

NERC Executive Board Team briefing

May 2010

Nominated Centre/Site Contact: <please insert name of person organising local briefings. This person may want to add further speaking notes about any local/centre/site implications of this briefing>

This briefing document is explained further at <http://net.nerc.ac.uk/business/nebteambrief/> Please return feedback using the attached feedback form.

Discussion issues:

Item 1: How can we improve the NEB Team Briefing?

Just over four years ago the NERC Executive Board (NEB) introduced the 'NEB Team Briefing'. Its purpose was to provide:

- a regular update to staff across NERC about policy, project and staff issues
- an opportunity for all staff to discuss issues that have broad implications across NERC
- a straight-forward way for staff to feed comments back to NEB on any issues, but especially those in the team briefing.

It was not intended to cover all of NEB's business but was to focus on a few issues that NEB thought were most important for people to know about and engage with – a mix of information points and issues for discussion. It was also an opportunity to raise issues you wanted to see in future NEB Team Briefings.

At a recent Leadership for NERC workshop, managers were considering whether the NEB Team Briefing was really working effectively across NERC and whether it was valued by staff. They decided it was best to ask you what you think.

Questions:

- Do you think the NEB Team Briefing is working in your area?
- How could it be improved?
- Are you getting the right information about the issues facing NERC?

Further Information:

Janice Timberlake, Director, People, Skills and Communications
jtim@nerc.ac.uk

Item 2: How is NERC preparing for the Spending Review?

The UK science budget is set every three years through the Government Spending Review. A review of public spending for the period 2011–14 will be launched soon after the general election.

We are working closely with RCUK and BIS to make the case for the science budget as a whole and for NERC environmental science. We have a compelling story to tell about pressing 'grand challenges' and opportunities, and how we will tackle them through partnership (eg *Living with Environmental Change* – LWEC).

We must convince a few key decision-makers – HM Treasury, ministers and BIS officers – of the value and impact of our science for future economic growth, for international leadership, and for wider societal benefit.

We collect evidence of NERC impacts through routine performance and reporting channels, and we have commissioned some case studies of economic impact.

As well as making a written case, RCUK and NERC is actively meeting and briefing key decision-makers (in BIS) and influencers such as MPs, special advisors and business leaders.

Council's approach is prudent and above all strategic. We are preparing scenarios for a range of outcomes, including the possibility of a reduced science budget. Planning decisions for 2011–14 will be guided first and foremost by Council's existing 10-year vision for NERC strategy and funding streams.

Questions:

- How can we all help to provide evidence, not just of scientific impact, but of wider economic and societal impact?
- How can we identify key influencers for the spending review, and work with them to promote the impact of RCUK and NERC science?

Further information:

Phil Heads, Acting Head of Strategic Management
phhe@nerc.ac.uk

Item 3: What is NERC doing to protect the reputation of climate scientists following the incident at UEA?

The theft of e-mails from UEA dented public trust in climate science. In response, we have been active in reiterating the strength of the scientific evidence for climate change and in supporting the scientists who are in the media spotlight on such issues. As a climate scientist himself, Alan Thorpe has been very closely involved in this activity. He wrote an article on the subject for *New Scientist* and has been quoted in support of climate science in several national papers. In November 2009, immediately prior to the Copenhagen summit, he signed a joint statement issued by NERC, The Met Office and The Royal Society, which set out the overwhelming scientific evidence for climate change. This received good media coverage.

Recognising the important role of the media, we have worked with the Science Media Centre in providing opportunities for journalists to interrogate senior climate scientists (Alan Thorpe included). A NERC-sponsored event on 'Climate science and the media' at the Science Media Centre in March attracted an audience of 200, from both science and the media. Attendees debated the issues arising from the UEA incident and explored ways scientists and journalists can work better together to inform the public about science.

We are also reviewing the ways we support scientists to work with the media. In addition to the existing course on Communicating Science to the Public, available to all NERC-funded researchers, we are considering a media and public engagement Fellowship scheme.

Questions:

- What do you think is the best way for NERC to tackle an attack on reputation such as this?

Further information:

Judy Parker, Head of Communications
jmp@nerc.ac.uk

Information Points

1. An update on the SSC

Our long journey towards the introduction of Shared Services is coming to an end. In early April, we started to receive finance and operational procurement services from the SSC. This has not been without some challenges, particularly in terms of access to the new system for some and building up familiarity with the new processes and ways of working, and these challenges will likely continue for some time yet.

In late April we started receiving HR services from the SSC, with payroll services due to come on stream in the summer and grants services in the autumn this year. Much work still needs to be done to ensure that these services are also introduced to NERC successfully, but once all of these services are up and running and providing the levels of service that we require, we are confident that the benefits anticipated from setting up the SSC will start to be realised.

Contacts for further information:

- Your local [transition manager](#) for any local SSC interaction issues
- Your SSC Project Board member:
 - John Murray at BGS
 - Ian Dunn at BAS
 - Brian Butler at CEH
 - Julie Ledder at NOC
 - Nigel Sully at Swindon

2. NERC response to the volcanic ash plume

The Icelandic volcano (Eyjafjallajökull) erupting provided a unique opportunity to carry out some valuable research whilst assisting the Met Office and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to obtain data on the ash plume over Britain.

NERC's Airborne Research & Survey Facility pulled out all the stops to get its Dornier 228 research aircraft ready to fly on day one of the national emergency (15 April). Within hours the Dornier was airborne, fitted with the necessary instrumentation to measure volcanic residues (such as sulphur dioxide and ash particles) and record data relating to the height, density and position of the plume. The data collected by the Dornier contributed in a major way to the agreement with the aviation industry on 20 April which allowed re-opening of UK airspace. A few days later the NERC/ Met Office BAe146 was able to join the research effort and the data provided by the two aircraft will help improve atmospheric models for future use.

Satellites and ground-based lidar and radar mapped the plume and sent data for analysis to NERC data centres and facilities, and to university-based researchers. Ash samples are being examined by a number of researchers, including some from the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology's Environmental Change Network.

Volcanologists from the British Geological Survey provided information to the Government and the CAA on volcanic behaviour and trends, whilst scientists from NERC's National Centre for Atmospheric Sciences advised on the atmospheric impacts. The National Oceanography Centre is investigating the impacts on marine biology.

NERC scientists have been appointed to scientific and operational advisory groups set up by the Government to deal with this and future environmental emergencies.

Please use this opportunity to discuss the implications of any of the above issues to your centre/site and to discuss any additional local Centre/Site issues.