



The one-hundred-and-eleventh meeting of the  
Joint Nature Conservation Committee to be held at 08.45 on 8th June 2017,  
at JNCC, Monkstone House, City Road, Peterborough, PE1 1JY

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## **Joint Nature Conservation Committee**

### **Strategic partnerships with the academic community**

**Paper by Helen Baker and Jason Weeks**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The JNCC strategic plan for 2017-20 states that we will build strategic partnerships with the research community in the UK and internationally. To achieve this, JNCC will:
  - i. use our strength of working at the interface of science and policy to increase the policy relevance of research and the value of natural environment research investments;
  - ii. enable staff to enhance professional development;
  - iii. collaborate with individual researchers and engage with research funding mechanisms, and seek to create partnerships that develop Centres of Excellence or Disciplinary Networks based on our strengths in nature conservation science;
  - iv. recognise the importance of interdisciplinary work with social and economic disciplines.
- 1.2 JNCC has a long record of working with academic research partners, but has never developed an overarching strategic purpose and approach to this. Strengthening academic partnerships will deliver benefits not currently fully realised by the organisation.
- 1.3 This paper establishes a framework to support achievement of JNCC's strategic outcomes, highlighting the desired benefits, types of partnership of interest, and the required internal governance approach.
- 1.4 Engagement in academic partnerships will allow JNCC to use a limited amount of grant in aid to best effect in acquiring relevant evidence, and, where appropriate, enable JNCC to attract income to fund staff participation in research.

#### **2. Reasons for developing a strategic approach to partnering with academia**

- 2.1 Long-term, strategic engagement with the UK, EU and international research community will lead to benefits by:
  - i. increasing the utility of research to JNCC, and our partners, through informing scope and outputs of both individual projects and programmes of activity;
  - ii. increasing the value of JNCC's small research investments through co-funded collaborations;
  - iii. supporting researchers, including students, in achieving excellence in research impact by aiding their understanding of the use of research in policy advice;

- iv. encouraging longer-term innovation and aiding communication of evidence certainty within the policy context;
- v. gaining access to public-private partnerships, which could lead to research opportunities with individual businesses (e.g. Knowledge Transfer Partnerships);
- vi. generating opportunities for staff to participate actively in research projects and activities, including gaining income to support that participation;
- vii. providing publishing opportunities for individuals and developing personal scientific profile;
- viii. raising the credibility and visibility of JNCC within the science community, with other stakeholders and with our customers; and
- ix. creating additional revenue/value through consulting or other opportunities that arise because of enhanced scientific profile.

## 2.2 Successful outcomes would include the following

- i. JNCC co-developing and co-delivering high-impact research projects with academic partners;
- ii. sustained partnerships with academics and other partner research organisations (e.g. Cambridge Conservation Initiative) built on a strategic programme of research projects that meet the evidence demands of JNCC and other government bodies;
- iii. externally funded involvement of JNCC staff in research projects and programmes, when appropriate;
- iv. JNCC being a founder member and funded delivery partner in a few relevant Centres of Excellence or high-impact Disciplinary Networks;
- v. JNCC staff leading or co-authoring scientific papers published in high-impact journals;
- vi. JNCC being a leader in high-impact science-policy advice; and
- vii. enhanced access to high-relevance evidence for JNCC and other government bodies.

## 3. Types and purposes of partnerships

- 3.1 Table 1 summarises the types of partnerships that might be available to JNCC, their purpose, and the benefits and risks of JNCC engaging in them. Some examples of existing JNCC activities are given in Annex 1.

**Table 1: Partnership options, benefits and risks**

Type	Purpose of JNCC involvement	Benefits to JNCC	Risks to JNCC
Impact support for individual academic projects	To assist researchers to develop and deliver research and communications relevant to non-academic stakeholders, such as policy-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence scope and outputs from research</li> <li>• Staff development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited actual engagement</li> <li>• Only T&amp;S costs typically available and so usually requires JNCC resources (staff time funded by GIA)</li> </ul>
Co-delivery of individual projects	To jointly deliver research and communications that have some relevance to JNCC's strategic aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence scope and outputs from research</li> <li>• Staff able to do science</li> <li>• Staff development</li> <li>• Science credibility leading to more opportunities to engage in new project</li> <li>• Potential for income to cover staff costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full cost recovery not possible unless participating as a sub-contractor</li> </ul>
Doctoral Training Programmes (DTP)/ Centres for Doctoral Training (CDT); hosting PhD or academics within JNCC	To assist development of stakeholder-relevant strategies for programmes, and assist post-graduate students and researchers to develop engagement skills and deliver stakeholder-relevant needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can influence scope and outputs from research</li> <li>• Can support training of early career researchers in engaging with policy-relevant evidence production</li> <li>• JNCC may co-host/ support a PhD or post-doctoral researcher through participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited actual engagement</li> <li>• Only T&amp;S costs available and so requires JNCC resources, including co-supervision when relevant (staff time funded by GIA)</li> </ul>
Impact support and co-delivery for serial projects and add-ons (a programme of research via e.g. a Memorandum of Agreement)	Combines purposes of impact support and co-delivery, but in a longer-term arrangement that can more effectively address JNCC's strategic evidence needs (could include links to Doctoral training)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong influence on scope and outputs from research</li> <li>• Longer-term, more strategic approach to evidence acquisition</li> <li>• Staff able to do science</li> <li>• Staff development</li> <li>• Science credibility leading to more opportunities to engage in new projects</li> <li>• Potential for income to cover staff costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence becomes weaker over time and outputs less relevant</li> <li>• Increased effort to initiate, with associated increased resource commitment, potentially giving lower ratio of cost recovery</li> <li>• Liability for continuation</li> </ul>
Centre of Excellence	To collaborate fully across leadership, development, co-delivery, communications and training on a strategic programme of research of significant relevance to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong influence on scope and outputs from research</li> <li>• Longer-term, more strategic approach to evidence acquisition</li> <li>• Staff able to do science</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence becomes weaker over time and outputs less relevant</li> <li>• Increased effort to initiate with associated increased resource</li> </ul>

