





# Announcement of Opportunity for the Soil Security research programme: Research Fellowship Awards

Call published: 16<sup>th</sup> September 2015

Closing date for full proposals: 16:00 GMT 3 December 2015

Please note that this Announcement of Opportunity is the basis on which proposals will be assessed.

# Summary

The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and the Scottish Government are inviting proposals for fellowship awards of up to three years duration, which will address the objectives of the Soil Security programme as stated in this document.

Funding of up to £2m (80% FEC) from NERC and the Scottish Government is available to support projects submitted to this call. It is anticipated that up to six fellowships may be supported, depending on the size and quality of the proposals received.

The application process for this opportunity consists of both a written proposal and an interview.

The Soil Security programme (SSP) is a NERC-led five-year research programme supported by NERC, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), Defra and the Scottish Government that aims to secure future soil quality to sustain ecosystems and the services they deliver to people – such as sustainable agriculture, flood and disease regulation, carbon storage and clean water. The Soil Security programme is aligned with the Global Food Security (GFS) Programme, and with both Scottish and UK Government policies in this area. The programme is administered by NERC on behalf of the funders, and supported by an external programme coordinator.

The overarching aim of the Soil Security programme is to advance understanding of the ability of soils to adapt to perturbations through an integrated and predictive understanding of the multiple functions of soil, and through which to deliver improved forecasts of the response of the soil system to changes in climate, vegetation or land management at scales of analysis which match the scale of decision making. Delivering this aim, NERC recognises the opportunity to train a new generation of scientists who have the skills and knowledge needed to take a more multi-disciplinary approach to the study of soil, embracing new techniques and approaches from the physical, chemical and biological sciences.

# **Background**

#### **Science Background**

Soil systems are a key component to the delivery of many ecosystem services upon which societies depend, including those that are crucial to food security, climate mitigation, water and nutrient cycling. They are highly complex systems that involve multiple physical, chemical, and biological processes; these interact to regulate the soil's functioning, and its ability to resist and recover from perturbations, such as drought.<sup>1</sup>

These controls on soil functioning, and their response to perturbations, are likely to vary across different spatial and temporal scales, <sup>2</sup> and across different soil conditions and land types; in other words they are highly scale and context dependent.

Soils are extremely heterogeneous and not all soils can fulfil the full spectrum of services required for the future of the UK, so there is a need to protect their multifunctional attributes in order to preserve national and international natural capital. Changes in the way we manage the land surface have resulted in widespread degradation of soils and their ability to deliver ecosystem services. For example, it has been estimated that currently 45% of European soils exhibit very low organic matter contents (0-2% organic C)<sup>3</sup> and degraded soils cover 15-17% of the world's land surface<sup>4</sup>. Once critical functions are lost they can be irrecoverable, potentially for millennia, representing a loss of resources that is potentially highly detrimental to the UK's national livelihood and well-being<sup>5</sup>.

Despite their importance to mankind, our understanding of what regulates the ability of soils to perform these multiple functions in different contexts and at different spatial scales, ranging from the soil profile to the Earth system scale, is very limited, as is our knowledge of the ability of different soils to adapt and respond to changes in climate and land use. This represents a significant gap in knowledge given the rapid rate at which soils are being degraded worldwide and the urgent need to inform policy makers and land managers on the sustainable management of soils.

The UK agri-tech strategy<sup>6</sup> recognises that soil degradation and biodiversity loss threatens food security. In England, the UK Government has committed to safeguarding soils' ability to provide essential ecosystem services and functions by ensuring that all soils are managed sustainably and degradation threats are tackled before 2030, through the 2011 Natural Environment White paper<sup>7</sup>. The Scottish Government (SG) published the Scottish Soils Framework in 2009 and a State of Scottish Soils report in March 2011. Scottish policy recognises soil as a valuable but vulnerable natural asset, which contributes vital economic and environmental functions and requires sustainable and effective management for the long term. As well as being important in their own right, an understanding of soil processes is essential to underpin policy areas ranging from food production, flood alleviation, water quality, greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity.

<sup>1</sup> De Vries, et al. (2012). Land use alters the resistance and resilience of soil food webs to drought. Nature Climate Change, 2, 276–280.

<sup>2</sup> Ettema, C. and D. A. Wardle. 2002. Spatial soil ecology. Trends in Ecology and Evolution, 17,177-183.

<sup>3</sup> Jones et al. 2012. State of Soil in Europe. JRC Reference Report 80pp.

