

Delivering the NERC strategy Q&A

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Version	Date	Approved by	Reason for change
1.0	Nov-2007	Document owner	Minor updates
1.1	Dec-2007	Document owner	Reference to blue skies in relation to RM and diagram of how NC and RP interact added.
<p>Note: Minor textual changes/points of clarification can be approved by the document owner and should be recorded and change 'within a particular version of the document. i.e. v1.1, v1.2, v1.3. Significant changes must be referred to the strategy delivery system owner: [director] delegating to [business manager]. Significant changes should be recorded as a new version, i.e. v1.0, v2.0, v3.0.</p>			

Delivering the NERC strategy Q&A

For:

NERC's Swindon Office
Research centres
Collaborative centres

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Delivering the strategy

1. How will I be affected by any changes to the delivery of the NERC strategy?

The new strategic priorities for science and organisation themes will be translated through new strategy delivery processes into new or re-directed work. It will take time to plan and feed through these changes. We may need to increase our effort in some areas of work and decrease it in others. We are already starting to map our existing work against the new strategic priorities, so that we have plenty of time to anticipate, plan and manage any changes in our work.

2. What will happen to my research centre's strategy and funding plan?

Local strategies have always supported the corporate strategy as well as wider objectives. Local business plans may need to be updated to reflect changes to the delivery of strategy. Your director should be able to provide further information.

3. How will we address knowledge gaps within the organisation?

We are looking at this as part of implementing the People Strategy. It will become increasingly important to access skills and facilities through partnership and collaboration with other centres and universities.

Funding

4. What are the three funding streams?

- *Responsive mode (formally known as “blue skies”)*
- *National capability*
- *Research programmes*

More information is available on the website:

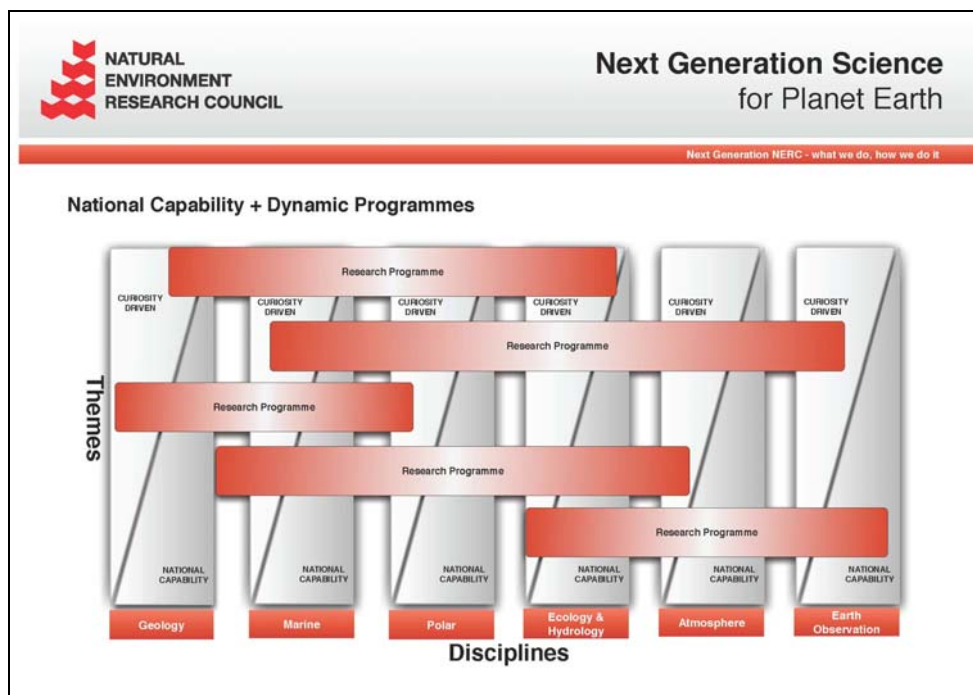
<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/delivery/processes/funding.asp>

[note: technically there are 5 funding streams, efficiency and knowledge are the other two, but most people will be interested in the 3 above]

5. How will the changes in funding *national capability* affect me?

We do not yet know what the impacts may be at an individual level. This is an issue for local planning and discussion.

6. How do national capability and research programme interact?



This diagram helps to explain how NERC will deliver its strategy *Next Generation Science for Planet Earth*. It illustrates how different kinds of research activity will complement one another and build on the essential environmental science disciplines that explore the Earth system.

NERC supports *National Capability*, primarily through its own research centres in each of the disciplines, to enable the UK:

- to deliver world-leading environmental science
- to support national strategic needs
- to respond to emergencies.

National capability includes: environmental survey and monitoring; scientific services and facilities; skills and expertise; research infrastructure; related training and knowledge exchange.

Through *curiosity-driven (Responsive Mode) research*, NERC supports original investigation and training in universities and research centres to enhance our fundamental knowledge and understanding across all the environmental sciences.

To meet the key environmental challenges of the 21st century, the NERC strategy identifies seven themes (and a series of challenges) that link science disciplines across the Earth system:

- Climate system
- Biodiversity
- Sustainable use of natural resources
- Earth system science
- Natural hazards
- Environment, pollution and human health
- Technologies.

Research to address these strategic themes and challenges will be supported through dynamic *Research Programmes* that build on a range of disciplines, national capability and fundamental knowledge. These programmes will be targeted and time-limited so that new challenges can be addressed as strategic priorities evolve and our knowledge grows.

To meet the environmental challenges, NERC aims to create and support vibrant, integrated research communities. Research programmes will take a highly collaborative approach, supporting research centres and universities to work together across disciplines.

For more information about NERC strategy and its delivery see:

www.nerc.ac.uk/about/delivery

7. If I am only working on national capability or research programme funding how will this affect performance management i.e. promotion and appraisal?

