

Announcement of Opportunity: Highlight Topics July 2015

Call launched: 14 July 2015

Closing date: 8 October 16:00



1. Summary

NERC invites proposals for the second round of highlight topics, a route for funding strategic research. Highlight topics focus strategic research on defined topic areas, and will be delivered through independent projects. The highlight topics in this call are:

- A. Evolutionary biotic response to environmental change: limits to adaptation
- B. Coastal morphology: coastal sediment budgets and their role in coastal recovery
- C. Quantifying climate risk for adaptation and resilience planning
- D. Closing the global methane budget
- E. Reducing uncertainty in the integrity of potential carbon capture and storage sites

NERC has allocated £16 million to this call and a maximum of £4 million (cost to NERC) is available per highlight topic. There are more highlight topics than funding is available for, so that all highlight topics will not, necessarily, result in funded grants. This is to ensure that only the very best research is funded.

A notification of intent to submit a proposal must be sent to researchgrants@nerc.ac.uk by 21 September 2015 16:00. The closing date for proposals is 16:00 on 8 October 2015, which must be submitted via the research councils' Joint electronic-Submissions (JeS) system.

2. Background to the call

NERC's vision is to place environmental science at the heart of responsible management of our planet. NERC's goals are to fund excellent, peer reviewed environmental science that helps us:

- understand and predict how our planet works
- manage our environment responsibly as we pursue new ways of living, doing business, escaping poverty and growing economies.

NERC's strategic research funding supports research that addresses some major challenges of the 21st century: benefiting from natural resources, resilience to environmental hazards and managing environmental change. To provide the understanding to meet these challenges NERC must work with the broad environmental science community to identify priority research areas, topics and partnerships to take forward through our strategic research activities.

Decisions to allocate funding to a new strategic research priority are made through one of three routes; the pathway used depends on considerations such as the nature of the research challenge, its scale, complexity and timeliness, as well as the immediacy of the decision making.

Highlight topics are a funding stream that focuses strategic research on defined topic areas. The other funding streams are strategic programme areas and joint strategic response.

3. Highlight topic scope

The following highlight topics have been selected for this call and are considered to be of equal priority. There are more highlight topics announced than available funding will support, so all topics will not, necessarily, result in funded grants. This is to ensure effective competition so that only the very best research is funded.

Proposals must address issues within a single highlight topic; proposals addressing more than one highlight topic will not be accepted. Where multiple proposals are invited within a highlight topic, they must be independent projects and it is not anticipated that coordination will be required between projects to achieve their aims.

NERC has allocated £16 million over four years to this call. A maximum of £4 million (cost to NERC) is available per highlight topic, but it is not anticipated that all highlight topics specified in this announcement will be funded up to the value of £4 million. Please refer to the individual highlight topic scope for the maximum duration and budget limits per project.

Associated Studentships are out of scope for these highlight topics.

The expected start date for projects funded under this Announcement of Opportunity is no later than 1 May 2016.

A. Evolutionary biotic response to environmental change: limits to adaptation

Objective

The aim of this work is to improve our understanding and predictive capabilities of the dynamics of communities, and the limits of their adaptive capacities in response to environmental change through the integration of ecology and evolutionary genetics.

Strategic context

The consequences of increasing pressures on ecosystems, due to increasing resource use, climate, weather and land use change creating an increasingly variable environment, are uncertain. One such consequence is biodiversity loss, which is a pressing global issue that impacts on both ecosystem health and the provision of services. Understanding the characteristics of populations and species that make them resilient can inform management scenarios that enable the goals of biodiversity preservation and ecosystem functioning. Gaining a conceptual understanding and empirical evidence of the factors limiting the capacity of communities to adapt to rapid environmental change is fundamental to gauge the resilience of the biosphere against changing conditions and develop meaningful strategies for mitigation of environmental change. The challenge now is to understand how organisms will actually respond to the projected changes in their environments, and progress in this area would be enabled by research that bridges ecological and evolutionary genetics.

Scope

The work must achieve a level of integration between ecology and evolutionary genetics, both theory and approaches, in order to be able to understand and predict the dynamics and limits to adaptation of communities in response to environmental change. Work that does not seek this integration is not within the scope of this call. The work will be applicable to a wide range of environments, from terrestrial, freshwater and coastal to open ocean.