<sup>4</sup> Staring Centrum Instituut voor Onderzoek van het Landelijk Gebied., Oldeman, L. R., United Nations Environment Programme. & International Soil Reference and Information Centre. (UNEP;ISRIC, Nairobi, Kenya, Wageningen, Netherlands, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Haygarth P.M., Ritz, K, 2009. The future of soils and land use in the UK: Soil systems for the provision of land-based ecosystem services. Land Use Policy 265, 187-197.

De Vries, et al. (2012). Land use alters the resistance and resilience of soil food webs to drought. Nature Climate Change, 2, 276-280..

<sup>4</sup> Ettema, C. and D. A. Wardle. 2002. Spatial soil ecology. Trends in Ecology and Evolution, 17, 177-183.

<sup>5</sup> Haygarth P.M., Ritz, K, 2009. The future of soils and land use in the UK: Soil systems for the provision of land-based ecosystem services. Land Use Policy 265, 187-197.

<sup>6</sup> www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/227259/9643-BIS-UK\_Agri\_Tech\_Strategy\_Accessible.pdf 7 http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf

This call is one of several activities supported by the programme, and part of a wider collaborative partnership on soil security developed under GFS, which includes other activities led by BBSRC and Defra.

### Supporting skills development

In 2014 NERC introduced a call for evidence<sup>8</sup> to identify and prioritise focused training needs in the UK environmental sciences, in order to inform NERC training investments, and in particular topic areas for future calls for NERC Centres for Doctoral Training (CDT). The output of this and a similar skills gap analysis by BBSRC was a NERC and BBSRC jointly supported Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) in soil science<sup>9</sup> to develop a new generation of research scientists skilled in soil systems.

To provide leadership for the next generation of soil research community, NERC is now looking to support the future leaders of the community to develop their research and leadership skills as they move through the early stages of their research careers. Soil Security Fellowships are early career fellowships and provide support for three years to provide successful fellows time to develop their research, start to build a research group and develop an international research profile.

# Fellowship requirements

#### Scientific scope

The key challenges are set out in the Soil Security programme <sup>10</sup> and associated Thematic Action Plan. Fellowships will complement and extend the programme, either building on the supported consortia research <sup>11</sup>, and / or developing new and novel directions within the scope of the programme, for example through:

- Informing on a suite of soil functions (excluding the protection of cultural heritage and archaeology and providing a platform for civil engineering) in an integrated and holistic manner
- Seeking to understand the ability of the soil system to resist and recover from perturbations, thereby defining the limits of their resilience to stress
- Undertaking research at a range of scales, both temporal and spatial (upscaling and downscaling modelling approaches) in order to deliver improved forecasts of soils' response to change, at the scale of decision making
- Using and/or developing appropriate novel tools and technologies
- Building on existing research and infrastructure.

Fellows can be from any discipline and, recognising this is how significant advances will be made, are encouraged to adopt approaches that are both novel and multi-disciplinary, encompassing ecology, biology, chemical and physical soil sciences to understand the functioning of soil. Approaches that are particularly encouraged include:

- Those with the physical sciences
- Incorporating modelling and the use of big data
- Recognising scales (both spatial and temporal) in functions

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/available/postgrad/focused/cdt/evidence/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> This was awarded to the STARS (Soils Training And Research Studentships) consortium led by Lancaster University.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/funded/programmes/soilsecurity/

<sup>11</sup> http://gotw.nerc.ac.uk/list them.asp?them=Soil+Security

 The adoption of new tools and technologies (e.g. EO, molecular, data visualisation, remote telemetry).

We would also accept proposals that draw on existing social science and economic research and that integrate such approaches into the proposal, for example, looking at an economic analysis of soil quality indicators; links between soil quality, health. Given the interests of the funding partners in this call, these elements should be a relatively minor part of the whole proposal.

#### Leadership skills

The Soil Security programme fellowships are intended to establish the future leaders of the UK soils community, enabling the development of their research and leadership skills as they move through the early stages of their careers. Future leaders are required increasingly to work at an interdisciplinary level, with the capability to produce high quality NERC research that integrates with that of other disciplines, to more effectively address challenges that require broader understanding to develop solutions. Applicants are therefore expected to demonstrate how they will fulfil this role, and demonstrate throughout their application their clear trajectory to becoming a world-class research leader. Leadership can be demonstrated in several ways including research approach, strategic vision, staff and community engagement, impact delivery and knowledge exchange.

