

NERC Funding Streams and Categories

Definitions and Guidance

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Note:

Minor textual changes/points of clarification can be approved by the document owner and should be recorded as a particular version of the document. i.e. v1.1, v1.2, v1.3.

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Section 1: Introduction and context

1. This document provides guidance on the characteristics, definitions and use of NERC funding streams and funding categories.
2. The purpose of the NERC funding framework is to enable users (including managers and decision makers) to identify clearly the purpose of each kind of activity, together with the appropriate funding stream and category for planning and managing the cost of each kind of activity. NERC funding administrators and research centres are likely to be key users of this guidance document, especially for the Centre activity resource planning (CARP) process, though it contains useful summaries for other stakeholders.
3. NERC uses three main funding streams: national capability (NC), research programme (RP) and responsive mode (RM). It is important to recognise that the definition of a single funding stream, be it NC, RP or RM should not, in itself, characterise the mission of a single organisation – the funding stream is not a replacement for the quinquennial review¹ definition of a research council institute, or the characteristics of a particular university. It is the balance between these funding streams (and other income sources), and the nature of the work undertaken, that support the delivery of each organisation’s mission.

¹ The former office of Science & Technology quinquennial review (QQR) of the grant awarding research councils

Section 2: Funding framework: definitions and characteristics

1. The NERC funding framework was introduced in April 2003 to provide a powerful tool for the strategic management of NERC finances, reflecting the diversity of our business, identifying the options for financial flexibility, and enabling a more rapid response to new opportunities and emerging priorities.
2. During 2007-08 the funding framework was revised with the introduction of new funding streams. The requirement for, and relevance of, the funding framework is unchanged. It will continue to enable collaboration with external funders, stakeholders, universities and other research councils.
3. The framework recognises that funding streams and funding categories are not synonymous. NC, for example, is not a monolithic and homogeneous entity, but a range of diverse activities with significantly different characteristics (captured as different funding categories). On the other hand, some activities (funding categories: eg training) are not unique to one funding stream and may contribute to all of them.

Funding Streams

National capability for environmental science (NC)

National capability enables the UK to deliver world-leading environmental science, support national strategic needs, and respond to emergencies. NERC supports national capability by funding:

Activity	Description
Environmental survey and monitoring ¹	Long-term observation, survey, mapping, scientific collections, community Earth-system models and data management.
Shared services & facilities ¹	Scientific services and facilities accessible to the whole community.
Scientific advice	A small core of leadership in NERC Research and Collaborative Centres to enable but not fully fund the provision of scientific advice and national good services to the UK government, overseas territories, business and the public, including response to emergencies. Exceptional activities supported by transfer of funds from government.
Training	Management and delivery of training and development for the next generation of environmental scientists (PhD students and post-doctoral fellows) tied to the delivery of national capability.
Knowledge exchange	Supports the capability to disseminate and debate NERC NC-generated knowledge and ideas.
Indirect costs	Indirect costs of research infrastructure and support for national capability

¹ Including the necessary (interdependent) research and development activities to keep the capability at the 'cutting edge'.

Research programme for environmental science (RP)

Research programme delivers world-leading, strategically themed environmental research, by funding:

Activity	Description
Themed research	Original investigation - undertaken to expand knowledge - that is directed to meet specified strategic aims and user needs. A small core of leadership in NERC Research and Collaborative Centres, to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- lead and coordinate national and international collaborative programmes;- develop RP and RM proposals.- conduct preparatory studies for potential RP and RM projects- support down-time between RP and RM projects- support RP and RM projects conducted by IMP scientists.
Training	Management and delivery of training and development for the next generation of environmental scientists (PhD students and post-doctoral fellows) tied to the delivery of themed research.
Knowledge exchange	Supports the capability to disseminate and debate NERC RP-generated knowledge and ideas.
Indirect costs	Indirect costs of research infrastructure and support for research programme.

