

NOC Association Steering Board

4th April 2016

Attending

Professor Jon Bull, University of Southampton
Professor Gideon Henderson, FRS, University of Oxford
Dr Mark James, Scottish Oceans Institute
Professor Steve de Mora, Plymouth Marine Laboratory
Professor Ed Hill OBE, National Oceanography Centre
Dr Hilary Kennedy, University of Bangor
Professor Tony Clare, University of Newcastle
Professor Peter Liss CBE, FRS (Chair), University of East Anglia
Professor Jon Sharples, University of Liverpool
Professor Andrew Watson FRS, University of Exeter

Jackie Pearson, NOC Association Secretariat

Apologies

Steve Hall, National Oceanography Centre (NOC)
Julie Pringle-Stewart, NOC
Professor Ian Wright, NOC

Item 1 Chairman's welcome and apologies

1. Peter Liss welcomed delegates. Apologies had been received from Steve Hall, Julie Pringle-Stewart and Professor Ian Wright. For this meeting, Professor Rachel Mills would be represented by Professor Jon Bull; Professor David Paterson would be represented by Dr Mark James.

Item 2 Actions 7th October 2015

2. Revisions to the minutes of May 15th had been made and the minutes posted onto the NOC Association web site.
 - 2.1 There was an action on Peter to write to Katherine Wright at NERC about Doctoral Training Programmes (DTP). This is covered in item 3.
 - 2.2 There had been a query about the terms of reference (ToR) for the NOC Association and a request for this to be included as an agenda item. In view of the pending changes to NOC, Peter decided, at this stage, to simply provide a paper for information on the ToR and a listing of current members.
- 3.9.1 Peter referred to membership. Hilary advised that she attends Board meetings as a representative of Bangor. Members of the Association are representatives of institutions whereas membership on the Steering Board is on an *ad hominen* basis. Paragraph 8 in the October 2015 meeting minutes needs to be revised. Peter asked about who should represent the *Challenger*

Society on Association meetings. The Secretariat was asked to check the roles of representatives on the current ToRs. **Action: Secretariat**

Item 3 Update on the Doctoral Training Programme (DTP) enquiry

- 3.1 Peter referred to the letter he had written to Katherine Wright at NERC about the DTP scheme. The drop in the number of marine-focused studentships in DTPs to 63 in 2015 is concerning.
- 3.2 Jon Bull queried whether the numbers were real or notional. If notional, we need to see the actual numbers for the last two years. He queried whether the drop could be linked to the fact that the new DTPs are broader than the previous scheme. Ed Hill advised the numbers do not include the figures for the Centre for Doctoral Training (CTD).
- 3.4 Peter said data is needed for another couple of years to determine the degree of impact, if any. Gideon Henderson suggested approaching institutes directly to see if there needs to be an increase in recruitment in marine subjects.
- 3.5 Peter reiterated that the situation is of concern; the marine community may not be alone in its concern. Mark suggested asking NERC to provide the detail behind the numbers so that the range of disciplines supported can be assessed.
- 3.6 Jon said that the Training Advisory Group (TAG) has done this type of analysis. TAG has just presented its review to NERC Council. The review had considered awards and their geographical distribution, however, it was too early to comment yet.
- 3.7 Gideon added that the DTP system is going under a mid-term review so this is a good time to consider disciplinary balance. Ed added that it may be that the categories, rather than total number of studentships, may have changed.
- 3.8 It is important to keep this issue under review. Mark suggested asking NERC to provide data about the type of work that is being funded. In two years' time, the Board needs to ask NERC to provide data on, for example, numbers of studentships with a classification for marine at 30%, then 60% etc. This issue is not limited to marine but concerns the balance across all the disciplines.
- 3.9 Peter decided to write to Dr Tearall at NERC explaining the concern of the Board about the balance across the disciplines and advised he would ask for detailed data. Mark added that this issue had been a problem for Scottish institutes and agreed to analyse the NERC data. **Action: Peter Liss/Mark James**

