

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL



NERC Equality and Diversity Plan

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN FOR NERC 2016 – 2018

1.0 Introduction

1.1 In view of...:

- the wider work of the RCUK group on Equality and Diversity led by Professor Jackie Hunter, Chief Executive of BBSRC and the draft RCUK- level Equality and Diversity Plan which is under development
- the status of each NERC Research Centre as employers of environmental science researchers at all stages of their careers and of each NERC Research Centre and Head Office as an employer within their local regions
- NERC Head Office's future focus and identity and the development of a NERC approach to corporate responsibility, where it can, through the decisions of its various governing and advisory bodies and through funding actions, seek to influence equality and diversity issues across the broader environmental sciences arena

...this document shows the equality and diversity landscape for NERC currently and suggests some high-level, focussed actions which NERC can take to shape that landscape further.

2.0 Background - Why should equality and diversity be a priority now?

1. In order to meet and exceed its Royal Charter objectives, NERC is dependent on accessing both breadth and depth of thinking. If it does not access diversity of thought and approach it is limiting its ability to drive excellence
2. There is evidence¹ that diversity can be a valuable business asset which has the power to lift performance and drive innovation
3. NERC is committed to integrity in everything it does and is keen to 'level the playing field' by driving positive action initiatives to reduce previous disadvantage for its own staff and for the environmental science population as a whole
4. Equality and diversity is high on the BIS agenda, with ministerial visibility and profile
5. NERC has a legal obligation under the Equality Act 2010 to comply with the General Duty of the Public Sector Equality Duty – the obligations are summarised in Annex A.
6. NERC has agreed a Corporate Responsibility statement and this includes a commitment to equality and diversity

3.0 Actions

3.1 In its role as a Research Council, NERC has both an opportunity and a responsibility to look beyond its own employed population and to influence the wider scientific community. NERC also recognises its responsibility to act as a leader and role model to the environmental science community. This document suggests actions in the following distinct aspects of NERC's role:

¹ Dr Scott E Page, University of Michigan, "The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools and Societies" (Princeton University Press), 2008

- NERC as an employer
- NERC as a decision maker
- NERC as a funder

4.0 NERC as an employer

4.1 NERC aspires to be an employer of choice for the best people and recognises the need to employ staff from the widest possible pool of talent.

4.2 The harmonised cross-Council Equality and Diversity Policy states that:

“An organisation’s success and competitiveness depends on its ability to embrace diversity and draw on the skills, understanding and experience of all its people. The potential rewards of diversity are significant: an organisation that recruits its employees from the widest possible pool will unleash talent and develop better understanding of its customers and stakeholders. It will also enable it better to spot and exploit opportunities.”

4.3 This statement will only be a reality for NERC when our data demonstrate that we do not have certain groups under-represented within the organisation or within specific areas or positions in the organisation (e.g. people from different ethnic backgrounds, women in senior roles).

What is the current position?

Gender

4.4 Annex B shows the comparative position in the proportion of men and women in each Band in NERC over the last 5 years. This shows that women make up 46% of the total NERC workforce in 2015, compared to 42% in 2010. In addition, it shows that the number of women in the senior Bands in NERC (Bands 5-1) as a proportion of the population in each Band (bar Band 1) has increased over this period by from 23% to 31%. While there will doubtless be many factors in play in this, NERC can point to a number of positive measures in which it has invested over the last few years to drive such a change, such as:

- Centres seeking to gain Athena Swan accreditation and the work required to underpin and demonstrate their efforts in this area
- participation in the Cranfield Women as Leaders programme and in the Senior Civil Service Leadership programme
- active consideration of the gender balance of recruitment/promotion panels for senior level recruitment
- continuing commitment to family friendly employment policies
- the introduction of a ‘Growing Future Leaders’ programme targeting those staff at Band 6/5 level where previous data in 2010 indicated a decline in the number of women progressing through to leadership positions and “stagnating” at Band 6 level or leaving the organisation altogether.