Scientific advances

This research combines two general themes:

1. The ability to predict the evolution of groups of interacting species based on a pattern of environmental change and fluctuations, the species composition and their inter-relationships, and the genetic state of each population.
2. The inter-relationships between phenotypic plasticity, epigenetic change and conventional evolution by natural selection.

Projects are expected to address one or more of the following (inter-related) questions either in a community context, using single species, or species pairs.

- i. What are the relative contributions of phenotypic plasticity, epigenetics and conventional evolution to adaptive change?
- ii. To what extent can plasticity, and evolutionary responses in the genes underlying such plasticity, buffer ecological disruption, and what are the limits are to such buffering?
- iii. Does existing phenotypic plasticity aid adaptation by supplying an initial step to the evolution of novel fixed phenotypes, or by extending population persistence to allow local adaptation? Alternatively, does it impede adaptation by delaying evolutionary responses?
- iv. How important are epigenetic factors (the component of natural variation that does not depend on genotype, but might instead be related to different environments - especially developmental environments) in understanding the response to environmental change?

Proposals should look to build on existing ecological and demographic models, population genetic theory, quantitative genetics and spatial approaches such as niche modelling. Approaches could include laboratory experiments and field studies of extant or historic populations, through to metagenomic studies, and should span a wide range of organisms.

Outcomes of the research should be an improved understanding, through the integration of ecological and evolutionary genetic theory, of the processes that determine, maintain and erode diversity. Understanding will be delivered through the capability to quantify within-species variation and its consequences for the evolution for ecological networks, and how such changes affect other traits contributing to ecosystem services, and is expected to feed into more effective stewardship on natural resources through collaborations with policy makers and stakeholders.

Delivery

This highlight topic will support up to three projects, each funded up to the value of £1.32m at 80% FEC (£1.65m at 100% FEC) and up to four years in duration.

B. Coastal morphology: coastal sediment budgets and their role in coastal recovery

Objective

The aim of this highlight topic is to better understand dynamic coastal processes, both physical and biological, and their role in coastal recovery.

Strategic context

The UK coastline is facing increasing pressures from economic and social development and climate change (sea level rise and changes in weather patterns), with the risks only likely to increase in the future as estuaries and coasts are particularly sensitive to small changes in external forcing (e.g. seasonality, rainfall volumes, wave climates, and storm frequency) that may have large, non-linear effects on sediment dynamics. Whilst hydrodynamic models have become highly advanced and robust, the complexity of sediment dynamic processes (including coupled physical-biological) in the water column, on and within the seabed, and at the water-land interface, is not well understood. This knowledge gap means there are substantial uncertainties in the prediction of medium-term (years) and long-term (decadal and longer) regional sediment budgets and morphological change that need to be addressed to improve decision-making for UK shoreline management plans and to better understand how the coast recovers after sequences of events, such as seasonal storms.

Scope

This highlight topic will require an integrated interdisciplinary approach that utilises existing and new field and laboratory-based process studies and data in the development and testing of novel numerical models. Projects should focus on coastal systems in the UK and partnerships with businesses and government are anticipated to maximise the uptake of research findings and predictive tools.

Scientific advances

This requires a fundamental science advance in our understanding and quantitative modelling of sediment dynamics from within the seabed up through the water column. This needs to cover the wide range of sedimentary environments and flow conditions found in UK waters, be applicable at a range of spatial and temporal scales, and needs to be a whole system understanding, including both biogenic and lithogenic fluxes and functions.

Three parallel strands of scientific advance are needed and must all be addressed by projects:

- i. a better understanding and representation of both transportable and source material within the coastal zone (e.g. grain size, cohesiveness, lithology, biological or ecological characteristics);
- ii. a quantitative assessment of the flux of transported material, including how this flux is mediated by the ecological system that exists along and within the coastal zone; and
- iii. the assessment of sensitivities of this mixed-sediment physical and biological system to possible changes in external forcing, including the combined impact of multiple variables and sequences of events, with the goal of understanding the internal dynamics of the system (e.g. nonlinearities, critical thresholds, tipping points, precursors and antecedent conditions) in parallel with assessments of behavioural uncertainties.

It is expected that the outcome of the research will be improved knowledge of coastal sediment budgets, including their role in coastal recovery, and hence a better understanding of the risks to our coastal environments and how we can increase resilience.

