**Announcement of Opportunity**

**2017/18 Evidence Synthesis Training Pilot Scheme**

**Closing Date: 16:00 13th June 2017**

1. **Summary**

2. NERC invites proposals to deliver training for early career researchers and PhD students at the point of submission relevant to the theme of evidence synthesis to inform policy and business decision-making, developed and delivered in collaboration with the users of NERC research.

3. Funded training initiatives will be required to develop and deliver training by 31st March 2018. There is a total budget of £0.5M available for this scheme.

4. There is no limit to the maximum that applicants can apply for to deliver this training.

5. This opportunity is open to organisations eligible for NERC managed-mode research grant funding.

6. Initiatives must prioritise NERC-funded PhD students at the point of submission (within six months or six months post-submission) and/or environmental sciences early career researchers (working within academic and/or non- academic settings).

7. All training supported through this call must be developed and delivered with engagement from stakeholders in NERC research of relevance to the broad field of evidence synthesis.

**Background**

8. In order to sustain the flow of top talent and skills for UK science, business and government, NERC supports two types of postgraduate training:

   I. Responsive training: This is postgraduate training where the topic is chosen by the student/supervisor drawn from any part of NERC's remit.

   II. Focused training: This is postgraduate training that ensures NERC trains individuals with particular, specialist skills that are linked to our strategic priorities or to priority skills needs. Whilst the training topic may be chosen by the student/supervisor, it will reflect a specific training objective which NERC has identified.

9. This pilot scheme forms part of the Focused training portfolio.

**Remit of the Call**

10. NERC research provides evidence necessary to inform robust decision-making across a wide range of sectors but this information is often in formats unsuitable or inaccessible for interrogation by non-expert audiences. For the UK to benefit broadly from its investment in user-relevant primary research there is a need to develop capacity in the NERC research community in the synthesis of independent and numerous research studies to form a rigorous, reliable and accessible evidence base to inform decision making.

11. Drawing on information collected through the 2014 Request for Evidence, the NERC Training Advisory Board (TAB) identified evidence synthesis as an area of training need, with a focus on the synthesis of academic research into evidence suitable to inform policy and business decision-making. In particular, skills in statistics and data management, inter alia review types and methods, the nature and application of different synthesis methodologies within different evidence contexts, policy research, and evidence synthesis, mapping and meta-analysis.

12. This call is to provide training to NERC students and early career researchers (ECRs) relevant to the theme of evidence synthesis to inform policy and business decision-making, focusing on the translation of research into evidence for users of NERC research. Training within the specific areas identified above is encouraged although awards focusing on other aspects of evidence synthesis relevant to users of NERC research will also be eligible for funding through this call. It is intended that the outcome of this training investment will be a cohort of environmental science early career researchers familiar with the principles of evidence synthesis to inform non-academic audiences.

13. All training initiatives must be of relevance to the [NERC science remit](#) but may also include training at the interface between these areas and other disciplines, where many major research challenges exist. Training can be relevant to a particular strand of NERC research or in the broad themes of evidence synthesis relevant across NERC remit.

14. Initiatives that will not deliver training of relevance to the theme of evidence synthesis will not be considered for funding.

15. Training initiatives may take a variety of forms (including but not exclusively):

     i. Placements with user organisations
     ii. Short Courses
     iii. Workshops
     iv. Field Courses
     v. E-Learning/Webinars/Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).
     vi. Etc.

16. Applications for training supporting placements or time within a relevant user organisation are particularly encouraged. As are training initiatives that provide significant added value to other NERC priorities/investments, such as [NERC's strategic research programmes](#).

17. Training initiatives may form part of accredited Continuing Professional Development (CPD), Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma.

18. All training must offer places as priority to NERC-funded PhD students at the point of submission (within six months of or six months post-submission) and/or environmental sciences ECRs. ECRs do not need to be working on NERC-funded research to be considered as priority candidates but should be working in a sector/discipline aligned to NERC's science remit. Please note, NERC Fellows ([e.g. IRF](#)) and NERC-sponsored fellows (e.g. [NERC Daphne Jackson Trust Fellows](#)) are considered to be ECRs. Where there is competition for course places between priority candidates or between non-priority candidates, the award holder should offer places to applicants according to the applicant training need and impact that receiving training will have on them.

