



Valuing Nature Programme Announcement of Opportunity:

Understanding the Value of the Natural Environment for Improving Human Health and Wellbeing

Guidance for applicants

Closing date for proposals: 16:00 BST, 22 September 2015

The following documents are available which provide further information and background to the call development:

Web survey results; Scoping workshop report; and Business Interest Group report available here <http://www.valuing-nature.net/health-wellbeing-funding-call>

1. Summary

The Valuing Nature Programme (VNP) is a Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) –led five year interdisciplinary research programme, which aims to better understand and represent the complexities of the UK’s natural environment in valuation analyses and to consider the wider societal and cultural value of ecosystems services. It will do this through a mix of research, network, development, interdisciplinary working and impact activities.

The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC), are announcing a major new joint investment as part of the VNP. This will provide an opportunity for natural and social scientists, arts and humanities researchers to form substantial interdisciplinary research collaborations (with relevant reference to health sciences), to increase understanding of the role and value of biodiversity and ecosystem processes in relation to human health and wellbeing.

The focus of the call will be on understanding the value of the UK’s natural environment for human health (physical and mental) and wellbeing within and across the following three areas:

- natural hazards and extreme weather events
- human exposure to pathogens and natural aquatic toxins
- urban ecosystems.

As a part of the call proposals should seek to combine different approaches, expertise, methods and/or data to explore cross-cutting themes such as:

- historical, spatial and temporal dynamics of value
- cultural and social contexts of value

- optimising value through evidence-informed design of interventions.

Call opens: **09 July 2015**

Call closes: **4pm, 22 September 2015**

A funding pot of up to £3.96m (80% FEC) from NERC, AHRC and ESRC is available, which is expected to support between three and six interdisciplinary proposals of up to three years duration. Each project must demonstrate how different research elements draw significantly from and integrate expertise and approaches from across the remits of all three funding Research Councils. The final portfolio of awards, rather than each individual project, is expected to broadly represent the overall balance of funder interests in this call.

2. Background and Objectives

2.1 Introduction

There is a need to strengthen the evidence base surrounding the value of the environment (such as human interactions in, and exposure to green and blue (water) space) to mental and physical health and wellbeing. Multiple biological, social, cultural and environmental factors interact to influence outcomes on human health and wellbeing, and there remain gaps in our understanding of these more complex issues. Such complexities include how biodiversity might influence that value, and how known social and cultural factors might interact with the natural environment through time and in different contexts. An understanding of the complex effects of the value of the natural environment on health and wellbeing outcomes will require research that integrates ecological, social, cultural, historical and creative approaches.

In this call, the 'natural environment' encompasses that shaped by human intervention, and covers both managed and unmanaged green/blue space. This context refers to biodiversity and ecosystem services as products or benefits to be gained from the UK environment. As a further clarification, this call is interested in understanding both mental and physical aspects of health and wellbeing across all three research areas, although this may not be explicitly described throughout the document.

As part of the Valuing Nature Programme, a Programme Coordination Team (PCT) has been appointed to support the development of an interdisciplinary research community and to maximise the impact of VNP research. Successful projects will be expected to participate in activities led by the PCT.

2.2 Call Priorities

The main purpose of this call is to increase our understanding of the value of the UK's natural environment, including the role of biodiversity and ecosystem processes, for human health and wellbeing. A key challenge recognised by the VNP is to better understand the ecosystem dynamics that effect health outcomes, thereby improving our understanding of the different values associated with the natural environment. Leading on from this we expect to develop and advance valuation evidence in both economic (including monetary) and non-economic terms.

Biodiversity and ecosystem processes influence human health and wellbeing through the broad range of benefits that we derive from the natural environment, generally considered to be food and water, but also including protection from natural hazards such as floods, toxins

and pathogens; and the aesthetic, cultural and recreational benefits derived from ecosystems, habitats and landscapes. Despite our awareness of the diverse forms of value generated by, or derived from, the natural environment, we know little about the dynamics through which ecosystems and biodiversity provide value in terms of outcomes for health and wellbeing, how this value is distributed, perceived and experienced by different groups in society (including cultural and social groups as well as different age groups), or how this value might be changed through interventions. Understanding the links between the natural environment and human health and wellbeing also needs to be set in the context of climate and land use change, increasing urbanisation and wider demographic, social and cultural change. Such drivers may act in concert to influence potential co-benefits or trade-offs between value for health and wellbeing and other forms of environmental functions and services. It is currently not possible in many cases to holistically evaluate or compare the outcomes of different environmental policy or management interventions in terms of their value for human health and wellbeing.