Type	Purpose of JNCC involvement	Benefits to JNCC	Risks to JNCC
	JNCC's evidence needs, with one or more partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development</li> <li>• Science credibility leading to more opportunities to engage in new programmes</li> <li>• Potential for income to cover staff costs</li> <li>• Can support training of early career researchers in engaging with policy-relevant evidence production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• commitment, potentially giving lower ratio of cost recovery</li> <li>• Liability for continuation</li> </ul>
Multi or Inter Disciplinary Networks	To engage with a specialist network of potential partners, co-designing strategic research needs from which individual co-delivered projects or a programme of research could develop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence strategic scope of research</li> <li>• More access to research opportunities that derive from the network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No projects or projects of limited relevance emerge from the action</li> <li>• JNCC not invited to engage in opportunities that do arise</li> <li>• JNCC resources to engage in the network are not fully recovered</li> </ul>

## **4. Benefits to partners**

- 4.1. The benefits to research partners of the options in Table 1 could include one or more of the following:
- i. supporting achievement of societal impact, and specifically informing on scope and outputs of relevance to policy makers operating at UK and international levels;
  - ii. supporting the training of students, especially at the post-graduate level, and potential for staff exchanges;
  - iii. contributing the skills that JNCC staff have, including administrative, training, technical and scientific, and communications, as well as knowledge of policy requirements;
  - iv. attracting other partners with complementary skills, including other government agencies, non-UK academics, national and international NGOs, industry and businesses; and
  - v. co-funding of partnership development and bid resourcing, and research delivery and communication.

## **5. Governance and resources to support the development of strategic academic partnerships**

- 5.1. Support for impact delivery and other activities that have limited resource requirements will be decided at the team level, with involvement of the team or programme leader. For other activities, the formal JNCC bid process will be followed.
- 5.2. The bid process (available on the JNCC intranet) exists to provide a systematic approach to assessing and valuing new areas of work, especially linked to income. It is summarised in a flow chart and includes the following resources:
- i. Go/No-Go rapid assessment to test feasibility and match to JNCC priorities (as set out in the strategy and associated programme plans);
  - ii. Risk assessment;
  - iii. Financial cost calculator;
  - iv. Decision making process, based on delegated authority.
- 5.3. The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of staff is an integral part of the decision-making processes around strategic partnerships; a new approach to CPD will be implemented in 2017.

## Annex 1

### Examples of JNCC participation in academic partnerships

Type	Example
Impact support for individual academic projects	JNCC is currently engaged in several advisory groups.
Co-delivery of individual projects	<b>EO4Cultivar</b> . Funded through UK Space Agency, International Partnership Programme. Lead partner Environment Systems Ltd (private), academic partners Aberystwyth University, Open University and Edinburgh University, and industry partners. Delivering analysis-ready and value-added data to the South American agricultural supply chain and farmer advisory services. JNCC is a funded partner participating in Earth Observation, ecosystem services and sustainable livelihoods, and knowledge exchange activities. Total project fund £1,870,020; 2017-2020.
Doctoral Training Programmes (DTP)/ Centres for Doctoral Training (CDT); hosting PhD or academics within JNCC	<b>Adapting to the Challenges of a Changing Environment (ACCE)</b> . Partnership between the Universities of Sheffield, Liverpool and York, and the NERC's Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) providing doctoral training in the biological components of the natural environment and related disciplines. JNCC is a CASE partner, along with 27 other government, NGO and private partners.
Impact support and co-delivery for serial projects and add-ons (a programme of research, via e.g. a Memorandum of Agreement)	No current examples.
Centre of Excellence	<b>Earth Observation Centre of Excellence (EOCoE)</b> . Established by Defra in 2015, funded by government partnership. Partners include National Centre for Earth Observation (NERC) and Satellite Applications Catapult.
Multi or Inter Disciplinary Networks	<b>BiodivERsA 3</b> . The third phase of an EU project funded under Horizon 2020 with over 30 partners, primarily national research councils. The partnership began in 2005 and has funded over 40 ecological research projects through six consecutive programmes with a total fund of over €160M. JNCC's primary role has been impact support, leading an operational task and co-delivering others, and has received some income to support participation.