19. These awards are cash limited and additional funding will not be made available to supplement any awards.

20. **NERC requires that all applicants engage with relevant non-academic stakeholders when developing and delivering training. Applicants proposing training without this engagement will not be considered for funding.**

**Funding**

21. There is no maximum funding limit for individual training awards through this pilot scheme.

22. There is a total budget of up to £0.5M available for this scheme and NERC intends to support approximately 10 awards.

23. Funding should be calculated on a per attendee (place on the training course) basis. The per-attendee cost will be funded at 100% Full Economic Cost (FEC).

24. The cost per attendee requested should include, where appropriate, support for travel and subsistence costs for attendees to attend the training. Funding to cover staff travel, time and subsistence costs, venue hire, materials and consumables can be included. Indirect and estate costs should not be included.

25. For applications requesting funding to support placements, all costs associated with undertaking a placement (including pay for the duration of the placement, appropriate travel and subsistence, etc.) can be requested.

26. A breakdown of these costs must be included within the application at a per-training recipient level in a clear and easily understandable format. Reflecting the wide range of costs that can be requested through this call, no pro forma of costs has been provided as it would not be possible to capture all potential headings. However, applications are expected to break down costs to a level appropriate for their assessment e.g. applicant T&S, venue hire, salary for placements for ECR staff, etc. Applications that fail to provide this information will not receive funding through this call.

27. The assessment panel may recommend to NERC that individual costs or the overall cost of a proposal be reduced prior to making an offer of award.

28. In-kind and co-funding contributions from non-academic end-users/stakeholders to support a proposed training initiative are encouraged though not mandatory for this call.

29. All training supported through this call must be completed by 31st March 2018.

**Eligibility**

30. This opportunity is open to [organisations eligible for NERC research grant funding](#), i.e. applicants based in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), NERC Research & Collaborative Centres, and Independent Research Organisation (IROs) approved by NERC. This is a managed mode scheme.

31. Applicants must include a least one formal user/stakeholder Project Partner who will have an integral role in the proposed training initiative. The role of the project partner in relation to the delivery of the proposed training must be clearly detailed within the proposal case for support.

32. NERC funded DTPs and CDTs are eligible to apply to this competition for funding to support training initiatives aligned with, but in addition to, their existing DTP and CDT student training programmes. Applications may not request funding to support activities already funded through the DTP/CDT awards. DTP/CDT applications must demonstrate that the proposed training is not duplicative of their existing training within their application.

33. Training courses delivered by NERC DTPs and CDTs must be open and advertised to attendees beyond the DTP/CDT and places on these courses must be offered according to the scheme priority criteria. Training supported through these awards can therefore be delivered by a DTP/CDT but not restricted to only DTP/CDT students.

**Application Process**

34. Evidence Synthesis proposals must be submitted using the Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S). Applicants should select Document Type – 'Studentship Proposal' and then select the Scheme – Doctoral Training (4913). The Call Name (Je-S) is 'Evidence Synthesis Training (JUNE2017).

35. This call will open on Je-S on the 30th May 2017.

36. All applications must state an end date before March 31st 2018.

37. To use the Je-S system, the RO must be registered as a Je-S user. Full details are available on the Je-S website. Further information can also be obtained by contacting the Je-S Helpdesk by email at JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk, or by telephone on 01793 444164.

38. Applicants should leave enough time for their proposal to pass through their organisation's Je-S submission route before 16:00 GMT on June 13th 2017. Any application that is received after the closing date, is incomplete, or does not meet this competition's eligibility criteria, will be returned to the applicant and will not be considered.

39. Proposals should be submitted from the administrative lead partner. The administrative lead partner will receive the funding for the training and will be the main point of contact for NERC. Where multiple departments of the same organisation or multiple organisations are involved in the delivery of the training, must be added to the application pro forma as a project partner.

**Proposals**

40. A Case for Support pro forma is available to download from the NERC website and this document must be completed and attached to your Je-S application as a "Case for Support" document. Please do not attach any additional documents as they will not be considered when reviewing your application.