Responsive mode research for environmental science (RM)

Responsive Mode (RM) is the funding stream that supports excellent research in response to unsolicited ideas from research groups, consortia or individuals, in any area relevant to NERC's remit. NERC promotes unrestricted and innovative thinking; proposed research can be pure, applied or policy-driven, and must seek to address - or provide the means to address - clearly defined science questions.

Through Responsive Mode, NERC encourages (but does not demand):

- 'adventurous' research;
- 'technology-led' proposals;
- collaboration and the exchange of ideas across and within disciplines and institutional boundaries; and
- collaboration with international and non-academic partners.

RM is a key component of delivering NERC's strategy and is intended to facilitate the identification of the next generation of strategic priorities. By providing young researchers with the opportunity to develop their careers, together with its support for cutting-edge areas of science, RM plays a crucial role in sustaining the UK's position as a world leader in environmental science research.

Funding for RM includes the dissemination of that knowledge and understanding, and the research infrastructure (indirect costs) required to deliver that research.

Funding Categories

National capability		Research programme		Responsive mode	
FC	Description	FC	Description	FC	Description
1	Environmental survey and monitoring				
2	Shared services and facilities				
3	Scientific advice				
4	Training	4	Training	4	Training
		5	Themed research	5	Blue skies research
6	Knowledge exchange	6	Knowledge exchange	6	Knowledge exchange
7	Indirect costs	7	Indirect costs	7	Indirect costs

FC9 Capital projects

Note: FC8 (specialist major infrastructure) is no longer used. Activities previously allocated against this funding category are reported against FC2 (e.g., dedicated BAS Antarctic infrastructure/ships, research ships operated by NMF Sea Systems, NIGL and ESA subscriptions).

FC10 (science in society) was merged with FC6 (formerly knowledge transfer) and re-named as FC6 (knowledge exchange).

Characteristics

	National Capability	Research Programme	Responsive Mode
Delivery	Delivered by NERC RCCs and other providers of services-and-facilities. Where appropriate, new NC activities are offered to the relevant NERC provider in that field.	Delivered by RCCs, HEIs and independent research organisations.	Delivered by RCCs, HEIs and independent research organisations.
Duration and Competition	Generally long-term investments by NERC. NC is seldom provided through open market competition mechanisms because of the unique and significant strategic character of the activities.	RP is time-limited and designed to meet the evolving requirements of NERC's strategy. It is often collaborative, cross cutting and inter-disciplinary in nature. It is normally provided through open competition mechanisms to ensure delivery of the highest quality research that meets strategic and user needs.	RM is time-limited and designed to sustain a healthy and diverse research base. It is provided through open competition mechanisms to ensure delivery of the highest quality research.

Section 3: Guidance for users - National Capability

1. The NC funding stream supports NERC's current and future strategic science needs, together with some "national good" needs¹. In planning NC investments NERC is advised by the NERC National Capability Advisory Group (NCAG), NERC Theme Leaders and external stakeholders such as UK Government. Activities conducted within the NC funding stream will typically include expenditure within some or all of the following funding categories.

Funding category 1 – NC environmental survey and monitoring

2. FC1 supports the provision of datasets and scientific collections, obtained through long-term observation, survey, mapping and community Earth-system models. It includes the direct costs of:
 - Collecting data and samples
 - Collating and assimilating data, models and collections for dissemination and use.
 - Managing, maintaining and archiving datasets and collections.
 - Essential work to keep the long-term observation, survey, mapping, collection, model or data management programme at the leading-edge and intellectually well resourced. This is commonly referred to as "interdependent research".
3. Illustrative examples of environmental survey and monitoring include:
 - Long-term measurements of **atmospheric ozone hole** above Antarctica by the British Antarctic Survey.
 - Long-term monitoring of **geological hazards** such as faults, landslides and volcanoes by the British Geological Survey.
 - **National hydrological monitoring programme**, by Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and British Geological Survey to enable better prediction of floods and droughts.
 - **Countryside survey** – the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology collects information on natural landscape features including plant communities and habitats within farmland, woods, heathland, moors, soils, small rivers and ponds.
 - **Environmental change network** is involved with data, monitoring and research to detect and interpret environmental change.
 - Continuous **plankton recorder survey** collects information on upper ocean plankton abundances over decades and across ocean basins, and correlates them with climatic indices such as temperature, coastal upwelling, Gulf Stream position and atmospheric pressure anomalies.
 - Up-to-date detailed **geological maps** for use by environmental scientists and evaluating authorities are provided by the British Geological Survey.
 - Designated **NERC data centres** (for CARPs, the indirect management costs of data centres should be included with direct costs in FC1, whereas indirect infrastructure costs should be attributed to FC7).