One or more of the following three areas should be presented as the research focus, around which the role of biodiversity and ecosystem processes in health outcomes should be addressed. See details in Section 3:

- natural hazards and extreme weather events
- human exposure to pathogens and natural aquatic toxins
- urban ecosystems

The above research areas provide the underlying science base for this interdisciplinary research opportunity, which gives consideration to the environmental, social, cultural, historical, health and wellbeing dimensions. Provision must be made within projects to ensure depth of interdisciplinary integration and that different academic communities are drawn together. This should be achieved through a cross-cutting approach which integrates increased understanding of the underlying natural science with, for example:

- historical, spatial and temporal dynamics of value (including for example life-course, cumulative and inter-generational dimensions);
- cultural and social contexts of value, (including, for example, the distribution of health and wellbeing impacts between diverse social and cultural groups)
- optimising value through evidence-informed design of interventions or changes to practices, participation, policies, behaviours or decisions, (including understanding the trade-offs and/or potential for co-benefits where appropriate)

Proposals need not be confined to one area, and may have relevance to more than one of the research areas and/or seek to explore connections between them, for example:

- Extreme events could trigger the occurrence of natural aquatic toxins (or increase the transmission of pathogens), therefore management designed to alleviate the impact of extreme events could also enhance the resilience of the ecosystem.
- The design of surface water management schemes as an integral part of green/blue infrastructure in urban areas could alleviate the impacts of flooding and drought and provide recreational opportunities.
- Increasing demand for recreational use of urban green/blue space could increase the risk of human exposure to disease (e.g. Lyme disease).

A strong focus within this call will be on potential barriers and opportunities to translate evidence into appropriate action across different environmental, social and cultural contexts. Projects will need to identify appropriate end-users to achieve co-development and co-production. This may result in new forms of governance for individuals, communities, organisations and governments to take decisions, which adequately reflect valuations in the broadest sense.

Discussions with the VNP's Business Interest Group (BIG) and Policy Engagement Group (PEG) via PCT-led activities will provide opportunities for further engagement and dialogue with end users, and projects will be expected to explore, develop and exploit specific opportunities for engagement with stakeholders and users in responding to the call announcement of opportunity.

3. Research Areas

The specific focus of this call will be on environmental value for health and wellbeing in, or across, three areas. Proposals to this call should address one, two or three of these. If two or more areas are addressed, proposals will need to demonstrate how these will be integrated. However, there is an expectation that all three areas of research will be covered by the breadth of projects funded through the call. Research should focus on the UK, though reference to international examples may be appropriate.

For all areas, proposals should ensure that natural and social science, arts and humanities approaches are truly embedded and integrated within their research. Applicants should also engage with appropriate user partners at the design stage (for further details see Section 4, Interdisciplinary working and links to end users).

3.1 Natural Hazards and Extreme Weather Events

Significant value can be generated through protection of society from the effects of natural hazards and extreme weather events¹. In the language of ecosystem services, negative health and wellbeing effects frequently arise because ecosystems fail to regulate natural hazards. The extreme events of greatest relevance to the UK are floods, droughts, heat waves, cold spells, and storms, and thus should be the principal focus. Drawing on overseas comparisons or other forms of natural hazard or extreme weather may, however prove useful.

Research challenges could include, but are not limited to:

- Evaluation of environmental characteristics that improve natural hazard regulation through management interventions (e.g. at different spatial levels); their impact on cultural or recreational benefits; and their value in reducing negative health or wellbeing effects.
- Understanding how we integrate mitigation through environmental management with management for other objectives. What are the benefits and trade-offs on health and wellbeing, biodiversity and cultural ecosystem services?
- The historical context of, and narratives around how long health and wellbeing impacts from past events are endured and remembered; the length of the recovery process under different circumstances; and their influences on later events.
- Understanding and valuing the costs and benefits of different community participation and responses (e.g. to homeowners, employers and health service providers) and their adaptations.
- How can actual and perceived risks, memory and experiences of those affected by natural hazards and extreme events be valued?

¹ Alderman, K. et al. (2012) Floods and human health: a systematic review. *Environmental International* 47, 37; Stanke, C. et al. (2012) The effects of flooding on mental health: outcomes and recommendations from a review of the literature. *PLoS Currents Disasters* 4.

