

NERC Services and Facilities (S&F) Policy & Processes Manual

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SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 The NERC Portfolio of Scientific Services and Facilities

NERC maintains an extensive portfolio of Services and Facilities (S&F), as listed in [Annex 1](#), which support environmental science. These Services and Facilities are diverse, including the NERC aircraft, several Earth Observation capabilities and numerous specialist laboratories. Despite their diversity, however, they share many features in common; they need to conform to certain underlying policies if NERC is to be seen to be consistent.

This manual sets out the policy framework within which the Services and Facilities should operate. Not all policies are applicable in all circumstances, and this is made clear where appropriate.

1.2 Intended Readership

The manual is intended in particular for:

- heads/managers of Services & Facilities in the NERC portfolio, and their staff where relevant;
- Services and Facilities Management Staff within NERC's Swindon Office;
- chairs of facilities' Steering Committees.

It has been designed to be read in its entirety and thereafter to be retained for reference. A list of acronyms is given in [Annex 2](#).

1.3 Why Does NERC have Facilities?

NERC invests in facilities for several reasons:

- cost effectiveness, in that NERC does not normally have to pay VAT on work done at the facilities and that it can negotiate a good price for NERC users, usually at local rates;
- some of the facilities are unique, either in terms of the equipment they have (either an individual piece of equipment or the collective instrumentation) and in terms of the expertise of the staff;
- some facilities have a large capital investment, such as the aircraft, that would not otherwise be possible;
- provides hands-on training, to PhD students and PDRAs in particular, that would not be possible in commercial environments.
- maintains the capability and reduces the risk associated with uneven demand.

1.4 Role of Swindon Office

NERC needs a cost-effective portfolio of facilities that is aligned with NERC strategy in terms of capability. To this end the Swindon Office Services and Facilities Management Team (SFMT) must:

- understand the overall requirements of actual and potential customers in the NERC science community for underpinning Services and Facilities;
- when necessary, procure suitable Facilities to meet these requirements, balancing the allocation of direct NERC funding between the Facilities;
- assure the quality of the service provided by the Facilities in the portfolio, whether directly

funded or not. In particular, monitor the performance of each Facility, which is expected to report annually on its activities (see [section 3.8](#) Annual Report), and provide other statistics on request;

- ensure that actual/potential customers are aware of the Facilities and their capabilities; publicise the role the Facilities play in enabling science;
- contribute the views of the Facilities into the formulation of NERC policy. In particular, attempt to ensure that the priority and resources accorded to Facilities by NERC will be such as to optimise overall scientific productivity, and that planning takes the need for such facilities into account;
- ensure that the overall policy/strategy of NERC is communicated to the Facilities, insofar as it affects them;
- create, in consultation with the Facilities, policy relating to facilities within the overall NERC policy framework and communicate it to the Facilities in the portfolio and the wider community, as appropriate.

Many of these activities involve *liaison and communication*. In practice, this is achieved by assigning a specific Swindon Office staff member as the contact point for each Facility in the portfolio ([Annex 1](#) lists the NERC contact for each facility). The detailed responsibilities and duties of the contact point are listed for reference in [Annex 3](#).

1.5 S&F/Facility Mission Statements

The SFMT maintains a Mission Statement for S&F as a whole; a copy of this is shown in [Annex 4](#). Each individual Facility within S&F develops and maintains their own Mission Statement which is compatible with the overall Statement. These Mission Statements will change over time as our working environment and remit evolves. Facility Mission Statements form part of Appendix A of the contract/SLA ([section 3.3](#) Contracts/SLAs).

SECTION 2 – SFMT General Policy Documents/Issues

2.1 Funding Arrangements of the Facilities

When NERC funds a Facility, it is essentially making a bulk purchase from the Supplier for whole or part of the capacity of that Facility, for use in support of NERC-funded activities. Where the funding covers the entire costs of the Facility, the Facility is "fully funded" and the entire capacity is purchased. If the funding is less than this, then NERC is entitled to only a proportion of the capacity.

NERC pays for its Facilities via either “block-funding” or pay-as-you-go (PAYG), or a mixture of both.

Most of the current NERC facilities are block-funded. With this funding model, NERC pays for a certain amount of a facilities capacity, regardless of whether there will be enough NERC grants (responsive mode, research programmes or training awards) to fill that capacity. Any capacity not taken up by NERC grants is then filled by “direct access” projects (see [section 2.2.2](#) Accessing a Facility - Direct Access).

Some NERC facilities (CFARR, NBAF-E, NBAF-L, GEF-D and GEF-S) are funded on a pay-as-you-go basis. In this funding model, NERC pays for what it actually uses. How the PAYG model operates varies between different facilities. For example, a maximum and minimum amount of capacity is determined, and NERC pays for what it uses between those two values, or NERC guarantees to pay for a certain amount of staff-time and then consumables are charged at the amount that has been used. This ensures the facility has a smooth income from NERC and that staff/equipment is there when NERC users require access to the facility. Applicants can only gain access to the facility once they have secured funding via, for example, NERC grants. There is not normally any “direct access” under this funding model.

2.2 Accessing a Facility

2.2.1 Process for Applying to Use a Facility via NERC Grants

Contact Facility

A PI wishing to use any of the NERC Facilities must first of all speak directly to the facility. This determines that the project is technically feasible and that there is, in principle, capacity to do the work. There are no restrictions on amount of the facilities’ capacities an individual grant project can use. It also forewarns the facility of potential future work and helps in capacity planning. The facility can also advise on the experimental design etc, if needed.

Facility Costs

Under FEC, all the costs involved in a project have to be costed in. Although many of the facilities are free-at-the-point-of-delivery to the community, they are not cost-free to NERC which is still paying for them, albeit via a different route. It is policy that facility costs must be included in all NERC grants (all responsive mode schemes, research programmes, fellowships - but not studentships). See [section 2.2.4](#) – Costing Facility Usage.

Grants Application Form

All Facilities should be able to provide PIs with an estimated cost for projects proposed. Such costs should be included in the Je-S proforma under 'other directly incurred costs'. Importantly, facility costs must also be included in grant applications to schemes where there is a maximum amount that can be applied for (ie standard grants and large grants rounds in responsive mode and some research programme proposal calls). An upper limit of £1.2M has been introduced for standard grants. This could be problematic for some projects where there are large facility costs. It has been agreed that exceptions can be made in these cases providing the facility usage has been justified, the research is

not on the scale and complexity of a large grant and the costs are under the standard grant funding limit without the facility cost. The permission process is available on the NERC website at <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/available/researchgrants/typesofaward/standards.asp#exceptional>.