¹ National Good refers to activities where the primary customer is society rather than the research base, and which cannot be measured by standard scientific metrics. Examples include maintaining the UK presence in Antarctica, seal monitoring, and support to Government during emergencies.

Funding category 2 – NC shared services and facilities

4. FC2 supports the provision of shared services and facilities. It includes the direct costs of:
 - Services and facilities where 50% or more of their usage is by research organisations, agencies or individuals external to the host institution (services or facilities that fail this eligibility criterion should be allocated to FC7).
 - Large activities with limited scientific input that would distort FC7 indirect costs, such as the research vessels operated by National Marine Facilities – Sea Systems, Arctic infrastructure, NERC Isotope Geosciences Laboratory (NIGL), European Space Agency (ESA) subscriptions (for CARPs, the indirect management costs of these large activities should be included with direct costs in FC2 rather than FC7).
 - Where appropriate, essential interdependent research required to maintain the scientific quality of the facility.
5. If a service is intended, wholly or in part, to support the internal requirements of a given research programme, then that element should be attributed to the relevant RP.
6. The cost of a shared service or facility will include those costs directly incurred in delivering the activity. As an example, the James Cook research vessel would include marine gas oil, ship crew and specific shore-based support for ships.
7. Illustrative examples of shared services and facilities include the following:
 - **Analytical facilities:** NERC has a range of specialist analytical facilities to support NERC research, including argon isotope facilities, life sciences mass spectrometry facilities, and molecular genetic facilities.
 - **Atmospheric facilities:** these include two aircraft which provide airborne chemistry and radiation measurements on a world-wide basis; two radar systems which enable study of phenomena and processes throughout the atmospheric column; a laboratory providing high-quality absorption, extinction, reflectance and emission spectra from solid, liquid, aerosol and gaseous samples; and a GPS data archive enabling georeferencing of aircraft and radar observations.
 - **Earth observation facilities:** these include a remote sensing aircraft providing synoptic analogue and digital imagery at high spectral and spatial resolutions; a GPS data archive providing information for georeferencing of airborne imagery and a wide range of environmental observations; a satellite data receiving station which archives imagery derived from a range of polar-orbiting and geostationary satellites.
 - **Equipment pool:** NERC provide researchers with access to a range of specialised equipment and training to support experimental fieldwork.
 - **High performance computing (HPC):** computing power for environmental scientists.
 - **Marine facilities:** NERC provides access to a range of marine facilities in support of marine science including research ships, technicians and marine science equipment.
 - International Programme Offices (IPOs).

For more information on NERCs research facilities visit www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/facilities