41. The Case for Support attachment submitted through the Je-S system, must be completed in single-spaced typescript of minimum font size 11 point (Arial or other sans serif typeface of equivalent size), with margins of at least 2cm. References should also be at least 11 point font. Please note that Arial narrow and Calibri are not allowable font types and any proposal which has used either of these font types within their submission will be rejected. References and footnotes should also be at least 11 point font and should also be in Arial. Headers and footers should not be used for references or information relating to the scientific case. Embedded diagrams or pictures or numerical formulae may contain text that is smaller than 11 point but applicants should ensure that the font is legible. Text in tables and figure labels not within embedded diagrams should be at least 11 point. If applicants are not able to use Arial font and are unsure whether the font type they plan to use will meet NERC guidelines then they should contact the [NERC Research Careers team](#) before submitting their proposal for confirmation of whether or not the font type they plan to use is acceptable.

42. Applicants should note that the assessment panel will not consider reference to external sources, e.g. websites, if these are included within the text.

43. Each Case for Support should include information under the headings detailed below:

- **Training Excellence**
- **Training Justification**
- **Justification of Resources**

44. Further information concerning these assessment criteria and the types of evidence that will be considered are available in *Annex A*.

45. No additional attachments, including letters of support, will be accepted.

**Assessment Process**

46. Bids will be assessed by an assessment panel against two assessment headings:

- **Training Excellence (75%)**
- **Training Justification (25%**

47. Training Justification scores will be used to rank proposals in the event of equal weighted scores.

48. Additional information about these assessment criteria can be found in *Annex A* to this document.

49. The scoring guide to be used by the assessment panel can be found in *Annex B* to this document.

50. All applications will be assessed solely against the criteria detailed above. Please note, applications requesting higher levels of funding will not be discriminated against in favour of proposals requesting lower funding amounts both for total amounts and for per attendee costs. However, all costs must be justified within the application and NERC will reduce award amounts as appropriate should costs not be appropriately justified.

51. All eligible applications will be reviewed by the assessment panel and there will not be an external review stage for this call.

52. The assessment panel will consider existing NERC training when agreeing their funding recommendation for NERC executive with the intention of minimizing duplication in the training supported by NERC. Applicants must therefore demonstrate within their proposal that the proposed training is not currently being delivered through other NERC schemes.

**Timetable**

- Call opening date: 12th April 2017
- Call opening date for submission of application through Je-S: 31st May 2017
- Closing date for applications: 13th June 2017
- Assessment Panel: July 2017
- It is intended that funding decisions will be communicated by July 31st 2017
- Training initiatives must be delivered by: March 31st 2018

**Reporting Requirements**

53. All successful applicants will be required to report on their training initiative. A summary of this information will be provided to the NERC Training Advisory Board for comment.

54. Award holders will be expected to report on the:
   - number of applications received
   - number of places awarded to: 1) NERC PhD Students & 2) Early Career Researchers
   - general feedback regarding the competition.
   - current institution of attendees
   - high level summary of current academic area of applicants defined within NERC Research Areas
   - applicant feedback
   - user/stakeholder feedback
   - impact of this training and how this impact will be captured

55. NERC will distribute appropriate pro formas well ahead of the deadlines for the collection of these data.

56. This information will inform future funding opportunities of this nature and may also feed into the provision of training across NERC's postgraduate training portfolio.

**Contact**

For all enquiries please contact:

*NERC Research Careers team*
Email: researchcareers@nerc.ac.uk

**Annex A: Evidence Synthesis training pilot scheme Assessment Criteria and Factors & Evidence that might be discussed**

*Please note this does not present a complete list of all factors that may be discussed but those that will form the basis of discussions during assessment.*