PIs wishing to use a facility will need to submit a mandatory 'technical assessment' with their grant application. This is a result of cross-council harmonisation and for NERC the technical assessment will be in the form of a quote. Quotes are free text (there is no form or template) but should include the number & type of samples, type of analysis required or the type of equipment loaned and number of days etc (whatever is suitable to the facility) and the cost. Any caveats particular to a certain facility should also be included. By issuing this quote the facility is stating that the PI has spoken with the facility, it is able to carry out the work and this is the estimated cost. PIs will select the facility they want to use from the drop down menu and then will have to upload the facility quote/technical assessment. (If a grant is not using a facility there is a box to tick to say so – applicants will not be able to submit the application without either selecting a facility or ticking the 'no facility' box). There will also be a couple of boxes for unit and cost but these are not mandatory. The grants handbook states that PI should contact the facility to obtain the technical assessment a minimum of one month prior to the grant submission deadline.

Facilities costs that were not requested on the grant proposal will not be added later and the PI will need to find the funds from his existing grant money. If this cannot be done the PI can contact the grants team (or programme manager for RP) and make the case for additional funding but they are not guaranteed to get it. NERC will arrange with the PI to underspend on his grant by the cost of the facility usage (facilities should let SFMT know the costs) and S&F will claim the money from the grant budget as usual. This also applies to situations where the PI didn't know they wanted/needed to use a facility when they submitted the grant.

Unlike applications involving aircraft, the ships/marine and polar logistical support, there is no need to submit a S&F application form together with the grant proposal (HPC usage no longer requires a S&F application form to be submitted along with the grant).

NERC Grants and Facility Steering Committee

Once a grant has been funded, SFMT receives a list of the grants intending to use a facility from the grants team in the case of RM and fellowships and the programme managers for RP. SFMT circulate this list to the facilities on the list to let them know the application has been funded. Facilities can then request the grant documentation if needed. There may be facility specific questions put to the facility by the grants team, programme manager or SFMT, before a grant is approved for funding.

The PI will be sent an award letter which states that the facility costs have not been included in the grant, and that the PI will then need to contact the facility again and complete a facility application form for consideration by the Facility's steering committee.

There is a common belief in the community that there is a double jeopardy with having to apply to the facility steering committee as well. The process of assessment and capacity allocation for grant-funded facility access is different from the research grants peer-review process. In most grant applications the actual details of the analytical aspect, for example, is absent (due to lack of space, it being a minor part of the project etc) so the facility dimension has not been assessed. Also, peer-reviewers of the grant are not always experts in the facility aspect, so again it will probably not have been expertly reviewed. The facility steering committee also takes into account facility-specific aspects such as capacity, logistics etc. On rare occasions, there is a problem with the facility application that the steering committee has picked up on, and a grant-funded project will be not supported in its present form. In these cases the committee and/or facility will provide guidance so that on resubmission of the application, it should be acceptable. If a PI has applied to the facility in plenty of time, this delay should not be problematic. On the rare occasion a project is time-critical, peer-review can be done via email and the project approved by chair's action (see [section 3.9.6](#) – Chair's Action).

2.2.2 Direct Access

For block-funded facilities, a PI does not need to have a NERC grant to be able to access a facility. (There is usually no direct access at pay-as-you-go facilities: one has to secure the funds to pay for the work, including NERC funded PhD training). The basic concept in block-funded facilities is that the facility is there to support grant-funded work and any spare capacity is then filled with direct access work. Direct access typically allows for small amounts of work to be done (essentially pilot or proof-of-concept projects where data are needed so that a research grant can be applied for). Individual direct access projects are not expected to be above about 10% of the capacity of the facility for the year, but exceptions can be made in exceptional cases with the agreement of the facility and the steering committee. Direct access should not be applied for to cover facility usage in connection with a grant: the facility costs have to be included in the grant. Direct access is not intended to supplement NERC grants.

2.2.3 Eligibility to Apply to a Facility

The project has to be within the NERC remit and within the remit of the facility. Any applicant that is eligible to apply for a NERC grant or training award as a PI or a Co-I is eligible to apply for access to a Facility. Section C of the Research Grants Handbooks, which is updated at least annually, gives further details about eligibility (<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/researchgrants/>). Applications received where the PI is not eligible to apply will need new paperwork submitting either prior to or shortly after the steering committee meeting. If there is an eligible PI named on the application peer review can proceed, if not the application has to be rejected.

Facility staff are not eligible to apply direct to the steering committee (ie direct access) to use their own facility; they must apply for funding through the grants system or, if appropriate, carry out the work under their R&D allocation. However, facility staff are allowed to apply to their own facility for support for their PhD students.

The above policy does not preclude other potential customers, who do not satisfy the above criteria, from receiving support from a Facility in *return for the payment of a fee*, subject to capacity being available (see [section 2.3](#) Commercial Work).

2.2.4 Costing Facility Usage

The costs of using a facility should be calculated at *Full Cash Cost (FCC)* (ie the total cost of providing the service), including:

- all directly incurred costs such as staff salaries, travel and subsistence, consumables (as paid in the contract/SLA);
- all directly allocated costs such as pool technicians (as paid in the contract/SLA);
- indirect costs (library, personnel, finance) and estates costs (building and premises costs, utilities) (as paid in the contract/SLA) ;
- a value covering the depreciation of the capital equipment.

Costs are calculated in terms of units. When a facility is first set up, a unit is calculated by estimating the year's costs (taken from Appendix B of the contract/SLA) and the amount of capacity to be made available to users that year (ie. not including the 15% of the total NERC capacity that is for in house R&D). A facility may have several units, each with a different cost associated with them. The number of units should be kept to a minimum and NERC recommends not using any more than six units. There is no set way to define a unit, it depends upon what works better for the individual facility, and some examples of a unit are given below:

- per day/half day of work

- per type of analyses (so much for carbon isotopes, so much for sulphur isotopes etc)
- per type of work (so much for sample prep, so much for sample analyses, so much for data analysis etc)
- per type of equipment loaned per day/week

The information produced in the cost-allocation form (see [section 3.6](#) – Cost Allocations), submitted annually, will show whether the price of each unit is broadly accurate. The actual unit-costs a facility charge does not have to exactly match the one calculated from the cost allocation, but it has to be roughly the same. If the unit-cost a facility charges is considerably more/less than the calculated one, and this has been the case over the last 3-4 years then the actual unit-costs charged should be brought into line with the calculated unit-costs.