Item 4 Marine Science Coordination Committee Meeting

- 4.1 The MSCC has a new co-chair, Dr Gemma Harper, from Defra. Dr Harper is the new director for Marine and replaces Dr Terrence Illott. A key issue for the MSCC concerns how to sharpen its focus. There had been discussion about its future strategy and direction. A working group has been established to

refresh the marine science strategy. Business had not been strongly represented in the first version of the strategy. The meeting was again characterised by the absence of a number of key departments, including the Department for Environment and Climate (DECC). The MSCC agenda has become dominated by Defra and Marine Scotland so a refresh of the strategy may hopefully stimulate engagement from departments.

- 4.2 The MSCC is struggling to resource the Secretariat; Defra needs some contribution. Departments need to both resource the Secretariat and attend the meetings. Mark commented that not many researchers are aware of the role of the MSCC. Steve noted that this had been the best MSCC meeting he had attended. The MSCC has an identity crisis, however, and there is a need to ensure there is appropriate representation from departments. Stuart Rogers gave a presentation on the potential for change and this could set the tone for what is needed now.
- 4.3 Peter referred to the Inter-Alliance of Marine Science and Technology (IACMST), the forerunner to the MSCC. IACMST never had access to Ministers, however, the MSCC does have this option but does it use this? Steve advised the MSCC has reported at Ministerial level on only two occasions. This is an issue of which Gemma needs to be made aware.
- 4.4 There had been a concern that industry has not been sufficiently represented on the MSCC; also, that it has tried to cover too many areas. It is not possible for the MSCC to achieve all that is required of it with its limited budget. For now, it needs to focus on the areas where it can make a difference.

Item 5 Ownership and Governance Update

- 5.1 NERC has employed Richard Sigersky to manage this project which has been very helpful. Although NERC Council has approved exploration of the options for the preferred corporate form, there still needs to be engagement by BIS, for approvals on several issues. BIS have asked centres to prepare a business case but the process and timetable for approval has not been forthcoming. BIS has had several on-going issues including the election, the Spending and Nurse Reviews so there has been insufficient resource.
- 5.2 There had been a concern that was insufficient engagement with NERC, however, following Richard's appointment, a series of meetings are lined up to explore transition aspects and separation issues between NOC and NERC. There is also a sub group that will discuss risk and assurance so that NERC Council can give its approval to the next stage.
- 5.3 We need the right time table and level of engagement with BIS. Gateway Three is the next stage, scheduled for June 2016. NERC is making progress on the level of engagement and there will be a joint programme board with representatives from BIS Science, BIS Commercial and NERC. This will be set up with terms of reference as a body that will take ownership of this project.

- 5.4 NERC Council is conscious of the impact of this exercise, which has increased the work load for senior management teams at centres. The level of uncertainty is unhelpful.
- 5.5 Once further approvals are in place, the 'new NOC' will take effect from April 2017, although the time table may slip. Jon asked if all the NERC institutes were going through the process at the same pace. Ed advised that in general centres are, however, the pace of transition for BGS has been slower although they may pass through Gateway Two soon. At the moment, NOC and CEH are in the same position.
- 5.6 Peter spoke about the research councils with respect to the Nurse model. Ed commented that, rather than running institutes, the new Research Council will have the role of strategic oversight and engagement with the science community. The time line with the Nurse Review is long-term, up to 2018. If the issue is raised within the Queen's speech, this could come into being by April 2018.
- 5.7 Ed referred to the NOC Association. The proposal for the new NOC is a company limited by guarantee (CLG) with a board of trustees. The consensus was that the NOC Association should have 'observer status' on the Board. This would be preferable to a trusteeship which has constraints. An observer status would give the NOC Association more flexibility.
- 5.8 Peter mentioned the issue of resourcing for the NOC Association. Currently, the Secretariat is funded by NOC. He suggested that the Association could be configured on a subscription model. This would be possible provided members are prepared to pay. A subscription basis would attract a level of expectation from members. Mark said that a subscription basis would be unlikely to be cost effective, however, and that it would be simpler to have some clarification on how observers report.
- 5.9 Peter asked whether NERC will provide funding for the NOC Association, as it represents bodies that receive funding for NERC science. This would also give the Association some independence. Ed considered that although not out of the question, this idea is probably not be in line with NERC's plans. The Association is already funded via NERC. NERC would allocate the funding on the basis that it would still be able to monitor that the Association is being run well. Steve suggested that this could be stated in the business case – i.e. the fact that the NOC Association is set up by the wider NERC community to advise on equipment and facilities etc. This funding would be labelled as such in the revised NOC documents, however, we need to ensure that potential future directors of NOC do not have the option to stop running of the NOC Association. Peter and Ed agreed. Gideon commented that unlike the NHS where patients are using a service, with the Association, members are both collaborators and competitors. He asked about the NOC Association in relation to the government structure.
- 5.11 Ed noted that under ownership of NERC, the NOC role is clear. In an independent mode, there would need to be an assurance that NOC would not operate in its own interest - there is a lot of infrastructure and NC with which the wider academic community needs to interact. Gideon expressed a