3.2 Human exposure to pathogens and natural aquatic toxins

Biodiversity and ecosystem processes can affect human health and wellbeing directly through exposure to diseases or toxins produced by living organisms². While health and wellbeing is affected where ecosystems are pushed beyond the limits they can regulate (e.g. land and marine management on shellfish toxin), there is evidence that biodiversity plays a role in disease regulation³. However, less is known about the indirect effects of changing biodiversity or management interventions that will improve health and wellbeing outcomes.

Research challenges could include, but are not limited to:

- Forecasting exposure risks in the context of environmental change including understanding the mechanisms underlying potential triggers and change in risk.
- Valuing the impact of pathogens and natural aquatic toxins on human health and wellbeing under current and future scenarios.
- Trade-offs and interactions between human safety, exposure to pathogens and biodiversity of recreation and leisure areas.
- Designing management options to reduce the impact of pathogens and natural aquatic toxins, and understanding the costs and benefits of those options and impacts on other environmental benefits.
- Engagement with user communities to better understand behaviours and mitigate health risks.
- Learning from past experiences and the ways such incidents are represented in different media.

3.3 Urban ecosystems

Urban biodiversity and ecosystem processes within green/blue spaces can improve health and wellbeing. This area is focused on developing our understanding of how the composition and design of urban green/blue space influence health and wellbeing outcomes. Proposals should seek to evaluate the complexity of the effects of interventions, bearing in mind there may be negative as well as positive effects and that other factors come into play including social interaction; symbolic values attached to different species; and cultural heritage associated with green/blue space.

Research challenges could include, but are not limited to:

- Improving our understanding of the effectiveness of existing interventions over time. For example: evaluation of health and wellbeing outcomes of interventions such as 'green gyms'.
- How design, aesthetics, planning and maintenance of green/blue infrastructure influence the values of different ecosystem services.
- How accessibility and equality of participation affect use and benefits derived from urban ecosystems and can interventions enhance value by improving community engagement.
- What we can learn from different historical, social and cultural designs, contexts and uses of green/blue infrastructure
- Is it possible to define consistent, comprehensive and comparable measures for the value of green/blue space for health and wellbeing?
- How those responsible for design and maintenance use green/blue space can

² Keesing, F. et al. (2010) Impacts of biodiversity on the emergence and transmission of infectious diseases. *Nature* 468, 647; Chambouvet, A. et al. (2008) Control of toxic marine dinoflagellate blooms by serial parasitic killers. *Science* 322, 1254.

³ Zaghi, D. et al. (2010). Literature study on the impact of biodiversity changes on human health. *Comunita Ambiente Srl*, report for the European Commission (Directorate General Environment), July 2010.

optimise delivery of multiple ecosystem services.

4. Interdisciplinary working and links to end users

Successful projects will need to explore how our understanding of the value of the natural environment, including the role biodiversity and ecosystem processes, can contribute to more effective decision making and/or interventions that would improve health and wellbeing outcomes. This will, of necessity, include:

- a consideration of the role of biodiversity and ecosystem functions in delivering those outcomes and any potential co-benefits or trade-offs;
- valuations (monetary and non-monetary) to enable the relative benefits and risks of those interventions to be assessed and compared across different contexts;
- consideration of potential barriers and opportunities to operationalise research outcomes.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of this work, each project must demonstrate how different research elements draw significantly from and integrate expertise and approaches from across the remits of all three funding Research Councils. Projects will be expected to emphasise the contribution to 'real world' decision making. Explicit detail around how the project will tackle the challenges will be needed to ensure that the research has utility within policy and decision making and that pluralistic and interdisciplinary approaches are evident.

The challenge of working across disciplines and sectors to ensure utility of the research:

This will necessitate a broad interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach which engages early with different academic communities and a range of potential user and research beneficiaries. Evidence will need to feed into decision making and policy implementation across a range of scales, from local decisions to national policy. Proposals will need to demonstrate a commitment to engage with users of research from the earliest stages of project design to appreciate how this will work in the 'real world'. This may be facilitated through provision of tools and approaches to valuations that enable different sectors (such as Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Nature Partnerships, Health and Wellbeing Boards, recreation and tourism sector, land owners, government agencies) to work together in whole-system approaches to local issues. Involvement of business could also be explored to understand who bears the wider costs of impacts on health and wellbeing, such as the liability of leisure businesses following direct exposure to, or public perception of risk.