2.2.5 Facility Application Forms

All NERC users are required to apply for access via the facility steering committee, using an application form tailored to that facility. The style and format of the application is therefore determined by the facility and its steering committee but should include contact details for PI/Co-Is, where the funding for the project is coming from (NERC or non-NERC grant, NERC or non-NERC PhD etc), outline of the project, what the facility is being asked to do, and the metrics information required for the annual report (see [section 3.8](#) Annual Report).

Facility application forms should be available as a download from the facility website (or ideally be a web-based form) and be submitted to the Facility electronically before the deadline set by the facility in order to meet NERC's deadline for the submission of steering committee meeting papers (note - not all facilities work to set deadlines). Any applications received after the deadline will be assessed at the following steering committee meeting (unless there are justifiable extenuating circumstances for the submission being delayed and then assessment will be at the discretion of the facility and the steering committee).

2.2.6 Obligations of Successful Applicants

Delays to the Project

The Facility should be informed of any delays in the project as soon as possible, and, if possible of the extent of the delay, as this is likely to have scheduling implications. Applicants should be informed about what to do in the event of a delay in their award letter (see [section 3.9.8](#) – Award Letters). Any long delays should be reported to the steering committee at the next meeting. In certain circumstances and/or for lengthy delays, the project may be cancelled or the applicant asked to resubmit the application in order for the project to go ahead. Reasons for resubmission or cancellation of a project could be that someone else has since done the work, technology has since developed which would benefit the project or there are questions over whether it is still an important project (would it still be a fundable project if it were assessed today?). The steering committee should decide where this course of action is appropriate, and it is only likely to apply to direct access projects.

Co-Authorship/acknowledgement

The grant-in-kind from a Facility to a NERC user is enabling the latter to undertake science, and receive due recognition when it is published. Depending on the nature of the facility and the project, it will sometimes be appropriate that the Facility's contribution merit joint authorship by Facility staff in the eventual publication(s). This is especially the case where the facility has undertaken considerable development in order to support the project. At minimum, the Facility should be formally acknowledged on all publications.

The open access policy (<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/outputs/>) relating to all peer-reviewed research papers arising from Research Council funded activities, where the authors acknowledge research council funding came into place on 1st April 2013. Papers resulting from facility work in relation to a NERC grant are clearly covered by this policy, as are papers by the facility staff

themselves which result from facility work as both scenarios receive direct NERC funding. Papers produced by non-NERC funded PIs using the facility (direct access work) will also be covered by the policy, if the NERC contribution to the research via the facility is considered to be significant enough to acknowledge NERC as a funder within the paper. UK HEIs have received a block-grant from RCUK to support costs of Open Access publishing.

For many facilities, the publications resulting from their support are a valuable performance indicator, which NERC collects as OPMs (Output Performance Measures) and in the Annual Report (see [section 3.7 and 3.8](#) respectively). Facility users are therefore expected to cooperate in reporting back to the Facility the papers that result - often after a lapse of years since they received support.

Data Protocol Forms

For most of the NERC facilities, all successful applicants are required to sign a data protocol form before the project goes ahead. This form sets out conditions of access to the Facility, especially the requirement for co-authorship/acknowledgement in publications and informing the facility of such publications. These forms are submitted to the Facility (not NERC). An example of the form is given in [Annex 5](#), but the form can be altered to suit the needs of the individual facility (for example, including the condition that the data be stored in a national or international database).

2.2.7 Environmental Data Management

All the Facilities in the portfolio are involved in some way or other with the collection of scientific data. Environmental datasets are a key resource, and NERC has adopted formal policies to ensure that they are appropriately managed, preserved and publicised.

In some Facilities, datasets acquired or produced for each customer will be passed to the customer, who will thereafter be responsible for ensuring that their data are suitably managed. In other Facilities, the *combined* dataset acquired from many individual customers will have a value in its own right that is greater than the sum of its parts. Some Facilities have a core mission to acquire and maintain such databases.

All Facilities should be acquainted with the NERC Data Policy (<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/data/policy.asp>) so that they can follow its guidance themselves, or advise their customers to do so, as appropriate.

2.3 Commercial Work

2.3.1 General Guidelines

Most facilities have some "spare" capacity available from time to time, be it equipment or staff effort; and NERC encourages this be exploited commercially to yield a profit.

Facilities can be split into two groups, one group, fully funded by NERC, is almost entirely devoted to NERC work, with minor commercial activities "on the side", and the second group operates commercially, selling NERC only a modest proportion of their full capacities. In both cases, the Steering Committees are expected to monitor the overall impact of commercial work but will not peer-review the individual projects.

For fully NERC funded facilities, NERC has a legitimate concern if commercial activities using NERC-funded staff or equipment are undertaken on a scale that impacts the Facilities' ability to support peer-reviewed NERC science. The amount of commercial income will be taken into account in negotiation of the annual resource allocations. Even if a Facility is heavily loaded in support of NERC activities, and fully funded to provide this support, it should still be aware of the **potential** commercial markets for its services.

For the facilities where NERC is procuring only a minority share of the Facilities' capacity, how the remainder is funded, whether through commercial exploitation or otherwise, is a matter for the supplier (HEI, NERC Institute etc) not NERC, providing there is no impact from the commercial work on NERC interests. The profits from commercial activities will be retained by the Supplier.

The exploitation of commercial opportunities will require some degree of managerial and business skill within the Facility. The Facility Head will be aware of the "critical mass" needed for the viability of that Facility's parent organisation, and of any potential economies of scale if operations were expanded. The development of commercial opportunities will require decisions as to which markets to address, skills in resource estimation and judgement in pricing. All of these will improve as the Facility gains experience, and all involve an element of risk. NERC aims to give Facilities the flexibility to improve their cost-effectiveness (and to win further resources for investment) by exploiting commercial opportunities when these can be identified, while retaining sufficient overall control through the Steering Committee to ensure that the level of risk is acceptable.

2.3.2 Core/Strategic Centre/Survey Work

Scientists in NERC's own Centres/Surveys (BAS, BGS, CEH, NOC) undertaking core/strategic work will be viewed as paying customers. The steering committee should be informed of these projects but there is no NERC requirement that they are peer-reviewed, although the PI may seek the views of the steering committee by submitting an application form. However, if there is a clear benefit to the Facility (and subsequently the user-community) for doing this work, then the amount charged to the Centre may be negotiated (block-funded facilities only). In these cases, the steering committee would need to peer-review the project. Note: payment for such work needs to be routed via SFMT to obviate VAT liability.

