



Terms of Reference

Social Science Expert Panel (SSEP) of the Natural England Scientific Advisory Committee (NESAC)

Purpose

SSEP provides high-quality, independent social science advice, challenge and review to Natural England and works to strengthen its relationship with the wider social science community.

Embedding and integrating social science expertise and ways of thinking across Natural England's evidence work is a significant challenge but also a necessity. This NESAC panel is being established in recognition of this and so that it can lend support to NESAC and all of Natural England in ensuring we are making best use of the available evidence to help us deliver across our six commissioning programmes.

Social science covers a diversity of disciplines and worldviews and should not be regarded as separate to the other types of science brought to NESAC. Our ultimate aim is to integrate social sciences more fully within NESAC. However, there is a need to expand and accelerate the use of the diversity of social science across Natural England before this integration can take place, which is why there is a need for this panel.

Key Responsibilities

SSEP will:

- Provide **advice and steer** to NESAC and hence to the Natural England Board on the social science aspects related to the coherence, integrity and relevance of Natural England's science, evidence and evaluation strategy; our overall science and evidence programme; our research and monitoring programmes; our plans for particular pieces of work in novel or contested areas of social and interdisciplinary science; our work with diverse communities; and, quality-assuring social science products with advice and support during design, specification and reporting.
- Provide **challenge** on the rationale and methods for proposed studies and to the emerging findings of specific pieces of research. Along with challenge to organisational ways of thinking on issues, including introducing and magnifying marginalised voices.
- Provide post hoc analysis and comment, on the effectiveness of methodologies and approaches we have applied.

- Provide **assurance** that internal peer review and external quality-assurance processes adopted for social science are appropriate and robust.
- Identify suitably qualified reviewers that might be approached to undertake external quality assurance or peer review of social science.
- Provide a strategic external perspective to support Natural England's futures and horizon scanning work.
- **Champion** Natural England's social science work and promote inter-disciplinarity: helping to ensure that social science has a strong and persuasive voice and helping to demonstrate the value of social science within Natural England and more widely through forging links and partnerships with the wider social scientific and interdisciplinary community.
- Develop a strategy in the initial stages of the panel to map how it will ultimately be integrated into NESAC (task and finish).
- Provide access to a wider range of social science disciplines within Natural England.
- Help to ensure that all Natural England's six commissioned programmes have appropriate and sufficient social science input and expertise to support setting, shaping and implementation of their aims and ambitions through challenge, steer and innovation. Identify short and longer-term research needs including broad evidence gaps in addressing policy priorities, to help identify the highest priority social research, and help to ensure that social scientist involvement across the programmes is not only reactive but also strategic.
- Provide new and diverse ways of thinking about Natural England's role and purpose; using evidence to support setting, shaping and implementation of the organisation's aims and ambitions.
- Commit to individual and joint learning about the organisation (so to better understand the context into which ideas are introduced).
- The impact of SSEP will be assessed against the remit above and members will report activities undertaken including the outcomes of the work. A short report will be submitted to NESAC on an annual basis to demonstrate the impact of the group and of social science in Natural England.
- Panel members may be asked to participate in research undertaken by Natural England social scientists related to organisational learning about social science.

SSEP as a panel of NESAC may occasionally be asked to provide advice on issues relating to the natural environment across government, reflecting Natural England's role as the government's statutory adviser on the natural environment in England.

Membership

Membership will comprise of the following:

- Between one and two nominated members from NESAC, one of whom will act as SSEP Chair.
- At least six independent external members, judged by the representatives of the Board to offer appropriate expertise. Recruited by an open process.
- Invited/co-opted members recruited on a time-limited basis to offer expertise on a specific subject.

- Natural England Chief Scientist
- Principal Specialist – People and Nature

Chief Scientist's Directorate Directors, Deputy Chief Scientists and representatives from Natural England's Social Science Team may also attend SSEP.

The Chair and nominated NESAC Members will be expected to serve for a formal term of two years, with review after that time in line with the ambition to merge SSEP into NESAC. Independent members will be selected to reflect the range of expertise required to deliver Natural England's purpose. These members will be expected to serve for a formal term of two years, with review after that time in line with the ambition to merge SSEP into NESAC.