5. Data Management and ethics

5.1 Research Council Policy

NERC, AHRC and ESRC believe that data generated from the research they fund is a valuable long-term, public-good resource. Data must be managed effectively and datasets of long-term value must be lodged with a recognised data centre to ensure access and long-term security in accordance with RCUK common principles:

<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/datapolicy/>.

Information on NERC data management is available at:

[\(http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/data/policy/\)](http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/data/policy/).

Information on AHRC data management is available at:
<http://www.dcc.ac.uk/resources/policy-and-legal/research-funding-policies/ahrc>.

Information on ESRC data management is available at:
<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/information/data-policy.aspx> .

In addition to standard policies above, applicants are expected to comply with ESRC's Framework for research ethics: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/information/framework-for-research-ethics/index.aspx>. Successful applicants should ensure that the appropriate ethics agreement has been approved before commencement of research.

5.2 Programme Data Policy

Any datasets of long-term value produced as a result of work carried out by the successful projects arising from this call should be made freely available via a recognised data centre, e.g. the Environmental Information Data Centre (EIDC) at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH), the British Oceanographic Data Centre (BODC) and the UK Data Service (UKDS) (for social and humanities data).

Applicants are required to submit an outline data management plan **and must pay careful consideration to data management needs and discuss any extra-ordinary needs with the EIDC / BODC / UKDS as appropriate**. In particular, applicants should consider the following points:

- What data are planned for collection and which of these data are perceived as having long-term value?
- What existing data will be required? Who will supply these data and will there be a cost?
- What level of data management support is going to be required from the EIDC, BODC, the UK Data Service, or any other data centre?
- What, if any, specialist data and informatics skills will be required by the programme and from where will these be obtained?

Successful projects will be expected to produce a full data management plan within three months of the project start date. A programme-wide Data Management Plan will be developed by the PCT, which the projects will be expected to contribute to and comply with. This will include a consideration of how interdisciplinary data and metadata from projects may best be made accessible together.

There will be no charge to the project for the data centres named here to accept and manage the agreed data sets and ensure they are widely accessible after an agreed embargo period. **However, any skills and costs for data management activities internal to the project should be costed and clearly identified within the proposal.**

6. Knowledge Exchange and Impact

6.1 Knowledge Exchange

Applicants should demonstrate an awareness of other similar and relevant research and knowledge exchange activities and potentials for collaboration, synergy and added value. Opportunities both for sharing knowledge and data, and engagement with stakeholders and users may come through connections with other relevant initiatives. Examples include the

ESRC Centre for Evaluating Complexity, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing⁴, AHRC Cultural Value Project⁵ and the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service Sustainability (BESS)⁶, UK Droughts and Water Scarcity⁷, and Flooding from intense rainfall⁸ research programmes.

The PCT will run a programme of engagement events and communication activities, with the aim of developing the interdisciplinary working capability of Valuing Nature researchers within and outside the funded research programme. These will provide funded projects with opportunities to extend their reach beyond the immediate project team. Projects will be expected to participate in these activities, such as attending the annual VNP conference, participating in workshops with other researchers and research users, taking up opportunities to engage with the PCT Business Interest Group and Policy Engagement Group, contributing to programme communication activities (e.g. writing research summaries, web blogs etc), coordinating project communications to make best use of PCT-led opportunities and becoming a member of the Valuing Nature Network. Proposals should include time and resource to participate in these PCT-led activities.

6.2 Impact

Excellence with impact is a central goal for NERC, AHRC and ESRC. The Councils aim to deliver maximum economic and societal benefits from our investments, to support UK economic competitiveness, to make public services and policy more effective, and to improve people's health and wellbeing.

To achieve this we need excellent impact activities, which anticipate and deliver the needs of the ultimate users of our science, whether they are in business, policy, the third-sector, the wider public or other groups.

The Research Councils' policy is that applicants are responsible for considering how their research will or might achieve impact outside the scientific community and submit this with their proposal as a 'Pathways to Impact' statement. The plan will identify those who may benefit from or make use of the research, how they might benefit and/or make use of the research, how they can be involved in project design and methods for disseminating data/knowledge/skills in the most effective and appropriate manner, from the outset.

Pathways to Impact activities do not have to be cost-incurring; it is not a requirement to include funded activities. However any funds required, to undertake any proposed activities outlined in the Pathways to Impact Plan should be clearly identified and requested via the Je-S form, and must be fully justified within the Justification of Resources statement.

As individual Councils' approaches vary, please note that proposals to this call should be submitted to NERC and should adhere to the NERC policy and guidance detailed on the [website](#) and in the [NERC Research Grants Handbook](#).