Centre/Survey staff not wishing to use the facility for core/strategic work should apply to use a facility via the normal routes (NERC grants or direct access).

2.3.3 Other Research Council Work

Other Research Councils can access NERC facilities. If they anticipate ongoing long-term use of a facility, a co-funding arrangement can be negotiated. Under this arrangement, projects from that Research Council would be viewed by the steering committee, whose membership, in addition to the Facility and NERC staff and NERC user community members, would include representation from that council and its user community (if required).

As with the core/strategic Centre/Survey work ([section 2.3.2 Core/Strategic Centre/Survey Work](#)), individual projects from other research councils will also be viewed as paying customers. The steering committee should be informed of these projects but there is no requirement that they are peer reviewed, although the PI may seek the views of the steering committee by submitting an application form.

2.3.4 Guidance on prices for paying customers

It is sound commercial practice for a Facility to charge external customers a price which is relation to what the market will bear. However, if such prices are on average less than the Full Economic Cost (FEC) of the corresponding work, then NERC will essentially be subsidising the Facility's commercial customers, which is not defensible.

There will be cases where commercial work brings benefits to a Facility over and above the income received (eg involve development work that will ultimately benefit the NERC community). In rare cases the Facility might even have intended to do the same work anyway. Under such circumstances a price of less than FEC would be justifiable. On the other hand a commitment to undertake

commercial work may cause disruption to the Facility's existing workload, and a price in excess of FEC would then be appropriate.

Please note that paying customers are likely to incur VAT.

Where Facilities are charging customers in which NERC has an interest, NERC's main concern is that the pricing should be fair to all parties.

If there is genuinely spare capacity of staff or equipment for which no other more profitable use can be identified, then *any* price in excess of the essential running costs will benefit the service financially. However, any price less than the FEC runs a risk of an accusation of 'unfair competition' from other commercial suppliers, and may, in any case, give the wrong signals to customers.

2.3.5 Risks and Safeguards on commercial activities

All commercial activities involve an element of risk, and this must be constrained to an acceptable degree, albeit the risk will often be to the supplier rather than to NERC. The following issues should be considered by Facilities in deciding whether to undertake work at all and under what terms.

i) Risk to NERC's general reputation

There is no reason why commercial work should be restricted solely to activities directly related to Environmental Science. Facility technology may be applicable in other fields. But the line must be drawn at activities which are actually contrary to NERC's mission, or likely to be viewed as such by the public, and work for customers whose association with NERC might prove an embarrassment. If there are doubts about the wisdom of a Facility undertaking a particular type of work, or work for a particular customer, the Facility should seek advice from SFMT.

ii) Adverse consequences to other interests within NERC

NERC would not wish a fully-funded Facility to be bidding for work in competition with other NERC Institutes. Any such potential conflicts should be drawn to the attention of SFMT, so that NERC can resolve them internally and present a united front to the outside world.

iii) Legal and contractual liability

Suppliers will normally expect Facilities to undertake commercial work only after a formal contract has been agreed with the customer. Such agreements will include, for example, limitations on liability and exclusion of consequential loss, etc.

Facilities cannot sell anything to which they have no title, and may be under existing contractual obligations which limit their freedom to exploit resources commercially. For example, computer software or equipment may be licensed for non-commercial use only, and it may be impossible to exploit data if the Intellectual Property Rights belong to a third party.

iv) Availability of resources

Before a Facility accepts a direct contractual obligation to undertake commercial work, it must clearly be satisfied that the necessary resources to undertake the work have been identified and that those controlling these resources can make them available for the project.

v) Impact on NERC-funded peer-review customers

Even when resources can be identified, undertaking the commercial activity may impact, or potentially impact, the service that can be offered to the NERC Community under peer-review. Some

adverse affects may be inevitable where Facilities are not "fully funded". SFMT can provide guidance to Facility Heads if there is doubt on the desirability of following up particular project.

vi) Ensuring a "level playing field"

A Facility with customers in the academic community as well as NERC Institutes may be asked to provide support to them in their commissioned work for which they may be bidding in competition with each other. When NERC is equipping and directly funding a Facility, it would expect that Facility to ensure equitable pricing so that each such competitor would receive the same service at the same price.

vii) Quotations

Suppliers will doubtless make clear to Facilities the extent to which they have delegated authority to make formal, legally binding, quotations to customers without clearance from the Supplier's finance department.

viii) Insurance of NERC's equipment

Customers who are charged for access to services, particularly equipment pools, will be expected to indemnify NERC against loss of, or damage to, its equipment, either within the UK or abroad. Organisations other than public-funded bodies must provide proof of adequate insurance.

2.4 In-House Research and Development

It has been recognised that there is a need for Facilities to conduct methodological/technological research and development in order to keep them at the forefront of science research and to retain the interest and enthusiasm of the staff. NERC therefore normally allows a proportion of the Facilities' capacities to be used internally for such purposes.

In-house R&D can:

- i. improve the overall value and quality of the Facility and complement the discipline- oriented science of the users. In-house research into measurement methodology and the development of data acquisition and processing techniques addresses important aspects of science which have been, historically, difficult to fund via NERC grants and studentships (going forward, this may change since NERC strategy recently introduced a Technologies Theme);
- ii establish the Facility as a recognised centre of expertise and gain national and international prestige. This can only be achieved if research results are effectively disseminated, in ways which will probably vary between Facilities;
- iii contribute to staff development and satisfaction;
- iv assist NERC in other ways, eg by providing expertise for instrument procurement.

The potential and need for such R&D depends on the nature of the Facility and its resources:

- some of the facilities (notably the analytical ones) have a remit to do in-house research at an agreed level, typically in the range 10% to 15% of the capacity funded by the SFT budget;
- other facilities may conduct a higher level of research supported eg by research grants, to complement the service to customers directly funded by the S&F budget;

- yet other Facilities do extensive development, including interfacing and modifying existing hardware, but minimal research, per se, eg the Geophysical Equipment Facility;

The Steering Committee for each Facility will provide guidance on what R&D that Facility should conduct, based on the perceived benefits to the Facility, the user-community and to NERC science. Committees must also approve the general research topics and advise on the level of effort and capacity that may be devoted to it, periodically reviewing progress and any new requirements. They should attempt to further NERC's strategy by identifying and targeting areas of science where fundamental R&D on methodology and techniques is necessary to promote first-rate, discipline-oriented science. The upper limit will always be governed by the conflicting demands of external customers and by the availability of resources. At the other extreme, there is likely to be a minimum level below which the activity ceases to be effective.