Applicants will be expected to:

- Demonstrate their research vision and philosophy and outline ways in which their research could be developed over the three year fellowship
- Explain how they will contribute to the international research area and interact with the leading national and international groups in their field of research, and engage with different disciplinary approaches where relevant
- Explain how they will enable the potential economic or societal benefits of their research to be realised.

#### **Collaboration and integration**

The Soil Security programme is a group of collaborative researchers, within a wider community of soil researchers and programmes. Whilst fellows will be largely independent (in the spirit of the NERC Independent Research Fellowships for early career researchers), they are considered an integral part of the Soil Security programme and will be expected to work and interact significantly with the existing group of researchers and with the Programme Coordinator. This includes participating in workshops, working groups and other activities specifically organised by NERC or the Coordinator. Expenses to attend these meetings should be included in the application and would typically be two meetings per year.

Links with activities similar in scope and direction to the Soil Security programme are also encouraged, particularly where added-value can be demonstrated through complementary effort, data collection and analyses.

The Soil Security programme fellows will be recognised by NERC as part of its wider portfolio of Fellows. As such all Soil Security fellows may be invited to take part in any appropriate fellowship events occurring over the lifetime of their awards.

#### **Knowledge exchange and impact**

Excellence with impact is a central goal for NERC and all the Research Councils. NERC aims to deliver maximum economic and societal benefits from its investments, to support UK economic competitiveness, to make public services and policy more effective, and to improve people's health and wellbeing. To achieve this we need excellent impact activities, which anticipate and deliver the needs of the ultimate users of our science, whether they are in business, policy, the third-sector, the wider public or other groups. The Research Councils' policy is that grant applicants are responsible for considering how their research can achieve excellence with impact.

An understanding of soil function and response to perturbations has bearing on a range of environmental, economic and societal outcomes (e.g. agriculture, forestry, flood alleviation, water quality, greenhouse gas emissions etc). This programme, and the fellowships within it, is likely to generate significant interest from policy and industry audiences. Applicants should consider how they will engage these audiences and translate the outputs of their work to make it relevant to them, for example by informing new soil management interventions, or the development of metrics as indicators of soils functions and health.

Whilst NERC does not expect applicants to be able to predict the economic and societal impact of their research, NERC does expect applicants to have explored the following from the outset:

- Who could potentially benefit from the proposed research over different timescales?
- How might the potential beneficiaries benefit?
- What will be done during and after the project to increase the likelihood of the research reaching the identified beneficiaries and maximise the likelihood of the identified benefits being achieved?

Pathways to Impact activities do not have to be cost-incurring; it is not a requirement to include funded activities. However funds requested to carry out any proposed, outcome-driven activities identified within the Pathways to Impact statement must be fully justified within the Justification of Resources statement.

Pathways to Impact submissions will be assessed but they are not used in proposal ranking; however these fellowships will not be allowed to start without an acceptable Pathways to Impact statement. Applicants are advised to read the guidance on the NERC website for further information http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/howtoapply/pathwaystoimpact/.

Applicants should be aware that a programme-wide Impact Strategy plan will be developed by the Soils Coordinator; applicants will be expected to work with the Coordinator to maximise the impact of the programme as a whole.

#### **Data management**

NERC believes that data generated from the research it funds are a valuable long-term public-good resource. To ensure the data can be fully exploited in support of the activities that they were collected for, and to enable them to be available for effective, longer-term post-programme exploitation, it is NERC's policy that data must be managed effectively from the time of generation onwards. NERC grant-holders must offer to lodge a copy of the data resulting from the supported research with the relevant NERC Data Centre (in this case most likely the Environmental Information

Data Centre - EIDC) when it is completed, together with documentation/metadata describing these data.

Applicants are required to submit an outline data management plan as part of the case for support, to identify the data sets likely to be made available to NERC Data Centres for archiving and reuse at the end of the grant. Guidance on completing this is available at:

http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/data/dmp/

There will be no charge to the project for a NERC Data Centre to accept and manage the agreed data sets at the end of the grant. Any in-project data management activities should, however, be costed and clearly identified within the proposal.

There will be a programme-wide Data Management Plan developed, with which the projects will be expected to comply.

# **Application procedure**

#### Eligibility and funding

Funding of up to £2million (80% FEC) is available for awards of up to 3 years duration. It is expected up to six fellows will be funded from this call, depending on the size and quality of proposals.