A programme-wide Impact Strategy will be developed by the PCT, which the projects will be expected to contribute to and comply with to maximise the impact of the programme as a whole.

⁴ <http://whatworkswellbeing.org/>

⁵ <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/Funded-themes-and-programmes/Cultural-Value-Project/Pages/default.aspx>

⁶ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/funded/programmes/bess/>

⁷ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/funded/programmes/droughts/>

⁸ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/funded/programmes/flooding/>

7. Reporting Requirements

In order for the funders to manage performance against their Strategic Objectives and Delivery Plan and report to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the funders' Councils, suppliers of strategic research projects are required to report regularly on the outputs and outcomes they have been commissioned to deliver. The Principle Investigator for each successful project will be required to submit the following:

- regular reporting on the outputs, outcomes and impacts of the project using the *Researchfish* database); and
- other reporting as required by the PCT and VNP Programme Executive Board (PEB), in order to enable them to monitor progress against the Programmes' objectives, and meet the projects' own institutional reporting responsibilities.

8. Programme / Project Governance and Management

NERC Swindon Office, on behalf of the funders, retains the overall executive authority for the governance and management of the programme, and of the successful projects. It will be responsible for:

- the overall Research Programme budget, including the high-level budget management and allocation of resources, e.g. profiling of funds within the programme budget and awards for research and funds for procurement of services
- commissioning, delivery and management of key funding opportunities, including authorisation of funding decisions, issuance of awards, post-award administration and payments, and award completion.

The PEB is chaired by the NERC Head of Terrestrial Sciences, and includes representative(s) from ESRC, AHRC, the other programme funders and relevant users/stakeholders as required. The PEB will provide the strategic direction for the programme and will be the ultimate decision-making authority.

The PCT will lead and coordinate activities within the Valuing Nature Programme and link and develop synergies with other relevant initiatives of the funders; facilitate two-way knowledge exchange between researchers and policy/practitioner audiences; and maintain an oversight of the funded research activities, ensuring progress in delivery against the programme objectives. **The successful Principal Investigators and their teams will be expected to cooperate and work with the PCT in order to ensure a successful programme outcome and maximise its impact.**

9. Use of Facilities

Applicants for NERC grants may also apply to NERC for access to any of the NERC services and facilities. Further information on NERC services and facilities is on the NERC website at: <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/facilities/>. Prior to submitting the grant proposal, the applicants must first contact the facility to seek agreement that they could provide the service required and obtain a technical assessment (quote). Applicants should contact the relevant facility at least one month prior to the grant or fellowship proposal closing date to ensure that the facility can provide the quote in time to be submitted with the proposal. Advice on the application procedure for a particular facility should be sought from the relevant contact (see <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/facilities/list/>.) For most

facilities and schemes, the notional costs of using the facility should be included in the grant proposal, under the directly incurred other costs heading. On the JeS proposal proforma, the facilities box should be ticked and the relevant facility(s) selected from the drop-down box. There is a system validation requiring a “technical assessment” (quote) for the NERC Facilities on this list: <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/facilities/apply/facilities-requiring-technical-assessment.pdf>. For some facilities the costs will then be removed from the grant and awarded notionally (where NERC provides the funding directly to the facility). If the relevant facilities costs have not been requested on the grant proposal, they will not be added later. Different rules apply for Sea Time and High Performance Computing which are covered in more detail in the Grants Handbook.

10. Application Process

NERC is administering this process on behalf of the other funders.

Full proposals must be submitted using the Research Councils Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S). Please select the Scheme: *Directed*; and the Call: *Valuing Nature Health and Wellbeing September 2015*.

To use this system, the applicant’s Research Organisation 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.

Applicants must ensure that their proposal is received by NERC by **4pm** on the closing date of **Tuesday 22 September 2015**. Applicants should leave enough time for their proposal to pass through their organisation’s Je-S submission route before this date. Any proposal that is received after the closing date, is incomplete, or does not meet the eligibility criteria, will be returned to the applicant and will not be considered.

Please note that on submission to Council ALL non-PDF documents are converted to PDF, the use of non-standard fonts may result in errors or font conversion, which could affect the overall length of the document. Additionally where non-standard fonts are present, and even if the converted PDF document may look unaffected in the Je-S System, when it is imported into the Research Councils Grants System some information may be removed. We therefore recommend that where a document contains any non-standard fonts (scientific notation, diagrams etc), the document should be converted to PDF prior to attaching it to the proposal.