concern about the possibility that NOC could change its provision of services in the future and asked how a NOC Association observer status would be able to do anything about this. Ed agreed that this underscores why this needs to be thought about in detail. This must be set out in the articles and funding contracts on delivery of services.

- 5.12 Gideon asked whether there was a need for a NOC Association and the Challenger Society? He queried whether there is a danger of fragmentation, however, Peter answered that this is why the Challenger Society is a member of the Association; also, the Challenger Society is more concerned with the science, whereas the NOC Association is more concerned with publicity and talking about what NERC is doing. This is where independence is important. The NOC Association has access to Jackie Pearson's time. There hasn't been a newsletter for a while due to over commitment and this needs to be resolved. **Action: Secretariat**
- 5.13 Gideon referred to an independent NOC and asked about the future role of the NOC Association and its distinction from the Challenger Society. Hilary explained that Challenger supports more, younger researchers. Andy commented that the NOC Association was instigated when NOCS and POL merged to become the NOC. The 'N' stands for national and we need to maintain dialogue with the community; it is better to keep the Challenger Society separate from the NOC Association. Jon commented that there are two tensions, one is the provision of service, the other is making sure that making sure that NOC collaborates across the UK and the marine science sector.
- 5.14 Peter noted that NOC is also a member of the NOC Association and that we should explore the option to link up with Challenger. Gideon explained that he has been influenced by what has happened in the geological society which had linked up with another group. There can be the danger that too many bodies may soften the voice. Peter explained that the forthcoming Association meeting is very different to what is happening in the Challenger Society - the NOC Association meeting is much more focused on NERC business. Hilary added that the Challenger Society did try and do, on odd years, special science meetings that involved graduate students but she considered that taking on another role would be difficult. Peter said that anything between the two organisations would be done on a joint basis.
- 5.15 Peter added that the NOC Association has a definite role to play to ensure that the ~ 40 bodies, in addition to NOC, have a voice. In the new arrangement, we do need more independence than we have now. We also need to ensure the resource is there. At this point, Ed agreed to create a position paper on this. **Action: Ed Hill**
- 5.16 Peter noted that the NOC ToR need to say that the NOC Association will have 'observer status' which will be a privileged position. Steve commented, however, that he felt that the NOC Association needs to be a member rather than an observer. A trustee status may not be sufficient as trustees must operate in the interests of the NOC. It was concluded that observer status would be most appropriate.