The Soil Security programme fellowship call is open to applicants of any nationality and applicants do not currently need to be at a UK Research Organisation. The fellowship must, however, be hosted by a Research Organisation eligible to receive NERC managed mode funding, or from one of the Scottish Government Main Research Providers for rural affairs and the environment, which are not eligible for Research Council funding <sup>12</sup>.

The fellowship applicant is the Principal Investigator on the award. No co-investigators or studentships are allowed on the application.

Applicants should not have a permanent academic position (or equivalent in institutions other than universities). NERC staff in Bands 5 and 6 only can apply for a fellowship and if successful, would have to resign from their position in order to take up the fellowship.

Applicants must expect to submit their PhD thesis before the fellowship interview would take place March 2016. Awards are expected to be made in April 2016. Although the actual start date may be postponed by up to three months from the proposed start date shown on the award letter (the duration of the grant remaining unchanged), we would expect Fellows to be able to start by 1<sup>st</sup> August 2016 at the latest in order to ensure that the fellowship can be completed by the scheduled end-date for the programme. Fellows should discuss their circumstances with NERC if this is not likely to be possible. For applicants that have not yet been awarded their doctorate, they will need to provide proof within their application from their institution demonstrating their intention to award a PhD by the start date of the fellowship otherwise the offer may be withdrawn.

Applicants can have up to a maximum of eight years of full-time postdoctoral research experience from the PhD certificate date to the closing date of the fellowship competition. The eight-year

 $<sup>^{12}</sup>$  Biomathematics and Statistics Scotland ; The James Hutton Institute and the Moredun Research Institute .

window is based on full-time working. Where applicants have worked part-time or had research career breaks, the eight-year window would be extended accordingly. Further enquiries about eligibility should be directed to soils@nerc.ac.uk.

Further information can be found in NERC Research Grants and Fellowships Handbook, however applicants should note that in other aspects (e.g. award duration and scope) this guidance supersedes that in the Handbook.

#### **Submission of proposals**

Submission of proposals will be via RCUK's **Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S)**. <sup>13</sup> To use this system, the applicant's host Research Organisation must be registered as a Je-S user. Full details are available on the Je-S website. Further information can also be obtained by contacting the Je-S Helpdesk by email at <u>JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk</u> or by telephone on 01793 444164.

The submission route that your Fellowship proposal will take depends upon how the host Research Organisation has configured its submission process. If you are submitting a Fellowship through a host organisation that is not your own, you may wish to familiarise yourselves with its submission process.

You will of course be in discussion with the organisation where you wish to hold the Fellowship. As part of these discussions, you should ensure that it is content to submit the Fellowship Proposal on your behalf. Upon submitting the Fellowship Proposal to the Research Council, the Research Organisation submitter will be asked to confirm that it has verified your identity. It will also be advised to check the Head of Department statement to ensure that it has been completed by an appropriate person.

The call will use the 'Fellowship Proposal' proforma document, and be listed under Scheme 'Research Programme Fellowship' and Call 'Soil Security Fellowships 2015' and will utilise the standard Je-S pro forma.

Guidance on the application process, including details of eligible costs, is available in the Research Grants Handbook (http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/howtoapply/forms/). NERC's normal grant terms and conditions will apply as outlined in the handbook.

#### The closing date for proposals is 16:00 GMT, 3 December 2015.

Applicants should leave enough time for their proposal to pass through their organisation's Je-S submission route before this date. Any proposal that is received after the closing date, is incomplete, or does not meet the eligibility criteria of this call, will be returned to the applicant and will not be considered.

Please note that on submission to council ALL non PDF documents are converted to PDF, the use of non-standard fonts may result in errors or font conversion, which could affect the overall length of the document.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup>Grant applications must be submitted using the Research Councils' Joint electronic-Submission system (Je-S). To use this system, the applicant's research organisation must be Je-S registered, see <a href="http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/">http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/</a> for further details.

Additionally where non-standard fonts are present, and even if the converted PDF document may look unaffected in the Je-S System, when it is imported into the Research Councils Grants System some information may be removed. We therefore recommend that where a document contains any non-standard fonts (scientific notation, diagrams etc), the document should be converted to PDF prior to attaching it to the proposal.

All documents should be completed in single-spaced typescript of minimum font size 11 point Arial font or other sans serif typeface of equivalent size to Arial 11, with margins of at least 2 cm. References must now also be presented in minimum font size 11 point. Please note that Arial narrow and Calibri are not allowable font types as they are smaller and any proposal which has used either of these font types within their submission will be rejected. Applicants referring to websites should note that referees may choose not to use them.