| Assessment Criteria | Key aspects of an excellent short course | Factors and evidence that might be discussed (N.B. not an exhaustive list) |
|---|---|---|
| Training Excellence (75%) /10 | Identified, realistic training outcomes within areas of identifiable training need relevant to the NERC remit and the remit of the call.<br><br>User/stakeholder project partner fully integrated into the development and delivery of all aspects of the training<br><br>Well-justified, excellent quality, training content delivered in an appropriate manner to provide confidence that the training outcomes will be met<br><br>Relevant expertise across all staff involved in the preparation and delivery of the training<br><br>Appropriate scale to meet training delivery outcomes and impact national training need | Identified training outcomes mapped to NERC remit and the training scheme goals<br><br>Logical and deliverable training plan<br><br>Academic and training experience of applicants to develop and deliver all proposed training<br><br>Role of, and requirements for, evidence synthesis with respect to user/stakeholder partner organisation Feedback and learning outcomes of previous or similar training courses in which the applicants were involved<br><br>Availability of relevant infrastructure to deliver the training e.g. equipment, facilities, support, training staff.<br><br>Accessibility and scale of proposed training including how the proposed training will be advertised.<br><br>Impact and legacy? |
| Training Justification (25%) /10 | Proposed training lies fully within the call remit of evidence synthesis of relevance to NERC remit.<br><br>Identified and well-justified need and demand for training of this nature and its outcomes<br><br>Clearly justified resources necessary to deliver the proposed training | Identified gaps in the national provision of training of this nature such as a dearth of comparable courses delivering equivalent training<br><br>Examples of oversubscription to previous iterations of this training or similar training courses<br><br>Report outcomes, other than NERC Most Wanted, identifying the need for training in the specific skills and expertise identified as outcomes<br><br>Data from organisations, users, etc. indicating a need for individuals equipped with these skills.<br><br>Information on all staff time and additional resources relevant to the development and delivery of the training at a level where resources for delivering each training component can be discussed (i.e. not just "Staff costs - £xk") |

## Annex B: Evidence Synthesis Scoring Descriptions

| Scoring Descriptors and examples | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Criterion | Excellent<br>8, 9, 10 | Good<br>6, 7 | Average<br>3, 4, 5 | Poor<br>0, 1, 2 |
| Training Excellence (75%) | Proposed training is of outstanding/excellent quality<br><br>Realistic, high impact learning outcomes with a clear and achievable delivery plan<br><br>Project partner(s) fully integrated into the development and delivery of the proposed training<br><br>Training staff and course leads with a proven, leading track record in delivering excellent training in the proposed areas<br><br>First-rate supportive infrastructure and equipment to maximize training impact<br><br>Extremely well justified course scale including project partner(s), location, attendee numbers, course structure and duration | Proposed training is of very good/good quality<br><br>Achievable, moderate impact learning outcomes with a reasonable delivery plan<br><br>Project partner(s) involved in the development and delivery of the proposed training<br><br>Training staff and course leads with a track record in delivering training in the proposed areas<br><br>Appropriate supportive infrastructure and equipment to ensure training impact<br><br>Justified course scale including project partner(s), location, attendee numbers, course structure and duration | Proposed training contains some is mostly of average quality<br><br>Learning outcomes either difficult to achieve or low impact<br><br>Project partner(s) listed but lack of clarity of their role in the development and delivery of the proposed training<br><br>Training staff and course leads have some experience of delivering training in the proposed areas<br><br>Some supportive infrastructure and equipment in place but either incomplete or unsuitable for achieving all training outcomes<br><br>Some justification for course scale but not convincing | Proposed training is of poor quality<br><br>Unachievable or no identified learning outcomes with few/no details on how they will be delivered<br><br>Very little/no involvement of project partner(s) in the development and delivery of the proposed training<br><br>Training staff and course leads present little or no evidence of delivering training in the proposed areas<br><br>Inappropriate or no supportive infrastructure and equipment in place<br><br>Little or no justification for course scale<br><br>Proposed training is so unrealistic or contains issues so severe it cannot be considered for funding. |
| Training Justification (25%) | Strongly evidenced argument demonstrating the national need and demand for the proposed training and how this training will address this.<br><br>Justified and clear resource request clearly demonstrating how all aspects of the training will be supported | Some evidence presented demonstrating the national need and demand for the proposed training and how this training will address this<br><br>Good justification for resources to support training but lacking in clarity or not covering all areas | Little evidence presented demonstrating both the need and demand for the proposed training and how this training will address this<br><br>Some justification for resources but not across all areas and lacking in clarity | Barely in remit.<br><br>No evidence presented demonstrating the national need and demand for the proposed training.<br><br>Little or no evidence presented to justify requested resources or completely lacking in clarity |