Actions:

4.5 The challenge is to continue the momentum that has been achieved in this area over the last five years. The following aims (and actions to achieve these aims) are detailed below:

Aim	Target	Actions
To continue to increase the number of women employed by NERC in senior roles	To increase the proportion of women in senior positions (Band 5 and above) by 8% on the 2015 baseline in each Band.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centres/NERC Head Office develop succession plans for key roles and ensure that all staff with the potential to reach these roles are given the support and necessary development. • In the construction and “marketing” of their Employee Value Proposition (EVP), each Centre/NERC Head Office more actively to demonstrate to current and potential future new staff the existence of a diverse workforce • Continue the positive measures taken in this area over the last 2-3 years • Head Office to carry out an Equal Pay Audit of the NERC Band 3-9 pay system and develop an action plan to address any necessary changes that need making as a result (in order to demonstrate that NERC values the contribution that women make as much as that of men in financial terms).
Centres/Head Office to demonstrate that they have embedded Equality and Diversity practices	Each Centre to gain and maintain at least Athena Swan Bronze level accreditation. Each Centre and Head Office to maintain liP status.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centres submit action plans for Athena Swan accreditation and deliver the actions therein. • Centres and Head Office demonstrate their investment in people and E&D practices to the level necessary to maintain liP status. • The “Senior Management Teams” of all Centres and Head Office to undertake Unconscious Bias/Inclusive Leadership Training

Ethnicity

4.6 While much of the previous focus in the area of Equality and Diversity in NERC has been around gender, NERC should ask itself whether there is anything it could or should be doing around ethnicity.

4.7 In terms of ethnicity, a breakdown of the ethnic make-up of the NERC workforce in 2015 reveals that 70% of staff are White British, 19% of staff decline to declare their ethnicity, 9% of staff are “other” and 2% of staff are Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME). This compares to the data available from the Higher Education Statistic Agency (HESA) for 2012/13 which shows that 3% of the research population in Earth, Marine and Environmental Science are BAME.

4.8 NERC has a legal duty to consider the ethnicity of its workforce. It is not required to look at the nationality of its staff. However, of the 47% of staff who have declared their nationality on the Oracle system, 15% are not British and this demonstrates NERC commitment to diversity in its widest sense. See Annex B.

4.9 It is clear that the size of the ethnic “pool” in general terms in the UK (in terms of that part of the NERC workforce which would come through HEIs) is at very low levels. While NERC can seek to influence this through its role as a funder and through its public engagement strategy, notwithstanding the relatively small

percentages in play, it is suggested that NERC as an employer should at least seek to match the proportion of researchers as per the HESA data with the number of researchers from BAME backgrounds in its workforce.

4.10 In addition to this, NERC Centres and Head Office also have a status as an employer within their local towns/cities/regions and so for roles which are drawn from these more local employment pools, there is an opportunity for the Centres/Head Office to aspire, for those roles where it will draw from local populations, to match the ethnic make-ups of the local employment pool.

Actions:

Aim	Target	Actions
To improve data collection so that NERC better understands the ethnic profile of its workforce	For each Centre / Head office to hold a dataset of the ethnic profile of its employees in which it has confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand what is needed to encourage NERC employees to complete their ethnicity profile on the Oracle system and take appropriate actions
To match the number of BAME staff in the environmental research sector with that in the equivalent proportion of the workforce.	For each Centre to increase the proportion of the BAME research workforce by 1% against the 2015 baseline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centres/NERC Head Office develop succession plans for key roles and ensure that all staff with the potential to reach these roles are given the support and necessary development.
To match the number of BAME staff in the relevant local employment pools with the equivalent proportion of the workforce in each Centre/Head Office.	For each Centre/Head Office to increase the proportion of the roles in their workforce filled from the relevant local population to match the BAME breakdown of that local population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the construction and “marketing” of their Employee Value Proposition (EVP), each Centre/NERC Head Office more actively to demonstrate to current and potential future new staff the existence of a diverse workforce. Each Centre/Head Office to understand the demographic data relevant to it and review its employment practice to ensure it is inclusive.

Disability

4.11 NERC is entirely reliant upon individuals declaring whether they regard themselves as having a disability or not and so the data that we hold in this regard are likely to underestimate the actual position as some people do not wish to make this declaration. Currently 0.5% of NERC staff have declared a disability on the Oracle system.

4.12 The legal definition of disability,

‘The Equality Act 2010 defines a person as disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.’

makes it difficult to clearly identify the employed disabled population, other than by self declaration and includes a number of conditions, including mental health conditions, which may not lead an individual to declare themselves as disabled.