Applicants should ensure that their proposal conforms to all eligibility and submission rules, otherwise their proposal may be rejected without peer review. More details on NERC's submission rules can be found in the <a href="NERC research grant and fellowships handbook">NERC research grant and fellowships handbook</a> and in the <a href="Submission rules">Submission rules</a> on the NERC website.

In addition to the standard Je-S pro forma, applicants will also be expected to provide the following documents:

#### 1. Case for Support (up to 8 sides A4) which is comprised of two parts:

#### a. A Previous Track Record (suggestion of up to 2 sides of A4) should

- Provide a summary of the results and conclusions of recent work in the technological/scientific area that is covered by the research proposal. Include reference to both NERC and non- NERC funded work. Details of any relevant past collaborative work with other beneficiaries should also be given.
- Indicate where your previous work has contributed to the UK's competitiveness or to improving the quality of life.
- Outline the specific expertise available for the research at the host organisation and that of any associated organisations and beneficiaries.

# b. A Description of the Proposed Project (suggestion of up to 6 sides of A4) including all necessary tables, figures and references) and should address the:

- Underlying rationale, scientific and technological issues to be addressed
- Specific objectives Methodology and approach
- Explanation of how the research will contribute to the Soil Security programme of research, and interact with the leading national and international groups in their field.

#### 2. Outline Data Management Plan (up to 1 side of A4).

The outline data management plan should identify data sets likely to be made available to NERC Environmental Data Centres for archiving and reuse at the end of the grant (guidance available on <a href="http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/data/dmp/">http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/data/dmp/</a>). Any costs associated with preparation of the data by the investigator's team should be included and clearly identifiable in the grant proposal. The Case for Support for successful proposals will be made available

to the appropriate NERC Environmental Data Centre, and where appropriate, used by them to draft, in collaboration with the PI (and consultation with the Programme Coordinator), a full Data Management Plan (DMP) within three months of the start date of the grant.

#### 3. Justification of Resources (up to 2 sides of A4).

This should include justification for all Directly Incurred Costs, Investigator effort, use of pool staff resources, any access to shared facilities and equipment (excluding HPC) being sought. No justification for Directly Allocated Estates and Indirect Costs is required. For HPC no cost estimates are required, but an estimate of the use of HECTOR in Million Allocation Units (MAUs) should be included an application must be attached when use of HECTOR exceeds 100MAU (in any one year).

#### 4. Pathways to Impact (up to 2 sides of A4).

This should include an outline of:

- Who could potentially benefit from the proposed research over different timescales?
- How might the potential beneficiaries benefit?
- What will be done during and after the project to increase the likelihood of the research reaching the identified beneficiaries and maximise the likelihood of the identified benefits being achieved?

Full details of the requirements for Pathways to Impact can be found on the NERC website<sup>14.</sup> The costs of knowledge exchange activities in the plan should be fully integrated into the proposal costings and justified in the Justification of Resources section. Additionally the Soil Security programme will also have an Impact/Knowledge Exchange strategy to which successful project impact plans will be expected to contribute.

#### 5. A CV of up to 2 sides of A4 for the fellowship applicant.

#### 6. List of publications

#### 7. Head of Department statement (up to 2 sides A4).

The Head of Department where the fellowship is to be based will be required to demonstrate:

- the availability of structured institutional support, including infrastructure and facilities, funds to support research, and access to PhD students; and
- support for personal development of the fellow, including mentoring, appropriate review and training courses.

#### 8. Letters of support (up to 2 sides A4 each);

For fellowship proposals, any significant collaborators (from outside the host Research Organisation) should be named in the Partnership Details section of the form and a letter of support should be attached from each person named in that section. Collaborators from the

 $<sup>^{14}\</sup> http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/howtoapply/pathwaystoimpact/$ 

host Research Organisation submitting the proposal should not be named in this section and should not provide a letter of support. Internal collaborators can be mentioned in the section on "Choice of Host Institution".

#### 9. Facility forms

PIs wishing to use a NERC facility will need to submit a mandatory 'technical assessment' with their proposal (including aircraft but excluding ships and HPC). For NERC, this means a quote for the work which the facility will provide. A full list of the Facilities requiring this quote can be found here: <a href="http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/facilities/apply/">http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/facilities/apply/</a> in the section 'NERC grant applications involving NERC facilities'.