Delivery

This highlight topic should be addressed as a single project up to the value of £4m at 80% FEC (£5m 100% FEC) and up to four years in duration.

C. Quantifying climate risk for adaption and resilience planning

Objective

The objective of this highlight topic is to undertake fundamental research relating to the characterisation and quantification of risks to inform adaptation to climate change in particular sectors. The work must start from an assessment of the end-user needs to define the scope of the climate science research.

Strategic context

It is widely recognised that climate-related risks are a significant threat that are often not properly accounted for in planning decisions. Such planning must incorporate scientific uncertainty, but can suffer from a 'ballooning of uncertainty' as each additional factor (e.g. future emissions, regional downscaling, impact modelling) and its uncertainty is considered. Risk management approaches such as the development of 'climate resilient adaptation pathways' can help to constrain this. These approaches require an initial evaluation of the critical end-user planning decision points.

Examples of types of research activities that could be formulated on the basis of end-user needs might be:

- The insurance sector requires information on correlated risks. A research gap may be identified concerning quantifying the risk of temporal clustering of storms in the UK under present and future climate conditions.
- Assessing food retail supply chain risk requires quantification of exceeding temperature and precipitation thresholds in certain calendar months at particular global locations. This may need new methods of downscaling climate model output.
- The energy generation and supply network is vulnerable to high winds and flooding. Quantifying the risk may need new research on the interaction between weather events occurring on timescales of hours to weeks and how this may be altered by climate change.

Scope

Projects must:

- start from and be focused on identified needs for evidence to inform climate risk assessment of one or more end-user groups in the UK (either a business sector civil society or the public sector);
- be aimed at addressing some of the fundamental environmental science questions that arise when attempting to quantify the associated climate risk(s); and
- be designed to produce results that could be incorporated in a comprehensive climate risk assessment undertaken by an end-user or a climate services provider.

Projects should not be an end-to-end climate risk assessment or a generic part of a larger climate services programme.

The end-user is required to be a partner on the proposal. NERC leads two initiatives where users are already engaged in considering how environmental science can help them assess climate risk. Both

the Environmental Risks to Infrastructure Innovation Programme¹ and the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Innovation Programme² have information regarding users' needs of climate information, which applicants may find useful. While there is an obligation to have a partner end-user identified on proposals to this highlight topic, NERC is not proscribing who appropriate partners should, or could, be. The information on users' needs provided via these links to existing programmes is for information only, and is not intended to be prescriptive.

Scientific advances

The structure of a proposal will need to be informed through preliminary discussions with relevant end-user groups. Delivery of the project will require:

- i. Working with users to identify the specific types of hazardous conditions that are important for the end-user group, including e.g. context-relevant thresholds, interactions and connections, so that the results are problem-led rather than science-led.
- ii. Identifying and understanding, at a process level, the relationships between the drivers of climate variability and change, and the risk of hazards.
- iii. Robustly assessing the extent to which the risks can be quantified, where there are uncertainties and whether changes to the risks can be predicted on monthly to decadal timescales.

Delivery

This highlight topic will support up to three projects, each funded up to the value of £1.32m at 80% FEC (£1.65m at 100% FEC) and up to four years in duration.

D. Closing the global methane budget

Objective

The objective of this highlight topic is to close the global methane budget through undertaking new observations and further analysis of existing data.

Strategic context

The atmospheric level of methane has increased by 50% since the pre-industrial times and accounts for roughly 20% of the total increase in radiative forcing. Globally, the methane growth rate has varied over the past 35 years for reasons that are not fully understood. Estimates derived from process studies of sources ('bottom up') are 20% higher than those from direct observation of the air ('top down'). There is therefore a need to understand and quantify both global methane levels, and national and international methane emissions, to close the global methane budget.

Major gaps in our understanding of the methane budget on the global scale have important policy implications. Such policies are often described as the opportunity to 'buy time' to control and reduce CO₂ emissions. They form a central part of the present US climate policy framework with a goal to reduce methane emissions from oil and gas sector by 40-45% from 2012 levels by 2025. Without a clear understanding of the drivers of present methane trends, it is impossible to provide the necessary verification for such goals. In the UK, methane has also played a pivotal role in national

¹ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/innovation/activities/infrastructure/envrisks/>

² <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/innovation/activities/sustainablefood/saric/>

efforts to meet GHG emissions reduction targets. Reduction in methane emissions from agriculture, waste disposal, leakage from gas distribution and coal mining have resulted in a drop of 51% from 1990 to 2012 in emissions reported as part of the UNFCCC. However, confidence in such national inventories is undermined by our inability to close the global methane budget.