The Chair, Chief Scientist, Principal Specialist and secretariat will review the membership annually to ensure continuity and fresh perspectives are provided and that the breadth, depth and balance of expertise is sufficient to perform the role of the Committee. SSEP will aim to maintain expertise across a wide breadth of specialist areas, which will be kept open and under review, reflecting NE's needs and the SSEP's advice.

Meetings

- Meetings will be approximately 2 hours in duration and held 3 times per year with dates for the following year being agreed by the previous July. One of these meetings will be common with NESAC.
- Meetings will be digital and will consider any member access issues.
- Meetings will be organised in a way that ensures SSEP provides a good balance of advice, challenge and review across the course of the year.
- Meetings will typically consider 2-3 substantive papers agreed in advance by the Chair, Chief Scientist, Principal Specialist and Secretariat.
- The Chair will report via NESAC to the full NE Board regarding outcomes of the discussions.
- Secretariat will be provided through Chief Scientist's Directorate with support from Board Services.

Anticipated Activities and Ways of Working

It is envisaged that the panel may contribute in the following ways but not exclusively:

- i. Attending 3 full-day digital meetings per year, including preparation beforehand which may include gathering views of others on certain issues.
- ii. On a voluntary basis, quality assuring highly significant or sensitive social science outputs including commenting on, or peer reviewing research proposals and specifications; research designs; research outputs; multidisciplinary evidence reviews.
- iii. On a voluntary basis, undertake short 'think-piece' type outputs or brief analysis that may align with work already or currently underway (either independently or as part of a small group)
- iv. On a voluntary basis, participating in seminars/briefings with Natural England colleagues as relates to members' specialisms.

Papers brought to meetings may be commissioned by:

- i. SSEP itself.
- ii. Requests from NESAC (or the Board via NESAC) to scrutinise the evidence underpinning key work areas or decisions.
- iii. Topics proposed by NESAC Chair and Members, Natural England's Chief Scientist or Natural England officers.
- iv. An outline future programme will be maintained by the secretariat and reviewed by SSEP at least annually.
- v. Secretariat will submit detailed agendas to be agreed between Chief Scientist and SSEP Chair one month in advance.
- vi. Secretariat will submit papers to SSEP Chair for quality assurance 12 days before the meeting and will circulate finalised copy to SSEP members at least 7 days before the meeting.
- vii. Any time extensions to be approved in advance by the Chair.

Actions/notes:

- i. Any direct actions will be circulated within 48 hours of meeting to members of group/authors.
- ii. Draft notes and confirmed actions will be circulated within 72 hours of meeting.
- iii. A full report will be produced for the next NESAC meeting and circulated with papers for the following SSEP meeting.
- iv. SSEP Papers will be loaded on TRIM and made available within Natural England via Sharepoint Online.
- v. A communication note will be produced for wider internal/external circulation.

Code of Conduct

Members of the SSEP must observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the advice they provide.

Claiming travel and subsistence expenses

Travel and subsistence expenses are expected to be negligible as this is a digital panel. These posts are not salaried but Natural England will consider reimbursement. Any queries regarding claims should be referred to the Secretariat.

Changes to these terms

These terms of reference may be amended at any time in consultation with NESAC and SSEP chair and members. The final decision on the changes to the terms lies with Natural England.

Annex 1: Schedule of Current Members

Member's Name	Role	Institution
Prof Michael Winter	NESAC Nominee - Chair	University of Exeter
Dr Tim Hill	Chief Scientist	Natural England
Gary Kass	Deputy Chief Scientist	Natural England
Dr Rose O'Neill	Principal Specialist	Natural England
Dr Beth Brockett	Senior Specialist	Natural England

Annex 2: Version Control Table

Version Control Table			
File name:		Version Number:	V1.0
Approved by (name, title):		Approval Date:	
Summary of key changes			
File name:		Version Number:	V2.0
Approved by (name, title):		Approval Date:	
Summary of key changes			
File name:		Version Number:	
Approved by (name, title):		Approval Date:	
Summary of key changes			