The performance management processes are about how individuals perform, not how their activity is funded.

8. Is our current five-year funding safe?

NERC will manage a progressive transition to the new funding arrangements, rather than an instant switch at the end of current programmes. This will ensure a manageable transition from the old to the new ways of working, whilst maintaining the sustainability of research and collaborative centres.

An executive board is considering exactly how we will progressively decrease existing quinquennial funding and increase research programme funding over several years. Centres will retain the five-year funding already awarded to them for their research programmes. To prepare for the new ways of funding, national capability and research programme activities within current five-year programmes will be identified and re-classified as such. Centres will progressively work to align these activities with NERC strategic priorities.

9. What will be the percentage split between the different funding streams?

Centres have carried out an internal mapping exercise to give a first look at percentage split. The first drafts are available to view and they are currently being refined (November 2007). If you would like to see the working drafts, please contact:

10. If my work is predominantly research programme based, is my job more uncertain?

The processes we are introducing to enable effective delivery and monitoring of the strategy, should give us timely information to help all our planning process. That means we will have earlier visibility if we need to redirect/retrain people to meet changing organisational priorities.

Overall research centres and collaborative centres deliver a mix of activities which are funded by a mix of income streams. We already balance these mixes, and we rarely label/employ people according to their funding source.

11. Will the opportunity to bid for research programme funding be restricted by grade?

It is already restricted by the existing rules, so no change is proposed.

12. How are funding allocations to science themes prioritised?

Council will have a high-level overview of NERC priorities and investments through our new strategic management tool. This will help look at the full extent of what NERC does and inform Council when they are making decisions about investments.

The portfolio planning process will then enable Council to refine:

- (a) the broad, high-level funding allocations to strategy themes from the different funding streams; and
- (b) the detailed funding allocations needed to implement theme action plans.

13. How do we prepare staff to win more research programme funding?

NERC will build on existing experience and knowledge already within our centre – we will use the transition period to adapt and develop skills as necessary. We will collaborate with excellent people in other centres/universities who have these skills.

14. Will the new funding arrangements involve greater effort in bidding?

In the future, centres will bid less often for *national capability* funding and more often for parcels of *research programme* funding. The overall effort is expected to be similar to the effort currently required for reviewing and bidding for quinquennial programmes. The concept of bidding for funds is not new -

most NERC centres already manage a mix of activities and funding streams (including *national capability*, *research programmes* and *responsive mode* plus contract research for public and industry funders).

15. Will research centres/surveys be disadvantaged in bids against universities?

There will be fair and open competition (as appropriate) via the current peer review route. Some funding (*national capability*) will be specifically aimed at NERC research centres and collaborative centres and not subject to competition from higher education institutes (HEIs). Sometimes national capability provides research centres and collaborative centres with unique selling points which HEIs don't have. However, there will be other occasions where national capability activities cannot be undertaken by centres and are more appropriate to be held elsewhere.

16. From a Swindon Office perspective, do these changes mean that I will be administering more funding rounds?

Within Swindon Office, staff will administer the same volume of funding across more clearly defined streams. On average, research programme funding will be awarded in bigger lumps, but we need to decide how to manage *national capability* investments. We don't anticipate that the new ways of working will significantly increase administration in this area.

Evaluation

17. Now that science and management audits (SMAs) have been removed, what will happen to the evaluation of existing activities?

Evaluations are one part of a developing broader, more formal approach to business performance management. Our aim is to use performance information more effectively. In this context, evaluations will only be conducted where a specific, high priority need for evidence has been identified (e.g. to inform forthcoming decisions, for evidence of achievements, for accountability). Evaluation is no longer automatically linked to the renewal process. We are currently developing an evaluation timetable, which will be published annually.

See the NERC website for more details:

<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/perform/evaluation.asp>

18. In terms of evaluation, what does 'lighter touch' mean?

Science and Management Audits were very time-consuming and resource intensive. Evaluations will be less resource-intensive for centres - they will make use of existing performance information wherever possible, and the methodology will be tailored for each evaluation.

19. What does "designed to meet the specific need for evidence" mean?

Evaluations will only be conducted where decision-makers have identified a specific, high priority need for evidence that an evaluation can provide (e.g. to inform forthcoming decisions, for evidence of achievements, for accountability). The methodology for each evaluation will be designed to provide the evidence required.

Roles and interactions

20. What is the definition of “collaboration” and will I have to have a partner to apply for research programme funding?

Collaboration is the working together of two or more partners to deliver NERC-funded science. An example of collaboration could be a research centre working with a higher education institute, or another research centre, or an international partner. It does not necessarily imply multi-disciplinary science, although multi-disciplinary science can be part of collaborative science. You won't have to have a partner, but the nature of the strategy should encourage partnerships to be formed for particular bids.

21. How do NERC's theme leaders differ from science directors and research centre directors?

In the early 1990s, NERC employed science directors with responsibility for overseeing NERC's strategically directed research effort. Research centre directors are responsible for managing and delivering a mix of activities whilst maintaining a healthy national capability and science base. Both these kinds of directors have executive responsibility and oversee a disciplinary sector. Theme leaders will be influential advocates for, and advisors to, NERC but have no executive power. They will not make funding decisions, and will not be directly responsible for delivering NERC investments. And they will champion cross-cutting strategic themes rather than particular disciplines. For more information on NERC's science themes: <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/themes/>

22. How will my centre/survey interact with the theme leaders?

Your directors should be able to answer this.

23. How will theme leaders interact with the NERC Executive Board/ Science & Innovation Strategy Board/Council/NERC Investment Committee?

Theme leaders have an advisory role, and will channel that advice mainly via Director Science & Innovation. They may also sometimes be asked to advise SISB, Council or the NERC Investment Committee directly.