Item 6 The funding landscape

- 6.1 The Comprehensive Spending Review settlement is known. The baseline for NERC is flat cash in terms of the traditional science budget. Inflation protection may be achieved by the addition of ~ £1.5B Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding which will support overseas development. NERC has taken a 5-6% cash cut because some of the budget is needed for other infrastructure. The £1.5B is divided into two parts - the 'Global Challenges Fund' will be administered by DfID, BIS RCUK - it will feel as if another research council has been created. Funding will be open to competition and allocations will be made against it through the Global Challenges Fund. The ground rules aren't yet known; we also don't know the terms under which ODA funding will be distributed. For example, will it be distributed under the Science and Technology Act?
- 6.2 Part of the ODA funding has been allocated to the RC baseline ~ £8M in the first year which is funding inside the RC budget which will be distributed as development money. ODA funding may be used according to particular constraints: 1.) it is for overseas development. It relates to specific, named countries and must be of direct benefit to them. 2.) there must be demonstrable intent to show how funding will support overseas development, and there must be evidence of benefit.
- 6.3 Discovery science or large infrastructure will not be classifiable under the ODA umbrella. Much ODA activity will be concentrated within research programmes which will put a constraint on the spending of the science budget within NERC. This may have a distorting impact on the balance of funding in ODA countries compared to others. The ODA fund will help to protect the science budget and this will commence with the Global Challenges Fund from 2018. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development website lists those countries that may be awarded ODA funding.
- 6.4 Ed referred to the Sustainable Development Goal 14 which relates directly to the marine environment. He advised that there have been discussions about an Indian Ocean experiment, however, the Indian Ocean is a challenging area in which to work.
- 6.5 Ed then gave an update on the presentation on the G7 initiative that he gave at the MSCC meeting. The G7 science ministers met in Berlin in 2015 to consider the research needed to support the 'ocean agenda'. Issues discussed included marine litter and the environmental impacts of deep sea mining. Ministers decided that further cooperation would be needed in international science issues. Science Minister Jo Johnson said that the G7 needed to be more ambitious and that there is a need for a 'CERN of the ocean'. The UK would lead on creation of a paper as to what further cooperation might be undertaken. The G7 chairmanship passed to Japan, however, it was a British initiative to see what further needs to be done.
- 6.6 The UK offered to help contribute to an outline discussion paper on the 'CERN of the ocean' initiative which Sir Mark Walport then took to a meeting in India. The paper was well received and underpinned the decision for a workshop in March 2016. The four priority areas identified are:– the deep ocean,

biodiversity and ecosystem services, biogeochemical sampling of the ocean and seas, and sea-level. Meetings of senior officials and science ministers will take place in Japan in April/May 2016. (Hyperlink to **Ed Hill's presentation**)

6.7 Peter congratulated Ed on the presentation. Ed advised that UK Government is very interested in this initiative. Steve commented on the parallel to the Global Ocean Observing System and asked whether it might come under the umbrella of ODA funding? Ed answered that this may be possible for some elements. Steve suggested fisheries and also, the common heritage of deep sea mining.

7. Update on the compendium of capability

7.1 Jackie Pearson advised about progress and showed a paper indicating those institutes that had thus far managed to complete a return. Much work remains, however, and Jackie is scheduled to provide an update at the Annual Meeting that would give members and other marine representatives the opportunity to file their contributions.

Any other business

Staff news

Steve de Mora advised the Board that Professor Manuel Barrange is leaving PML end of May. Dr Icarus Allen will become PML's new Director of Science and Dr Jerry Blackford will become Director of Modelling.

Post meeting note: Professor Ian Wright is leaving NOC in the autumn to take up a new post in New Zealand.

Date of next meeting

It was agreed to hold the next meeting on November 8th 2016 and Gideon suggested holding the meeting in Oxford, start time 1400 hrs. **Action: Gideon/Secretariat**

Summary of actions

1. Check the roles of representatives on the current ToRs. **Action: Secretariat**
2. Letter to NERC about balance of disciplinary balance; request for data and data to be analysed. **Action: Peter Liss/Mark James**
3. Resume circulation of the Association newsletter. **Action: Secretariat**
4. Creation of position paper on the NOC Association within the landscape of the new NOC. **Action: Ed Hill**
5. Next meeting to be arranged for 8th November. **Action: Gideon Henderson, Secretariat**