4.13 While there is a legal framework around the requirement to make reasonable adjustments for those with disabilities in the workplace, NERC has historically regarded “the workplace” as “the office” or “the

laboratory” rather than challenging itself harder to consider this to mean “the field”. This should be a challenge that we are prepared to face if we are to make changes in this area. Alongside this consideration, although the actions that NERC as an employer might take are necessarily individual-specific, there are organisational measures that NERC has also taken to support those with disabilities, such as:

- participation in the Two Ticks Scheme which guarantees an interview for an applicant with a disability who meets the minimum essential criteria for a post
- resilience programmes to support all employees in maintaining positive mental health (whether this is linked to a mental health issue which may be regarded as a disability or not)

Actions:

Aim	Target	Actions
To improve data collection so that NERC better understands its disabled workforce	For each Centre/Head Office to hold a dataset of disabled employees in which it has confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand what is needed to encourage disabled employees to declare their disability on the Oracle system and take appropriate actions
To match the number of disabled staff in the environmental research sector with that in the equivalent proportion of the workforce.	For each Centre to increase the proportion of its research workforce who declare a disability on the Oracle system by 1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the construction and “marketing” of their Employee Value Proposition (EVP), each Centre/NERC Head Office to promote an environment where disabled people would feel confident that they can work
To become recognised as an employer of choice for disabled people seeking employment	For each Centre / Head Office to ensure that it is able to make a range of reasonable adjustments to support the employment of disabled people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each Centre/Head Office to review its employment practice to ensure that it is inclusive in all of its working environments.

5.0 NERC as a decision maker

5.1 NERC has a number of decision-making and advisory Boards in place. NERC recognises that diversity in the membership of such decision-making and advisory Boards can enhance the decision-making process by ensuring that new and innovative approaches are explored and points of views from different perspectives considered. NERC has been successful in improving gender representation on its Council but analysis of the other governance boards suggests that the picture is more variable.

What is the current position?

5.2 Analysis of the membership of NERC's decision-making and advisory Boards (Annex C refers) suggests that gender and ethnicity representation is broadly in line with the environmental science population as a whole.

Gender

5.3 In 2014 NERC agreed a target of 50:50 gender representation on its Council. NERC took a number of steps in its Council member recruitment processes to seek to move towards this, for example, the new guidance to applicants emphasised BIS and NERC's commitment to diversity and equality; the cross-Council advert emphasised our commitment to diversity; advertising was targeted at a wide range of organisations and networks used by professional women; promising individuals were suggested by the executive/Chair and encouraged to apply.

5.4 As a result of this targeted approach, 32% of the 38 applications NERC received were from women (12/38). This compares favourably to 10% in 2013/14 (1 of 10 applicants) and 28% in 2012/13 (5 of 18). Of these, six women and nine men were interviewed; the women were proportionally more successful at interview, with three women and two men appointed. This brings the current gender balance of Council (excluding the Chief Executive and Chair) to 50-50 between women and men.

5.5 In applying these positive action techniques to Council recruitment, NERC has learned lessons in how to achieve better representation on its standing boards. Analysis of the gender representation of these boards, suggests that NERC would benefit from extending these approaches more widely.

5.6 NERC aspires to achieve 50:50 gender representation on all of its Boards and has set an interim target to be achieved by 2018

Ethnicity

5.7 HESA data suggests that the BAME research population is 3% and so NERC's representation levels on its decision-making and advisory boards are currently above that level.

Disability

5.8 NERC is not aware of any members of its decision making boards and advisory groups who are disabled.

Actions:

Aim	Target	Actions
To maintain the 50:50 gender representation on NERC Council	Maintenance of 50:50 gender representation on NERC Council (excluding the chair and CE)	To ensure that the successful positive action techniques used in the 2014 Council recruitment exercise are used in any future recruitment exercises
To increase the gender, ethnicity and disability composition of NERC decision-making and advisory Boards.	Minimum 33% female membership of decision-making and advisory bodies by 2018 and ensure proportionate ethnic minority membership.	Carry out the actions taken around Council member recruitment to seek to drive the changes/increases sought across all relevant NERC Boards (Annex C refers) in respect of gender, ethnicity and disability.
To ensure the future pipeline of potential Board and Advisory Group members is representative of the community as a whole	50:50 gender representation across all boards by 2020 and proportionate BAME membership	Actively identify and encourage future board members Provide opportunities to attend boards and advisory groups as an observer

6.0 NERC as a Funder

What is the current position?