Scope

The work must be focused on observational work on methane levels to close the global methane budget. More data on methane concentration and associated isotopes is needed to resolve the divergence between ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ emissions estimates and to help pin-point the explanation for recent trends.

There is the opportunity to use existing and planned observational datasets, such as those from the GOSAT and Sentinel 5P satellite missions, and undertake new targeted observational campaigns. This work should, if appropriate, utilise or enhance existing measurement infrastructure for example the pole-to-pole Atlantic sector network including UK facilities at Svalbard, Weybourne, Cape Verde and Halley Bay, or the infrastructure set up as part of the as part of the NERC ‘Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Feedbacks’ programme.

Scientific advances

Research in this area could include:

- i. quantification of the spatial and temporal atmospheric loading;
- ii. estimation of the atmospheric efflux from ground source flux strength;
- iii. source characterisation through geochemical and isotopic tracer measurement in the atmosphere;
- iv. integration of data with numerical modelling studies both to improve the representation of processes in models and to help interpret past and present trends.

Delivery

This highlight topic should be addressed as a single project up to the value of £4m at 80% FEC (£5m 100% FEC) and up to four years in duration.

E. Reducing uncertainty in the integrity of potential carbon capture and storage sites

Objective

This highlight topic aims to improve knowledge of the integrity of the sedimentary overburden of potential CO₂ storage reservoirs in the North Sea region.

Strategic context

Carbon capture and storage (CCS), the process by which CO₂ is captured at point sources (power generation and industrial) and permanently stored in subsurface geological reservoirs, is widely recognised as a key technology for significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions, enabling fossil fuel resources to be used in a more environmentally sustainable manner. However, in order to reduce emissions and work towards meeting international and national CO₂ emissions targets, sites capable of receiving and securely storing very large volumes of captured CO₂ are needed. While current initiatives are improving our understanding of CCS reservoirs and seal properties and CO₂ leakage at the seabed, the risk of leakage in the sedimentary overburden between the seal and the

seabed remains a key gap in our knowledge, yet this overburden zone is important as any leakage from a CCS reservoir will ultimately permeate upwards through it to the seabed.

Scope

This highlight topic will support research that reduces uncertainty over potential leakage from CCS reservoirs through the sediments overlying cap-rock seals of CCS sites in the North Sea. Integrated field-based and modelling studies of the subsurface in the North Sea, including the application of cutting-edge technologies and techniques, are expected to be the focus of successful projects. Collaborations with the CCS and hydrocarbon industry are encouraged.

Scientific advances

Proposals are expected to advance our understanding of:

- i. potential zones of weakness in the overburden (e.g. faults/chimneys) that may act as conduits for enhanced fluid flow to seabed;
- ii. the physical properties (e.g. permeability) of overburden strata and how this will affect rates of dispersed fluid flow;
- iii. the geochemical properties (e.g. pH) that influence reactions with leaking CO₂; and
- iv. how improved knowledge of flow rates and potential pathways can enable better predictions of CO₂ leakage and aid the development of remediation measures.

The outcomes of the research should increase confidence in the integrity of potential CCS sites in the North Sea region in particular (such information is mandatory for all prospective EU CO₂ storage sites), but will also have wider significance as most international offshore CCS initiatives are focused on shallow shelf seas with comparable geology to the North Sea.

Delivery

Up to £4m is available to support projects under this highlight topic. It can be addressed by either a single project up to the value of £4m at 80% FEC (£5m 100% FEC) or by a number of smaller projects that combined have a value of up to £4m at 80% FEC. The maximum duration of the projects is four years.

4. Governance and management

Governance

Each funded project will be governed and managed as a single project by the Principal Investigator. NERC does not require joint governance of multiple projects within a highlight topic.

Reporting requirements

As set out in section G of the NERC Grants Handbook³, successful projects are required to submit annual reports of Outputs and Performance Measures (OPMs) and a Final Expenditure Statement. For Strategic Research investments, including successful highlight topic grants, NERC additionally requires biannual progress reports.

³ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/howtoapply/forms/grantshandbook.pdf>

Data management

All NERC proposals require an Outline Data Management Plan to identify data sets of long term value that should be made available to NERC data centres for archiving and reuse at the end of the grant. Full details on data management planning are available on the NERC website⁴.

Knowledge exchange and impact

All NERC proposals should be accompanied by a 'Pathways to Impact' document. There is a requirement to identify the target communities/stakeholders, consider how these various groups/individuals are likely to benefit from (or be affected by) the research, and create a plan to engage with them which is appropriate and goes beyond communication, timely and happens early in the design stage. Full details on NERC policy relating to Pathways to Impact are available on the NERC website⁵.

5. Application process

How to apply

Applicants are encouraged to contact the NERC office at an early stage to discuss any questions on call procedures. The Research Grants Team (email: researchgrants@nerc.ac.uk) acts as the first point of contact for highlight topic grant proposals.

A notification of intent to submit must be emailed to this address by 21 September 2015 16:00.

Tell us the topic you plan to apply against, the institutions, investigators and project partners that are expected to be involved and include a title and abstract of your planned work. The abstract should be a maximum of 1 side A4, including references, in minimum font size 11 point (Arial or other sans serif typeface of equivalent size), with margins of at least 2cm. The abstract will not be assessed, but NERC will use the information to plan the proposal assessment. The abstract in the notification does not need to exactly match the final submission. Full JeS proposals submitted without a prior notification of intent will be rejected.

The format of highlight topic proposals follows the guidance for discovery science large grant full proposals (with exceptions detailed in this document for the maximum budget and associated studentships) and is in section F of the [research grants and fellowships handbook](#). Submission of an outline proposal is not required for the highlight topic call (a notification of intent is required).

Full proposals must be submitted using the [Joint electronic-Submissions system \(JeS\)](#) . Please select Document Type - 'Standard Proposal', Scheme - 'Directed' and the appropriate highlight topic call based on the call closing date e.g. Strategic highlight topics OCT15. Note there is one call for all the topics and not separate calls for each topic. The form will be available in JeS from around week commencing 24 August.

The highlight topic being addressed should be clearly indicated in the first line of the Objectives.

Applicants must ensure that their proposal is received by NERC by 4pm (16.00) on the closing date. The JeS system will close at 16.00 and proposals will not submit to NERC after that time. They should leave enough time for their proposal to pass through their organisation's JeS submission

⁴ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/data/dmp/>

⁵ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/howtoapply/pathwaystoimpact/>

route before 16.00 on the closing date. Any proposal that is incomplete or does not meet the eligibility criteria (including submission rules⁶) of NERC will be rejected and will not be considered.

For highlight topic proposals the following should be submitted to NERC via the JeS system:

Document/attachment type	Requirements
Proposal Form	JeS proforma.
Case for Support	Comprising a common previous track record incorporating all Research Organisations involved (up to 3 sides of A4), a common description of the proposed research (up to 16 sides of A4 including all necessary tables, references and figures) and a description of the proposed management structure and plans, participant responsibilities, and scheduling chart (up to 2 sides A4).
Outline Data Management Plan (ODMP)	Up to 1 side A4.
Justification of Resources	Up to 4 sides A4 for all Research Organisations in the proposed grant, including justification for items of equipment between £10,000 and the OJEU threshold. It should also include full justification of all sea-time and facility costs (excluding HPC) included as estimates on proposals. Use of ARCHER should be included as an estimate in Million Allocation Units (MAUs).
C.V.	CVs are required for named research staff (including Researcher Co-Investigators), Visiting Researchers, all Principal and Co-Investigators named in the proposal (up to 2 sides A4 for each CV). There is a JeS validation requiring the same number of CVs as named investigators and researchers on the proposal.
Pathways to Impact	Up to 2 sides A4.
Project Partner Letter of Support	From any named Project Partners (up to 2 sides A4 each). There is a JeS validation requiring the same number of attachments as Project Partners.
Letter of Support	Letters of support should generally be from Project Partners and attached as above. No further letters of support should be attached, except in exceptional cases where permission has been received from researchgrants@nerc.ac.uk . Letters of support can only be attached to the lead proposal.
Facility Form	Use only for application forms for Ship-time/Marine Equipment (SME), Antarctic Logistics Support (BAS should already have been approached before the proposal stage) and for High Performance