2.5 Marketing, Publicity and Websites

There is little point in NERC maintaining a portfolio of Facilities if potential customers in the environmental science community are not aware of them. Even where Facilities believe that they are well known within their particular specialist niche, they should be alive to the possibility of potential new customers and novel applications of their technology.

The S&F budget can only be maintained, in the face of intense competition from other demands for NERC funding, if the Facilities are demonstrably contributing to environmental science, and *are seen to be doing so by those with influence, and indeed the general public*. Activities aimed at ensuring this constitutes "marketing" in its broadest sense, irrespective of whether the service is provided to academic or commercial customers. The importance of marketing/publicity to each Facility, and the scale of related activities, will depend on circumstances, notably on its size and the variety of its work. None can afford to ignore the issue altogether.

The standard reporting mechanisms NERC has set in place are one means of communicating. In many cases Facilities will consider that further marketing activities will be required, for example:

- periodic publicity in external or in-house publications;
- production of additional promotional literature and display material;
- attendance at exhibitions and conferences;
- exploitation of specific events for publicity purposes;
- development of links with Theme Leaders.

In some cases NERC funding may be forthcoming in order to support such activities.

SFMT ensures that up-to-date information is maintained on the Facilities section of the NERC website, including basic information about what each facility does and whom to contact, links to the Facilities' own websites and a copy of the latest annual reports. It also provides more general information such as how to gain access to a facility and details of the Services Review Group (SRG) (see [section 3.2](#) – Services Review Group). Each Facility should maintain its own up-to-date website and should, at least, include more extensive information about what the facility can do, contact information, details on how to apply to the Facility (the details on the NERC website are not specific to any particular facility), the application form and any closing dates for applications.

2.6 Insurance/Indemnity

These indemnity guidelines are the ones available to users and have been taken from the facilities section of NERC website at <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/facilities/indemnity.asp>. The NERC

Research Grants Team has clarified that the cost of insurance for equipment is an allowable cost on a NERC grant and should be costed into the Other Directly Incurred Costs section of the Je-S form.

Guidelines

This guide covers loss and/or damage to equipment which is loaned from NERC facilities. NERC facilities include those within the NERC Service and Facilities Portfolio, NERC Marine facilities and NERC Aircraft facilities.

1. Customers are expected to take all reasonable steps to protect the assets of the Facility, and all borrowers are required to sign a form on which their institution acknowledges receipt of the equipment in good condition and agrees to exercise due care and attention while the equipment is in their possession.

2. Customers awarded free access to equipment are not formally required to indemnify NERC against loss of, or damage to, its equipment. However, they should be aware that they remain liable for the total costs of replacing or repairing such equipment lost or damaged whilst in their care, whether through theft, or other causes. Customers are strongly encouraged to insure against such loss, or otherwise they will be considered to have accepted responsibility to self-insure.

3. It is recommended that customers borrowing equipment add this to their Institution's block insurance for the duration of the loan, especially if the customer is taking equipment overseas. Often this does not cost anything extra (or involves only minor additional premium) and, as well as covering the insurance of the equipment, provides customers with peace of mind. Insurance costs should already be factored into Universities' Full Economic Costs.

4. Examples of negligence:

- Leaving equipment in an unlocked car
- Leaving equipment on the roof of a car and driving off
- Running over pieces of equipment with a car
- Not taking appropriate steps to obtain compensation for damage incurred whilst equipment is in possession of a third party eg a transit carrier.

5. NERC assumes responsibility for equipment while it is in transit arranged by the NERC facility. However, this is only applicable to transit within the United Kingdom (UK), and customers assume liability once the equipment has left the UK.

6. Commercial loans (whereby users pay for access to Facility equipment) will be expected to indemnify NERC against loss of, or damage to, its equipment, either within the UK or overseas.

2.7 Facility Staff Training and Development

NERC recognises that it has a responsibility for the training and career development of all its staff. Facility Heads will ensure that staff members under their control, whether they are NERC staff working at a HEI (NERC staff) or by a HEI with funds provided by NERC (non-NERC staff), are afforded adequate and appropriate training.

NERC is responsible for the training and development of NERC staff and they may attend courses offered by the UK Shared Business Services (UKSBS) where appropriate (with approval of their development co-ordinator).

Development and training for non-NERC staff is the responsibility of the HEI.

2.8 Long-term Sick Leave/Maternity Leave

NERC is responsible for the costs and well-being of NERC staff working at a HEI (NERC staff) on long-term sick leave or maternity leave.

It is the responsibility of the HEI to cover costs of long-term sick leave and to offer its normal maternity leave provisions for staff employed by a HEI with funds provided by NERC (non-NERC staff).

2.9 Health and Safety/Risk Assessment

The employer of S&F staff, be that HEI, NERC or other Research Council has responsibility for all its employees according to Health and Safety legislation.

Where NERC staff are embedded in a non-NERC institution there is a need to define the sharing or division of health and safety responsibilities between two or more employers, employees of which are sharing the same workplace, either on a client/contractor basis or where there is collaborative working. It is not legally possible for an employer completely to devolve or delegate responsibility for the health and safety of employees to third parties but it may be possible to reach agreements with other employers to share, or take on, certain responsibilities for health and safety of their respective employees. This may be necessary where the other employer is largely, or to a greater extent, in control of the workplace and where the major risks are created by the activities of one employer. It may be the case that health and safety can only be improved or ensured by all employees in that workplace following the same or similar safe working procedures and practices. In these cases a formal or written agreement as to the arrangement and division of responsibilities for the health and safety of the various employers' staff in a workplace will be advantageous. It is important there is a clear understanding of who covers what in health and safety terms, how the work can be carried out safely and that responsibilities are clearly defined.

Any Health and Safety incident or near miss reported to the local Health and Safety representative should also be reported to NERC (by emailing the facility contact point at NERC).

2.10 Disaster Recovery

All Facilities must maintain a Management and Operational Risk Assessment and have in place an appropriate and approved Business Continuity/Disaster Recovery Plan.