10.1 Eligibility

This opportunity is open to individuals and organisations eligible for RCUK funding, i.e. applicants based in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEI’s), RCUK Research and Collaborative Centres, and Independent Research Organisations (IRO’s) that are eligible to receive NERC, AHRC or ESRC Managed Mode funding. Please refer the RCUK website for more information <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs/>.

10.2 Proposal components

All attachments submitted through the JeS system, including the Case for Support, must be completed in single-spaced typescript of minimum font size 11 point, Arial font, with margins

of at least 2cm. **References must now also be presented in minimum font size 11 point.** Applicants referring to websites should note that referees may choose not to use them.

Please note the guidance below may be different from that for other NERC, AHRC or ESRC programmes.

Proposals should include:

Document / attachment type	Requirements
Proposal Form	JeS proforma
Case for Support	<p>comprising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 10 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). <p>The Description of the Proposed Research should explain the overarching research question(s), objectives and anticipated outputs; methodology and approach; risks and mitigation strategies.</p>
Outline Data Management Plan (ODMP)	<p>up to 1 side A4</p> <p>http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/data/dmp/</p>
Justification of Resources	<p>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.</p> <p>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).</p>
C.V.	<p>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.</p>
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	Project Partners should provide letters of support and should be attached as above. No further letters of support are required, 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 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.
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).

Please refer to the NERC Grants Handbook⁹ for further guidance on joint proposals containing more than one component proposal.

10.3 Launch event

The PCT has organised a launch event for 14 July 2015 to provide an opportunity for potential applicants to hear about the Programme, call and network with researchers from other disciplines and end users. Further information about the launch event can be found via the Valuing Nature website: <http://www.valuing-nature.net/node/17>

11. Assessment Process

To meet the funders' strategic objectives for the VNP, proposals will be subject to rigorous expert interdisciplinary peer review.

Proposals will undergo a rigorous peer review process:

- All proposals will undergo independent interdisciplinary external peer review, including an opportunity for the Principal Investigator (PI) to respond to reviewer's comments. All peer review will be undertaken by NERC, with suggested reviewers requested from all funders.
- An expert moderating panel will be convened to meet in the UK and composed of experts nominated by all the funders, including representatives from business, policy and practice as appropriate. The panel will use the reviews and the PI responses to prioritise the proposals and make their recommendations.
- Based on the recommendations of the Moderating Panel, the funders will, within the resources available, select a balanced portfolio of projects that collectively best address the key requirements of the programme.

Applicants will receive feedback on their proposal.

Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

⁹ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/howtoapply/forms/grantshandbook/>

- Research Excellence
- Fit to Call

Research Excellence

A proposal that demonstrates excellence can be characterised by terms such as: novel, ambitious, timely, exciting, at the international forefront, adventurous, elegant or transformative, but need not demonstrate all of them.

Fit to Call

Applicants should fully read this Announcement of Opportunity and ensure that their proposal demonstrates a strong fit to the scope and objectives outlined, including:

- Research scope - addressing at least one of the specified research areas;
- Interdisciplinarity - demonstrating integration of expertise and approaches from across the remits of the three funding Research Councils;
- Engagement with end user communities – identification of appropriate end users, and how they may achieve co-design and co-production.

Pathways to Impact

Applicants are required to identify the potential societal and economic impact of their work and to outline the steps they can sensibly make to facilitate the realisation of this impact. Research grants will not be allowed to start without an acceptable Pathways to Impact statement.

12. Timetable

Date	Event
27th March	Preannouncement
9th July	Call announced
14th July	Call event
22nd September	Application deadline
Late November / beginning December	PI response (provisional)
2016	
mid January	Panel
end January	Funding decision
early February	Grants awarded
1st April	Starting certificates submitted

All grants **must** submit their starting certificate by 1st April 2016.

13. Contact Information

For further information please contact one of the following:

Application process, general programme / call and NERC enquiries:

Rachel Leader

valuingnature@nerc.ac.uk

AHRC enquiries:

Gail Lambourne

g.lambourne@ahrc.ac.uk

ESRC enquiries:

Lorna Friis

lorna.friis@esrc.ac.uk

Valuing Nature Programme Coordination Team enquiries:

Rosie Hails / Anita Weatherby, CEH

info@valuing-nature.net

Further information on the Je-S system can be found on the Je-S website: <https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk> or by contacting the Je-S Helpdesk by email at JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk, or by telephone on 01793 444164.