⁶ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/howtoapply/>

	Computing (HPC) when use of ARCHER exceeds 160MAU (in any one year).
Technical Assessment	Mandatory for any NERC Facility selected on the JeS proforma except those listed in the previous row. The full list is at: http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/facilities/apply/facilities-requiring-technical-assessment.pdf . The attachment should be a quote from the relevant facility.
Equipment Section attachments.	Under the Equipment Section there is a JeS validation requiring three quotations for each item of equipment requested over £25K and a Business Case (up to 2 sides A4) is required for equipment requests over the OJEU threshold limit (see section E of the research grants and fellowships handbook).
Other attachment	This attachment does not go out to reviewers and should not be used, except where a Head of Department is required to confirm the eligibility of one or more of the Investigators (this will be an internal document for NERC). If the document does not fit within any of the attachment types above, it probably should not be submitted. Contact researchgrants@nerc.ac.uk if unsure.
Proposal cover letter	This attachment does not go out to reviewers, so should not be used except to flag up a significant issue to the NERC Office (e.g. a request not to use a certain reviewer, a potential conflict of interest).

There is no limit to the number of component Research Organisations requesting direct funding on highlight topic grants, but the minimum sum that can be awarded to an individual Research Organisation in a joint proposal is £65,000 (100% FEC). There is no JeS system validation for the upper limit and any grant proposal (including all components) received that exceeds the maximum funding limit for the specific highlight topic will be rejected by NERC. The specified funding limit for each highlight topic area includes all NERC facilities costs (except HPC).

For joint highlight topic proposals (with more than one component), applicants should follow the guidance in the section F of the Grants Handbook, which explains which parts of the proposal form must be submitted by all components or individual components.

All attachments submitted through the JeS 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.

The correct attachment type should be used in JeS as that determines whether attachments are visible to reviewers and/or moderating panel members.

Letters of support must be on headed paper and signed and dated.

Attachments must not exceed the page limits specified for the attachment type and scheme, regardless of the number of component Research Organisations. Attachments should be converted to PDF and checked prior to attaching to the proposal in JeS, as PDF conversion of documents with any non-standard fonts (scientific notation, diagrams etc.) can result in changes, such as missing data or increased document length.

Applicants should ensure that their proposal follows all the submission requirements detailed in the NERC research grant and fellowships handbook. Any proposal which does not follow these rules will be rejected. NERC will not return any proposals for amendment (<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/howtoapply/>).

No associated studentships can be requested under this highlight topic call.

The expected start date for projects funded under this Announcement of Opportunity is no later than 1 May 2016.

Eligibility

Normal individual eligibility applies and is in section C of the NERC research grants and fellowships handbook. Research Organisation eligibility rules are in section C of the handbook. Independent Research Organisations (IROs) must be eligible for NERC Managed (Strategic Research) Mode: (<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs/>).

Investigators may be involved in no more than two proposals submitted to this call (not per highlight topic) and only one of these may be as the lead Principal Investigator.

6. Assessment process

Full proposals will undergo expert peer review (see the [pre-award assessment process and minimum/optimal review levels of grants](#)). Applicants will have the opportunity to respond to reviewer comments before consideration by the highlight topic grants moderating panel, that will allocate final scores and rank proposals based on research excellence and fit to scheme (the appropriateness of the research proposed for the highlight topic). The moderating panel will also examine the strength of the management arrangements and whether the pathways to impact proposed are appropriate.

The moderating panel will be comprised of Peer Review College members, augmented if necessary by relevant experts from outside the College. The aim will be to use at least half from the core membership of the Peer Review College (expertise and conflicts of interest allowing).

NERC will use the recommendations of the moderating panel along with the overall call requirements and the available budget in making the final funding decisions. The highest ranked proposals will be funded, irrespective of the highlight topic to which they apply. However, the funding limit specified for each highlight topic will be applied.

7. Timetable

- Announcement published: 14 July 2015
- Notification of intent due: 21 September 2015 16:00
- Deadline for submission of full proposals: 8 October 2015 16:00
- Moderating panel meets: February 2016
- Latest start date for projects: 1 May 2016

8. Contacts

For eligibility and peer review queries, please contact researchgrants@nerc.ac.uk.