6.1 NERC has reviewed its processes to ensure that funding awards are free from bias and support the diversity of the environmental science research population. This has included changes to studentship and fellowship processes to ensure that women are not disadvantaged due to maternity arrangements or time off looking after their families during their research careers. NERC collects, monitors and publishes data on grant applications and fellowships in order to ensure that it is able to understand the diversity of the research population we fund and the impact of this funding on the entry, progression and mobility within the environmental science research population.

6.2 NERC data on the success rates for research grants and fellowships is published on the [RCUK website](#). This data demonstrates that NERC processes are largely free from bias, and that it is the research population as a whole which is the limiting factor. While NERC must continue with its commitment to ensure that it has fair and transparent processes, it should also take steps to influence the population as a whole, whether this is through the leverage it has as a funder.

6.3 NERC has led on the roll-out of unconscious bias training to those individuals who have a decision making role which impacts on the environmental science community. This training was initially rolled out to the Research Councils' Individual Merit Promotion Panel and to the Peer Review College chairs. It has since been extended to NERC's own Merit Promotion Panel members and is now available as a Leadership for NERC skills module. As part of an RCUK initiative, unconscious bias training will soon be available for the wider NERC Peer Review College (who undertake reviews and sit on review panels) as well.

Actions:

Aim	Target	Actions
To understand the environmental science population	To achieve a profile of the environmental science population by gender, age, ethnicity and seniority in which NERC can have confidence	To carry out qualitative and quantitative research into the environmental science population as a whole.
To ensure that NERC peer review processes are free from bias	Review data on success rates for Research Grants and Fellowships to ensure that NERC processes are free from bias	Publish data on an annual basis on success rates for Research Grants and Fellowships.
Use NERC's influence to ensure that the selection process for PhD students is free from bias	Require CDT applications to provide information on how the institution will address this requirement for student selection	Publish data on PhD students. Include in the Announcement of Opportunity.
Ensure that the make-up of NERC panels is diverse to ensure that decision making is free from bias	Increase the diversity of the members of NERC panels in gender and ethnicity	Review the data to assess the diversity of NERC panel members Review the data for the current members of the NERC Peer Review College (PRC). Monitor data for those applying to join the PRC in the next recruitment exercise and ensure the recruitment and selection process is appropriate to increase diversity.
Use NERC's role to influence the environmental science population	Discuss the levers NERC can use in its role as a funder	NEB and NERC Council to analyse the options where it can exploit NERC funding as a lever for change in Research Organisations in 2016

ANNEX A

NERC is required under the terms of the Equality Act 2010 to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty. In summary, those subject to the equality duty must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

These are sometimes referred to as the three aims or arms of the general equality duty. The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

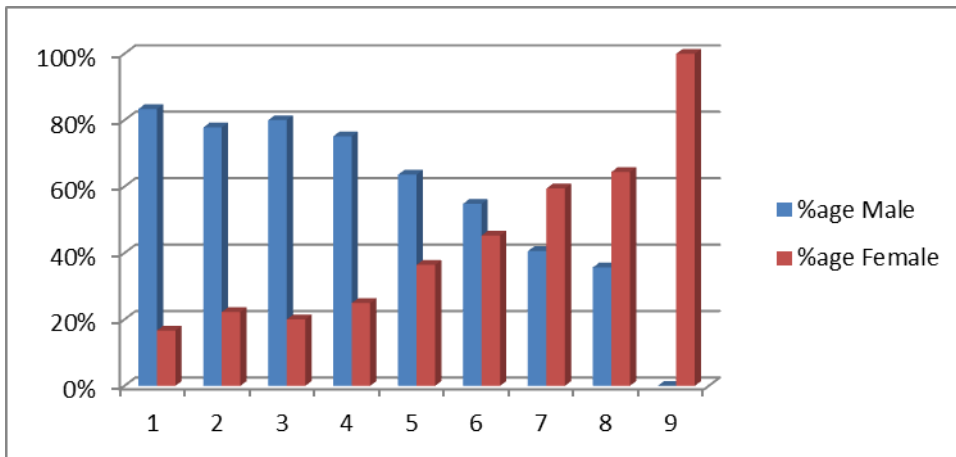
- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

The 2010 Act defines protected characteristics as:

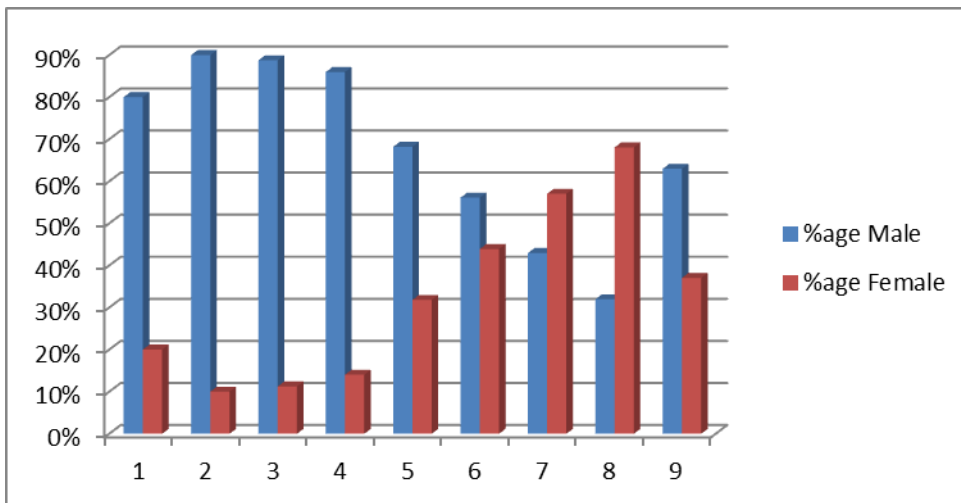
- Age
- Disability
- Maternity and Pregnancy
- Religion or Belief
- Race
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnerships

ANNEX B

NERC Employer Data – Gender vs Band by percentage of band 2015



NERC Employer Data – Gender vs Band by percentage of band 2010



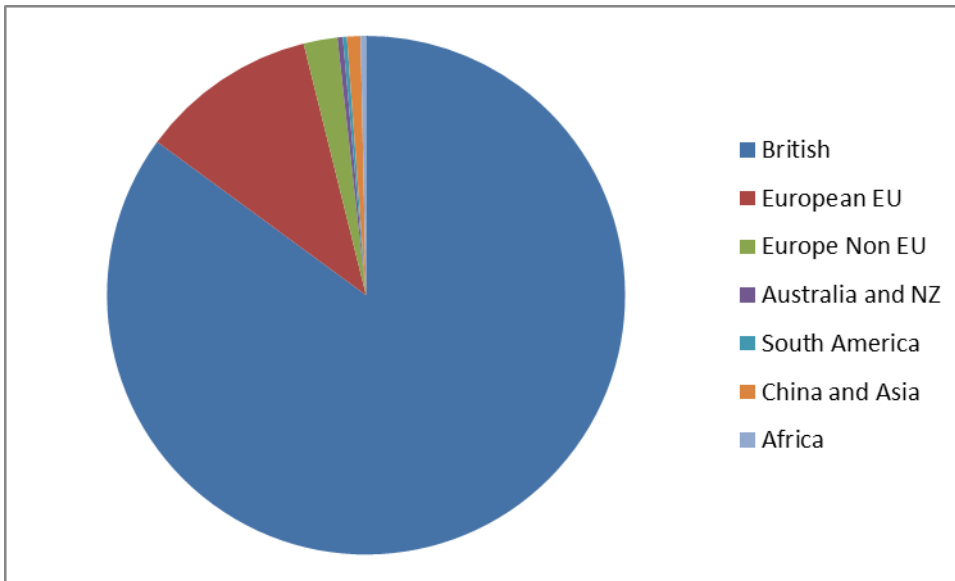
NERC Employer Data – ethnicity 2015

White British	1700	70%
BAME	54	2.2%
Other	212	8.8%
Withheld	448	18.6%

HESA Data for Earth Marine and Environmental Science 2012/13

White	88%
BAME	3%
Other	2%
Unknown	6%

NERC Employer data – by Nationality



ANNEX C**NERC Governance Boards and Advisory Groups by Gender and Ethnicity – September 2015**

SUMMARY	Gender		Ethnicity				Disability
	male	female	White British	white other	White and Asian	Asian or Asian British, other	
TOTAL - Chairs	6	1	6	1			0
TOTAL - members (excl. CEO)	44	23	56	6	2	3	0