Funding category 3 – NC scientific advice

8. FC3 supports a small core of leadership in NERC centres to enable, but not fully fund, the provision of scientific advice and national good services to the UK Government, overseas territories, business and the public, including response to emergencies. It includes the direct costs of:
 - A small number of lead scientists, engineers and technologists whose unique skills and expertise are needed to provide scientific advice and influence policy (eg COST actions) and cannot be attributed to other funding categories.
 - Providing scientific advice and national good services to the UK Government, overseas territories, business and the public.
 - Responding to emergencies, public consultations and parliamentary questions.
 - Exceptional activities supported by transfer of funds from Government.
9. The entire base for the scientific advice provided by a NERC centre is expected to be dispersed across a diverse range of activities that are identified and supported through several funding categories and income streams. Thus the bulk of salary costs for leaders, plus other scientists, engineers and technologists, (ie the majority of staff effort) will be funded through a combination of other routes, eg:
 - Higher education funding councils (via the dual support system);
 - Other national capability funding categories, including FC1 and FC7;
 - Research programme - grants, contracts or training awards;
 - Research programme elements that are linked to the volume of competitive funding income in a NERC Research or Collaborative Centre and agreed through the activity resource planning (CARP) process (eg V and S - see Section 4: RP FC5),
 - Responsive mode grants or training awards,
 - External (to NERC) sources of funding (e.g. commissioned research).
10. FC3 eligibility is limited to NERC research centres and established collaborative centres: BAS, BGS, CEH, POL, NOCS, NCAS, NCEO, PML, SAMS, SMRU. Individuals included in FC3 must also be eligible to receive Research Council grants as Principle Investigators. Centres will determine the amount of activity (staff effort) to be allocated to NC FC3 based on the nature of their work and their business activities. As such, there is no universal algorithm for setting the staff effort to be included. However, centres will be expected justify their FC3 costs, and why they are not routinely funded from other sources, based on the nature of their work and on benchmarking across NERC.

Funding category 4 – NC training

11. FC4 supports the management of training and development for the next generation of environmental scientists through the delivery of national capability. It includes the direct costs (eg staff supervision) of training PhD and MSc students and postdoctoral fellows.
12. Where students directly contribute to science activities, their project costs should be attributed to the relevant national capability activity (eg FC1, FC2). FC4 does not cover staff training – for staff training, specific costs should be attributed to the relevant activity (eg FC1, FC2) and generic costs to FC7.

Funding category 6 – NC knowledge exchange

13. FC6 supports the capability, but not the full capacity, to disseminate and debate NERC-generated knowledge and ideas. NC FC6 includes the direct costs of knowledge exchange associated with NC activity:
 - A small number of lead staff whose unique skills and expertise are needed for knowledge exchange and cannot be attributed to other funding categories.
 - Enabling knowledge transfer, commercialisation and science in society.
14. FC6 costs in NERC centres should be moderate because the full cost of knowledge exchange activity is supported through a range of internal and external sources. It does not include collating and assimilating data, models and collections for dissemination and use (these costs should be attributed to NC FC1 or RP FC5) nor does it include the costs of running a press office (FC7).
15. Illustrative examples of NC knowledge exchange include:
 - Identifying research ideas and projects that might become a marketable product or service (eg 'exploitation scouts' will look for commercial possibilities);
 - Gathering intelligence on knowledge exchange possibilities;
 - Promotional events (eg the launch of a new research vessel or facility);
 - Facilitating access to, and use of, NERC's data and knowledge.

Funding category 7 – NC indirect costs

16. Funding categories 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 (above) provide for the direct operating costs of delivering defined NC activities.
17. FC7 supports indirect costs or “overheads” that are not directly related to any single activity (and therefore cannot be charged directly to that activity), but are a necessary cost of undertaking it. Together the direct and indirect costs provide the “full economic cost” (FEC).
18. Illustrative examples of FC7 indirect costs include:

Running cost of scientific infrastructure

- Maintenance contract for a mass spectrometer

Support Activities

- Utilities – water, electricity, gas, rent and rates
- Estates and building maintenance and cleaning
- Scientific support activities (including technologists, engineers, technicians)
- Administrative functions – IT, HR, Finance, Press Office, Library (not shared), etc

Management Activities

- Staff management (including training and performance management)
 - Centre management (e.g. executive meetings)
19. The only exceptions, when indirect costs should be included with direct costs rather than FC7, are for the management (not infrastructure) costs of designated data centres (FC1, paragraph 3 above) and large facilities (FC2, paragraph 4 above) – these exceptions are expected to be relatively small in value.
20. Indirect costs should be:
- Calculated fairly using the transparent approach to costing methodology (TRAC - further guidance available from local finance teams).
 - Apportioned fairly (usually *pro rata*) across NC, RP and RM activities.