SECTION 3 – SFMT BUSINESS CYCLE ITEMS

3.1 Timetable of Business Cycle Items



Microsoft Office
Excel Worksheet

3.2 Services Review Group (SRG)

All Facilities, a year before their current contract/SLA finishes, will undergo a full review to establish whether the facility should continue or not and whether it should continue with its present supplier. Any potential supplier may submit a rival application to supply a particular facility. In these cases, the SRG will establish a need to continue the facility and then assess which supplier will be best for NERC's requirements.

Section 3.1 outlines the timetable for this process (a timetable specific to each SRG will be issued to Facilities under review that year). [Annex 6](#) gives, for reference only, the guidelines issued to applicants and a template of the two forms that need to be submitted to the SRG (an electronic version, updated with the appropriate dates, will be sent to facilities due for review that year).

Another function of the SRG is to review the whole Services and Facilities portfolio each year via the Annual Reports (see [section 3.8](#) – Annual Reports) and input from the steering committees via the chair's letter. By the time the SRG sees the annual reports they will be about 11 months out of date. The chair's letter should therefore update the SRG on anything that has happened since the annual report was written and highlight any problems that have arisen and how they have been, or are being, dealt with. Chair's letter should be addressed to the current SRG chair but sent to NERC Swindon Office for inclusion in the meeting paperwork. An email asking for these letters will be sent in January to the chairs, with advice as to whom the letters should be addressed.

Facilities will be informed of the SRG recommendation as soon after the meeting as possible, with the outcome ideally confirmed in June/July. However, this timing is not always possible and is dependent on other things that might be happening within NERC at the time. A letter, sent via email to the facility, will confirm the outcome and state NERC's intention to move to contract. The contract will be negotiated later in the year (see [section 3.3](#) – Contract/SLAs)

In the event a facility is not recommended for renewal (and another supplier is not going to be providing the facility), there may be a period of winding down, depending on the type of facility, while projects already approved to use the facility are completed. In these circumstances NERC may extend the current contract.

3.3 Contracts/SLAs

All Facility contracts/SLAs follow a similar format and are made up of three sections, a main section and two appendices. A template of the contract is presented in [Annex 7](#), although these obviously vary slightly depending on the Facility (Appendix B, the FEC costs form, is not given in Annex 7 as it is the same form presented in [Annex 6](#)). Each contract/SLA covers a period of, normally, three or five years, as recommended by the SRG. The contract year begins 1st April and ends 31st March. (The contract start date for a new Facility may not start on 1st April and is open to negotiation)

During October, after the March SRG, Facilities will be requested to update the SRG FEC cost form, in light of any pay increases, for example, received since the form was completed the previous year.

Capital/non-capital equipment items must not be put into the contract/SLA (capital is funded from a different budget). NERC will then negotiate terms and aim to issue the contract/SLA before the last three months of the current contract, to avoid HEIs issuing redundancy notices to Facility staff. The timetable for the process is given in [section 3.1](#) – Timetable of SFMT Business Cycle.

3.4 Yearly Resource Allocation/Contract Amendments

When the contract/SLA is set up, only the first year's costs are agreed, the other years are an estimate, since accurately predicting inflation/salary rises several years in the future is not possible. At the beginning of January each year (providing a new contract has not just been issued) the Facility should send revised costs, using the FEC costs form (Appendix B of the contract) for the next financial year to SFMT. A Resource Allocation Letter will be sent to Facilities in March confirming the finances for the coming financial year.

During the summer, a contract amendment will be issued, in line with the finances given in the Resource Allocation Letter (not including any capital items – see [section 3.5](#) – Capital). These are not issued sooner due to the workload for the Spring steering committee meetings.

3.5 Capital

Facilities can apply for funding to pay for repair costs to existing equipment, upgrading existing equipment or, exceptionally, purchasing new equipment. New equipment purchases should have been discussed and endorsed by the relevant steering committee.

As a result of the Wakeman Review, the Research Councils recently (2010) changed the definition of capital. Any item of equipment costing less than £10,000, repair costs to existing equipment and refurbishment/upgrade of existing equipment (providing it doesn't increase the value of the equipment) is now not viewed as capital. S&F refer to these items as non-capital equipment and funding of such items will come from the same budget as the contracts/SLAs.

The NERC Research Centres (BGS, CEH etc) still hold a small capital budget for S&F (separate from the contracts budget) for refurbishment/upgrade of existing equipment (where value is added to the equipment) and new pieces of equipment. Additionally, BIS also holds a capital budget that NERC, along with other research councils and organisations, can submit bids to for capital purchases. There are usually 3 announcements a year that coincide with the Budget, Autumn Statement and Party Conference. These bids are for large amounts of money and consequently S&F capital may form part of a larger NERC-wide bid or part of a NERC NC-wide bid. The BIS capital calls are very strategic and their priorities may not be the same as S&F priorities.

Facilities should submit, by email, any capital/non-capital equipment requests to the relevant Research Centre as and when the need arises at any time of the year. The Research Centres keep a rolling spreadsheet with all capital/non-capital equipment requests so a respond rapidly can be made when needed. There are no forms, but the email, or attached word document, should clearly set out a justification of the request, any implications for the facility if not purchased, any lead time involved and include costs (ideally one or more supplier quotes). The case for support for each item should be about 0.5-1 A4 page in length for smaller items, more for large items, although there is no strict limit. Where a facility requests more than one item, the items should be prioritised and requests should have been discussed by the steering committee.

Decisions about whether the capital/non-capital equipment request has been approved will be sent via email and/or confirmed in a letter, sent as and when funding has been allocated. Facility heads should inform the Research Centre if a capital item has been purchased through other sources so they can keep the spreadsheet up to date and not bid for things that facilities no longer need.

Any non-capital equipment items will be included as a one-off separate line in the next contract amendment and should be invoiced for as part of the quarterly contract invoices. Any capital item will not be included in the contract/contract amendment and should be invoiced separately from the quarterly contract invoices.

When the capital/non-capital equipment request is submitted to the Research Centre for approval the exact costs may not have been finalised, but the eventual invoice should be for the exact amount spent and not exceed the approved amount. In cases where the equipment turns out to be cheaper than originally thought, the difference will be retained by the Research Centre.

3.6 Cost-Allocations

It is important that NERC accounts for its investment in Facilities, and understands how it is being distributed amongst different recipients and scientific disciplines. This is achieved by cost-allocation data, an accounting mechanism whereby the entire costs of each Facility are divided up between its customers in proportion to their usage of the Facility.

