opinion, ComRes put quotas in place on each stakeholder group to ensure that a proportionate number of qualitative interviews were conducted with each stakeholder group, so as to accurately reflect NERC’s stakeholder database. Additional to this, ComRes put quotas in place which took into account engagement with NERC in terms of familiarity and favourability with the organisation as indicated by stakeholders in the quantitative research. As such, ComRes ensured that a broad spread of interviews were conducted covering not only the full range of stakeholder groups, but also that similar numbers of interviews were conducted both with those who are highly familiar and less familiar with NERC, as well as those who are highly favourable and less favourable towards NERC to ensure an accurate picture of opinion.

It is important to note that the purpose of the qualitative interviews is to provide greater depth and insight to the representative picture of opinion provided by the quantitative research, rather than providing a representative benchmark of opinion in itself. This is reflected in both the different sample sizes and the different nature of questions asked at each stage.

Audience summaries

Business

Familiarity with NERC is lowest among its business stakeholders. Around three quarters (72%) of business stakeholders say that they are familiar with the Natural Environment Research Council, with one in four (26%) saying that they know a great deal about the organisation.

Business stakeholders are most likely to report coming into contact with NERC by attending NERC events (63%) followed by direct emails (57%), face to face contact or meetings (56%) and visiting the website (46%). Business stakeholders have the least frequent contact with NERC of all of its stakeholder groups. Around one in seven business stakeholders (14%) say that they come into contact with NERC at least weekly, with similar proportions say that they do so at least monthly (44%) and around every three to six months (41%). Three quarters (74%) of business stakeholders say that the contact which they have with NERC is helpful, with one in five (21%) saying this is very helpful.

More than nine in ten (96%) say that they are favourable towards the Natural Environment Research Council, with one in four (26%) saying that they are very favourable towards the organisation. Nine in ten (90%) stakeholders say that they would be likely to speak positively about NERC if asked.

Business stakeholders primarily associate NERC with knowledge exchange and innovation (85%) and strategic research grants (81%) of the areas of work tested. Around two thirds (68%) of business stakeholders associate NERC with providing research grants for discovery science, while half (51%) associating it with providing environmental policy advice. Just over half (56%) of business stakeholders say that they are familiar with the vision of the Natural Environment Research Council, with just over two in five (44%) saying that they are unfamiliar with this. Having been provided with a description of NERC's vision, seven in ten (69%) say that the organisation is effective at achieving this vision, with one in ten (9%) saying that they are not. One in five (22%) say that they don't know whether NERC is effective in achieving this vision, indicating a lack of awareness in this area.

Developing industry links and focusing on knowledge transfer to increase social and economic impact are top priority areas for business stakeholders. Similarly to government stakeholders, business stakeholders cite the need for NERC to ensure that the research which it funds and conduct is focused on societal and industry need. More broadly, industry

stakeholders cite that they would like to know more about NERC programmes – both the areas which NERC are thinking of investing in, as well as the broad range of research areas which it already funds. Involvement in strategic planning is key in this area – business stakeholders say that they would appreciate the opportunity to feed into NERC’s strategic direction both in an overarching sense in terms of the topics and areas of research which it funds, and also on a project-by-project basis. The development of genuinely strategic steering groups is noted as a key area for improvement by business stakeholders in terms of project-by-project working. These stakeholders would like the opportunity to shape the direction of an individual project from the outset, working in partnership with NERC and its funded researchers to ensure that relevant projects are sufficiently focused on a given social or industry issue and can therefore maximise the socio-economic and political impact of the project in question. Partnership working is a key area of interest for business stakeholders, many of whom cite their wishes to develop greater and more effective working relationships with NERC as they see the current and potential value of the research it funds and conducts.

Additional to this, business stakeholders cite a range of practical ways in which NERC can look to maximise the socio-economic and political impact of its research, from putting impact criteria in proposals, engaging with stakeholders in the design of briefs and ensuring stakeholder objectives are taken into account and engaging with industry stakeholders to ensure that it understands and defines impact in the way in which industry would. Developing funding streams for multidisciplinary projects – potentially working with other Research Councils to do so – is additionally noted by business stakeholders as a key way in which NERC can increase the impact of its research.

Providing tailored communication is key to achieving sufficient cut-through with this audience. Business stakeholders cite the need for information to be communicated in language which will resonate both with industry and their wider stakeholders. At present, many business stakeholders note that the information which they do receive from NERC is overly academic in its presentation and content, and includes acronyms and jargon which cannot be easily translated for non-specialist audiences. One business stakeholder noted the need for information to be disseminated via industry contacts who are specialists in a particular area to ensure that the content is properly understood and can then be translated for wider audiences.

Developing and enabling partnerships with business stakeholders, ensuring that mechanisms are in place to ensure that these stakeholders are able to feed in and shape both NERC’s strategic direction, and the strategic direction of individual projects.