Section 4: Guidance for users - Research Programmes

1. The RP funding stream supports world-leading, themed research that meets defined NERC strategic priorities and user needs. In planning RP investments NERC is advised by Theme Leaders working with external stakeholders in the research and user communities. Activities conducted within the RP funding stream will typically include expenditure within some or all of the following funding categories.

Research Programme funding may be awarded by contract or through research grants. Terms and conditions for contracts may vary, but those relating to grants can be found in the NERC Research Grants Handbook at the following link:
<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/researchgrants>

Funding category 4 – RP training

2. FC4 supports the management of training and development for the next generation of environmental scientists through the delivery of research programmes. Such programmes may fund PhD studentships or post-doctoral fellows to meet strategic needs such as building capacity and advancing the strategically driven research being pursued by the programme.
3. FC4 includes the direct costs (eg staff supervision) of training PhD and MSc students and postdoctoral fellows. Where students directly contribute to science activities, their project costs should be attributed to the relevant research activity (eg FC5). FC4 does not cover staff training – for staff training, specific costs should be attributed to the relevant activity (eg FC5) and generic costs to FC7.
4. Curiosity-driven (blue skies) training awards are funded through RM and not included in RP.
5. Where training activity is not funded explicitly through a research programme, NERC research centres should attribute the direct management and supervision costs to NC FC4.

Funding category 5 – RP themed research

6. FC5 supports the directly incurred costs of undertaking strategically directed (themed) research, including:
 - Dedicated technicians, consumables, travel and subsistence.
 - Costs that are directly allocated to a research activity - this relates to services that are shared by other activities, including principal and co-investigators and laboratory technicians, and charged to users.
7. Illustrative examples of themed research programmes:
 - Ecosystems services and poverty alleviation (ESPA)
 - Quantifying and understanding the earth system (QUEST)
 - UK integrated ocean drilling programme (UKIODP)
 - Oceans 2025 (marine centres)

- Others listed at www.nerc.ac.uk/research/programmes/
8. Responsive mode or “blue skies” grants are curiosity (rather than strategically) driven and are therefore not included under the definition of RP.
 9. In addition, RP FC5 supports a limited core of leadership in NERC centres through a variable funding element V. This element applies to a portion of the direct salary costs of a small number of lead scientists, engineers and technologists whose unique skills and expertise are needed to lead the following kinds of tasks and cannot be attributed to other funding categories:
 - lead and coordinate national and international collaborative programmes;
 - develop RP and RM proposals (but not CR proposals – these costs should be factored into the rates charged to customers);
 - conduct preparatory studies for potential RP and RM projects;
 - support down-time between RP and RM projects;
 - support a portion of RP and RM projects conducted by IMP scientists, where they are not supported through other funding sources and categories.
 10. Other staff costs (ie the majority of staff effort) will be fully supported through other activities and sources (see Section 3, paragraph 9).
 11. The allocation of V will be determined annually through the centre activity resource planning (CARP) process. V is calculated as a proportion (currently set at 20%) of all direct RP and RM income won by a centre (ie excluding indirect costs). Eligibility for the V element of funding is limited to NERC research centres and established collaborative centres (see table below).
 12. In addition, centres whose proportion of competitive income (RP + RM + external income) exceeds an agreed threshold (currently set at 50% of total income) will be allocated a funding element S to support financial sustainability against fluctuations in competitive or “volatile” income. The allocation of S will be determined annually through the centre activity resource planning (CARP) process. Eligibility for the S element of funding is limited to wholly owned NERC research centres and NOCS (see table below). At present no eligible centres qualify to receive S funding because more than 50% of their total income is derived through NC and other “stable” sources.