The entire cost of providing each Facility is termed the Full Cash Cost (FCC) and includes:

- the FEC % costs (as laid out in the contract /SLA);
- a token supplement notionally covering administrative support in Swindon Office;
- capital rental (the cost of the capital item(s) amortised and inflated over a number of years, usually seven, unless it is a very large item with a long life, eg the aircraft, when it will be for longer, perhaps 15 or 20 years).

NERC calculates the full cash cost for each Facility and distributes it when the request for the cost-allocation data is sent out in March.

The cost-allocation forms and guidance notes are given in [Annex 8](#) (these are for reference only and updated forms/guidance notes will be sent to facilities when the information is requested in March).

Each Facility should record details of the capacity provided to all customers for inclusion in its cost-allocation statements. Accurate cost-allocations can only be computed *retrospectively* at the *end* of a financial year, once the year's costs and the total service delivered within it are known. However, if required, eg for pricing commercial work, adequate information can be estimated *during* a year, by *projecting* the year's costs and the volume of service that will be delivered.

The Facilities' budget may include an element for in-house research to ensure that the facility remains in the forefront of the science. This element of in-house research should be cost-allocated to the Facility and identified as 'In-house Research'.

It is important to recognise that the resulting "cost-allocation statements", showing the value of Facility attributed to each peer-reviewed customer, are in no sense invoices for payment. They do, however, give Facilities an insight into the average cost of providing their facility, which is useful when determining prices (see [section 2.2.4](#)) and which information must be advised to peer-reviewed users.

NERC may also utilise the data, when required, to provide information on what the Facilities are funding in each strategic priority or science area for example. Some cost-allocation data is also fed into the REF exercise, ie the value of facility usage for customers applying via direct access (for information on direct access see [section 2.2.2](#)).

3.7 Output Performance Measures (OPMs)

All NERC centres, Facilities and grant holders will, from 2013, provide annual research outputs data via the Research Outcomes System (ROS) (previously via the ROD system). Publications, impact and achievements data are the key data, but any relevant outputs for prizes, IP/patents and public engagement are also useful. The achievements and impact data provide important material for the NERC Annual Report and other corporate reporting to government, such as the NERC Delivery Report and NERC Impact Report. To ensure that publications are not duplicated facilities should only report publications **for non-award based research**, (ie publications resulting from direct access and from the facility core team).

[Annex 9](#) gives the 2014 guidance briefing. Please note that OPM data is not collected and collated by SFMT. Outcomes can be submitted at any time during the year. The next refresh of information on ROS will be at the end of March 2014.

3.8 Annual Report

Maintaining Facilities incurs considerable costs and it is important to demonstrate what is being achieved by them. A key means of providing and publicising this information is via each Facility producing an Annual Report.

Each Facility Head (including the Heads of Recognised Facilities) must produce, in a standard format, an Annual Report covering the preceding Financial Year. Copies of the form and guidance notes are presented in [Annex 10](#) available as links from the bottom of the main page (these are for reference only and updated forms/guidance notes will be sent to facilities when the information is requested in late February).

The four-page summary form (six-page for multi-nodal facilities) and the accompanying annexes should be viewed and commented upon by the steering committee at the Spring meeting. (Only the steering committees routinely see the annexes, but the SRG or anybody else can request sight of them). A final version of the report should be submitted to NERC, usually by the end of August (date will be confirmed each year and is subject to change).

The four-page summaries from each Facility plus an overarching facilities annual report written by SFMT, are then collated in a bound booklet. This booklet is distributed to Facility heads, steering committee chairs and internally within NERC. Copies of the booklet are provided to the SRG which are used, along with the steering committee chair's letter, to review the Facilities portfolio as a whole (see [section 3.2](#) – SRG). The four-page summary documents are published on the facilities section of the NERC website and should also be made available on Facility websites.

3.9 Steering Committees

All Facilities are overseen by a steering committee. Where two or more Facilities are using related technology/applications or share a common user-base, they may come under a single steering committee. Each steering committee has a secretary, usually a member of the Facility, who is responsible for organising the meeting, setting the agenda (in conjunction with the chair, Facility head and NERC) and producing a report of the meeting. Meeting papers are required to be sent to NERC three weeks before the meeting (NERC will advise of the deadline in advance). Deadlines for the submission of applications should be set accordingly.

3.9.1 Terms of Reference and Remit of Steering Committees

The information below is very generic and should be adapted to suit the Facility.

REMIT AND TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR [FACILITY] STEERING COMMITTEE

Remit

The [Facility] Steering Committee exists to:

- review applications for use of the [Facility];
- monitor outputs from the Facility;
- provide advice to NERC, the Director of Science and the Facility.

Director of Science, in turn, provides advice to the Science and Innovation Strategy Board (SISB) or Council on Services and Facilities (S&F) relevant to its remit.

Terms of Reference

1. To review applications and establish priorities for the Head of the Facility, for the allocation of those of the Facility's resources funded from the NERC Science Budget, taking into account recommendations made through the NERC peer-review mechanisms.
2. To review the scientific quality of work undertaken by users utilising the Facility, based on reports and publications.
3. To monitor the level of user-satisfaction with the service and to analyse the user-base.
4. To give guidance to the Head of the Facility on improvement of the Facility's equipment and on its service function.
5. To advise Director of Science on:
 - a. the level and direction of the NERC-funded internal R&D programmes for the Facility;
 - b. anticipated changes in requirements from the Facility and the anticipated levels of future demand for the Facility.
6. To receive and comment upon the annual report from the Head of Facility, before it is submitted to NERC Swindon Office.
7. To provide information and advice to the Facility and Director of Science at other times, as appropriate.

3.9.2 Steering Committee Membership

Membership of the Committee, including the Chair, will be decided by the NERC Head of SFMT, with suggestions from the Committee itself. It will include the Head of the Facility and a representative from SFMT (Swindon Office).

Following NERC approval, the secretary of the steering committee is responsible for formally inviting and formally thanking steering committee members at the end of their term. NERC is responsible for formally inviting and formally thanking the chair of a steering committee.

Members, other than *ex-officio* members, will be invited to serve for a term of up to four years with a maximum extension of a further two years. The Chairman will serve a maximum of four years. Committee members are experts from academia, Government or industry and acknowledged as such by their peers.

New committee members, other than *ex-officio* members, should not be from the same institution as any of the nodes of the facility or any of the current members of the steering committee. A retiring committee member can be replaced by a new member from the same institution providing their membership doesn't overlap.