#### 10. References

There is an option for the approver or submitter to include a **reference** for the applicant. This attachment is confidential and not viewable by the applicant

Please note that attachment types 'Other attachments' and 'Proposal cover letter' do not go out to reviewers and should not be used, except for internal documents for NERC (for example requesting in a cover letter not to use a certain reviewer).

The detailed research proposed (and costed) on the proposal should be manageable by the Fellow. Some fieldwork or technical assistance can be requested on Fellowship proposals, but the proposal must not include costs for a research assistant and should not assume access to PhD Students.

# **Assessment procedure**

To meet NERC's strategic objectives for the Soil Security programme, proposals will be subject to rigorous expert peer review. Applicants should note that the assessment process differs from that for the NERC Independent Research Fellowships. The following process will be used:

Fellowship applications will undergo a two-stage peer review process.

- All applications received will be assessed by independent experts through an external peer review process. An expert panel will then use these reviews to prioritise the applications and make recommendations on which should go forward to the next stage. Applicants will be notified whether or not their application will progress to the second stage of peer review and interview.
- 2. For applications put forward to the second stage the applicants will be invited to an interview panel, where they will have the opportunity to present their research proposal and discuss their research and professional development with the panel.

All Fellowship proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Suitability of Applicant
- Research Excellence
- Fit to Call

#### **Suitability of Applicant**

Applicants should demonstrate a thorough grasp of their discipline and considerable promise as an independent researcher. Fellows should display considerable initiative and demonstrate why they offer more potential than other postdocs in terms of future research careers. The panel must also be convinced that the applicant devised their own research plan. However, the panel should not necessarily expect pilot studies and preliminary results in support of the proposal. Applicants should:

- Demonstrate their research vision and philosophy and outline ways in which their research could be developed;
- Explain how they will contribute to the international research area and interact with the leading national and international groups in their field of research, and collaborate with different disciplinary approaches where appropriate;
- Explain how they will enable the potential economic and societal impact of their research to be realised.

#### **Research Excellence**

A proposal that demonstrates excellence can be characterised by terms such as: novel, ambitious, timely, exciting, at the international forefront, adventurous, elegant or transformative, but need not demonstrate all of them.

#### Fit to Call

Applicants should fully read this Announcement of Opportunity to ensure their proposal fits the call requirements and the scientific scope of the Soil Security programme.

Further information on assessment criteria can be found on the NERC website at http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/assessment/assesscriteria/

#### Pathways to Impact

Applicants are required to identify the potential societal and economic impact of their work and to outline the steps they can sensibly make to facilitate the realisation of this impact. Pathways to Impact are no longer scored by reviewers and are no longer used as a secondary criterion for ranking proposals. The interview panel will review, discuss and make recommendations to NERC on Pathways to Impact plans, and any proposals within the funding frame will **not** be allowed to start unless unacceptable Pathways to Impact plans are enhanced to an acceptable level within 2 months of notification of the panel outcome.

The interview panel will provide a ranked list of funding recommendations to the Programme Executive Board (PEB) based on the criteria outlined above and the potential for the projects to deliver a balanced portfolio to address the programme objectives. The PEB reserves the right to weight *Fit to Call criteria* appropriately to achieve the strategic aims of the programme.

# Reporting

In order for NERC to manage performance against its Strategic Objectives and Delivery Plan and report to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and NERC Council, NERC is

required to report regularly on the outputs and outcomes they have been commissioned to deliver. The Fellows will be required to submit the following:

- Regular reporting on the outputs, outcomes and impacts of the project using ResearchFish; and
- Additional reporting as required by the Programme Coordinator and/or funders, in order to
  enable the monitoring of progress against the programmes objectives, and meet funders own
  institutional reporting responsibilities.

## Call timetable

Announcement of opportunity published: 16<sup>th</sup> September 2015
Deadline for proposals: 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015
Interview Panel: March 2016 (tbc)
Grants awarded: April 2016 (tbc)

#### **Contacts**

#### **NERC:**

Vicky Fairweather

email: soils@nerc.ac.uk; Tel: 01793 411736

#### **Scottish Government:**

Liam Kelly

Email: Liam.Kelly@scotland.gsi.gov.uk; Tel: 0131 2442300

#### JeS Help

Further information on the Je-S system can be found on the Je-S website: <a href="https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk">https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk</a> or be obtained by contacting the Je-S Helpdesk by email at <a href="JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk">JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk</a> or by telephone on 01793 444164.