Eligibility to receive RP FC5 funding elements V and S:

Centre	Status	RP V	RP S
BAS	Wholly owned	Yes	Yes
BGS	Wholly owned	Yes	Yes
CEH	Wholly owned	Yes	Yes
POL	Wholly owned	Yes	Yes
NOCS	Established*	Yes	Yes
NCAS	Established	Yes	No
NCEO	Established	Yes	No
PML	Established	Yes	No
SAMS	Established	Yes	No
SMRU	Established	(No RP)	No
MBA	Other	No	No
SAHFOS	Other	No	No

* For financial management NOCS is treated like a wholly owned centre

Funding category 6 – RP knowledge exchange

13. FC6 supports the capability, but not the full capacity, to disseminate and debate NERC-generated knowledge and ideas. RP FC6 includes the direct costs associated with themed research activity (RP FC5) for enabling knowledge transfer, commercialisation and science in society (eg through promotional and dissemination events, and targeted dissemination of knowledge and data).
14. FC6 costs in NERC centres should be moderate because the full cost of knowledge exchange activity is supported through a range of internal and external sources. It does not include collating and assimilating data, models and collections for dissemination and use (these costs should be attributed to NC FC1 or RP FC5) nor does it include the costs of running a press office (FC7).

Funding category 7 – RP indirect costs

15. Funding categories 4, 5 and 6 (above) provide for the direct operating costs of delivering defined RP activities. FC7 supports indirect costs or “overheads” that are not directly related to any single activity (and therefore cannot be charged directly to that activity), but are a necessary cost of undertaking it. Together the direct and indirect costs provide the “full economic cost” (FEC). Illustrative examples of FC7 indirect costs are given in Section 3, paragraph 18.
16. Indirect costs should be:
 - Calculated fairly using the transparent approach to costing methodology (TRAC - further guidance available from local finance teams).
 - Apportioned fairly (usually *pro rata*) across NC, RP and RM activities.

Section 5: Guidance for Users - Responsive Mode

1. The RM funding stream supports original investigation and training undertaken to gain, advance or expand knowledge and understanding, in response to unsolicited research proposals in any area relevant to NERC's remit. Activities conducted within the RM funding stream will typically include expenditure within some or all of the following funding categories
2. More information on Responsive Mode funding can be found in the NERC Research Grants Handbook at the following link:
<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/researchgrants>

Funding Category 4 – RM training

3. Studentship, fellowship or post-graduate training where the research element is curiosity-driven rather than strategically themed.

Funding Category 5 – RM research

4. Curiosity-driven research delivering original investigation, undertaken to expand knowledge, not specifically targeted towards strategic (theme) priorities.

Funding Category 6 – RM knowledge exchange

5. Activity associated with RM research activity (RM FC5) for enabling knowledge transfer, commercialisation and science in society

Funding Category 7 – RM indirect costs

6. RM activity should include a fair charge for indirect costs. Calculation of the charge should be based on the transparent approach to costing methodology (TRAC). Further guidance on this can be obtained from local finance teams.

Section 6: Guidance for Users – Capital funding and match funding

Funding category 9 – Capital items

21. FC9 captures all capital items, whatever their intended use (NC, RP or RM).
22. Capital includes the procurement cost of all items with a value of more than £5k and a lifespan of more than one year (including items between £5k and £50k that were previously included in FC7). The definition of capital is given on the NERC Extranet at the following link: <http://net.nerc.ac.uk/policy/finance/fn/fn06-19.asp>
23. Illustrative examples of capital investments include:
 - Replacement / major upgrade of NERC building stock (UK and Antarctic)
 - Replacement / major upgrade of NERC research ships and aircraft
 - Major IT procurement exercises (eg high performance computing, cluster computers)
 - Additions / replacements to the NERC equipment pools
 - Laboratory equipment
 - Vehicles purchased for field based research
24. Once procured, the ongoing running and maintenance costs will fall under other funding categories.
25. Capital is treated separately from NC, RP and RM in centre funding allocations and business plans (CARPs).

Match funding

NERC policy is that centres may accept EU projects and other co-funding where the research objectives overlap substantially with NERC's explicit strategic priorities (as articulated through theme action plans, for example) and the co-funding helps to leverage delivery of NERC strategy. Centres may match any NERC funds (NC, RP and RM) with other sources of income to support and deliver co-funded and collaborative projects that meet this requirement. Under this policy NERC does not provide its centres or other research organisations with additional sources of co-funding.