3.9.3 Peer Review and Grading

NERC will allocate its share of a Facility's capacity according to the *quality of the science*, and the *appropriateness of the Facility's technology to that science*. Procedures to evaluate Facility applications are consistent with those used when considering NERC grants.

Committee members are asked to assess the priority for Facility Support according to: research quality; the professional ability and track-record of the researcher(s); the appropriateness of equipment/technology to be applied; the originality of the concept(s); and the relevance of the research proposal to advancing NERC's mission and meeting NERC's priorities.

The peer-review mechanism varies between the different Facility steering committees. For example, some committees meet twice a year and only discuss the applications then, others have more deadlines per year and discuss the applications by teleconference, while others assess the applications via email when they are received. Different mechanisms work better than others depending on the type of Facility.

Applications are graded using the same criteria as for NERC grant applications, using the 10-point system with 10 representing the best grade. The grades and definitions are given in [Annex 11](#). The highest-graded proposals are given the highest priority, in principle, with the less highly graded proposals being accommodated where possible. Applications graded 6 or below are not considered good enough to be supported, unless it is for a student training project and then a 6 is normally fundable. Poor applications are not supported, but advice/comments from the committee will be fed back to the applicant ([see section 3.9.8](#) – Award Letters) and applicants may resubmit.

In the case of the Analytical Facilities, it may also be appropriate to allow some latitude, for example for new users or where there is uncertainty whether the proposed method will work. The committee can recommend a small set number of analyses as a pilot in order to gain experience or to help to establish the case for support.

On rare occasions, an application maybe submitted to a facility and there is not the expertise on the steering committee to assess it. For example, the analyses the application is requesting is suitable to be done at that facility, but it is coming from a science area not routinely using those techniques. Members of other facility steering committees or of the wider community with expertise in that science area may then be asked to provide comments. Obviously if such applications were then to become more frequent, then the steering committee membership would need to be adjusted.

Statistics on the applications received, their peer-review grades, and the 'success rate' in being allocated support are key indicators of the demand for a Facility and of the quality of the science that it is enabling and is therefore fed into the Annual Report and the SRG documentation.

Peer-review is not appropriate to all Facilities, notably when "units of delivery" are not *consumed* by those requiring support. For example, the function of the NSGF is to place data into international data banks and the priorities for tracking various satellites are set internationally.

3.9.4 Confidentiality

Facility steering committees follow the same confidentiality rules as NERC grant moderating/assessment panels, as set out in [Annex 12](#).

3.9.5 Vested Interest

Facility steering committees follow the same vested interest rules as NERC grant moderating/assessment panels, as set out in [Annex 13](#).

3.9.6 Chair's Action

Applicants should apply well in advance of their requested time-period for support by a Facility in order to meet any imposed deadlines. However, there is an emergency procedure, in the form of Chair's Action, that considers applications that have, for example, not been supported for some reason by the Facility steering committee but are funded by a NERC grant and where waiting until the next Facility application deadline would have serious implications for the grant or studentship project.

In these cases, the applicant should respond as soon as possible to the steering committee as requested in the award letter, answering concerns, providing further information etc, either as an email or in a word document (as appropriate). The chair (and steering committee member(s) if required) will then re-assess and grade the project in light of the applicant's response. Steering committee members should be updated about the application at next teleconference/meeting.

3.9.7 Capacity Planning/Prioritisation of Work

Most Facilities in the portfolio have a finite capacity, limited by staff-time, equipment availability, or other constraints. Units of delivery supplied to one customer are essentially consumed and unavailable to other potential customers; hence the need, in most circumstances to ration the service by means of peer-review.

It is important that each Facility should devise a pragmatic system of assessing its capacity, and the extent to which this capacity is being under- or over- utilised, so that it can convey this assessment to its Steering Committee and/or the Services Review Group.

Ideally, the Facilities' capacity will be in overall balance with the NERC user-demand deemed to be worthy of support. If a Facility is regularly obliged to turn away highly graded applicants, then it is either operating inefficiently or clearly suffering from under-capacity, in which case extra resources should be requested at the next SRG with a view to expanding the facility. For many Facilities the concept of "capacity" is far from straightforward and may be influenced by unpredictable factors such as the weather, and logistical constraints which may preclude support for particular applicants, even where there is an overall low demand.

When a Facility does not have enough capacity for the work that has been approved by the steering committee, then the applications have to be prioritised. NERC grants and NERC students take priority, with direct access projects filling any remaining capacity, prioritised according to their grades. This high demand can often be temporary, due to staff changes, long-term staff illness, instrument breakdown, a lot of good applications received at the same time etc, so approved direct access projects can often be carried over and prioritised alongside the applications received at the next steering committee meeting.

Where the high demand is from one or more large NERC grants, then additional resources (temporary staff, new equipment) may be negotiated. SFMT recovers the costs of using a Facility associated with

a grant from the relevant research programme, fellowship or the responsive mode budget which enables SFMT to provide the resources needed to cover the priority projects.

3.9.8 Award Letters

There is no set format for award letters, but they all should include the project title and Facility lab number, the peer-review grade and steering committee members' comments. Award letters of successful applications should also include the amount of resource awarded (eg number of radiocarbon dates, number of days loan of a particular instrument etc), the cost of the work and instruction to contact the facility to schedule the project. A data protocol form (see [section 2.2.6](#) Obligations of Successful Applicants – data protocol forms and [Annex 5](#)) should be included if it is not part of the application form.

Award letters should be drafted by the Facility. As it is NERC that is funding Facility projects, the award letters have to be signed or endorsed by a member of NERC staff and, if necessary, forwarded to SFMT to send out to applicants.

3.9.9 Minimum Requirements for Holding a SC meeting

In order for a steering committee meeting to proceed a minimum number of members should be in attendance:

- The Chair (if the chair is unable to attend then another member of the committee willing to stand in as chair for that meeting should be agreed prior to the meeting)
- A representative from the facility (head of facility or facility manager)
- A representative from NERC/NERC Research Centre
- Enough steering committee members to enable discussion of the business (eg. Peer review, annual report, current issues affecting the facility etc). This is expected to be two thirds of the committee members minimum.

If the minimum requirements cannot be met, the SC secretary should contact the NERC/NERC Centre representative to discuss re-scheduling or for approval to continue with the meeting.

Committee members who are unable to attend should provide written comments where possible, especially on the applications for peer review and the annual report.