



## **NatureScot**

### **SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

#### **DISCUSSION PAPER**

#### **Science leadership in NatureScot – proposed improvement programme**

##### **Purpose**

1. The paper seeks views on developing science capacity and leadership in NatureScot.

##### **Action**

2. **The Committee is asked for views on developing science leadership in NatureScot, noting the proposals set out.**

##### **Preparation**

3. The paper was prepared by Eileen Stuart, Sarah Hutcheon and Des Thompson.

##### **Background**

4. The creation of NatureScot provided an opportunity to refresh our purpose and goal, which is now described as:

*NatureScot is Scotland's nature agency with 30 years' experience advising the Scottish Government. We work to enhance our natural environment and inspire the people of Scotland to care more about it. We will be indispensable to Scotland's 'green recovery' from Covid-19, stimulating a revival that secures resilience through a nature-rich future for Scotland and an effective response to the climate emergency. This means that by 2030, Scotland will be recognised as a world leader in looking after and enhancing nature.*

*NatureScot believes that a nature-rich future, where everyone is involved, will make us all happier, healthier, wealthier and more equal. That means that as Scotland recovers from Covid-19, our natural world will be at the heart of the nation's well-being. NatureScot will focus on connecting people and nature to tackle the climate emergency and biodiversity loss through large and small*

*scale nature based solutions. **Working in partnership, these solutions must be bold, innovative, for everyone, built on sound science, entirely ethical and drivers of green economic growth.***

5. In order to achieve this goal we need a science capability that can support all aspects of our work, as well as reinforcing our reputation as an organisation with high quality evidence and science underpinning our advice and influencing work. We believe this requires a sustained programme to develop our science leadership potential. The Committee has previously considered core scientific strategic issues ([SAC/2017/03/03](#), [SAC/2018/03/03](#)) giving rise to a refreshed approach to our strategic evidence base ([SAC/2018/09/01](#), [SAC/2019/03/01](#)) and publication of NatureScot's [Strategic Evidence Needs](#)

### Science Leadership

6. First we need to define what we mean by science leadership in NatureScot. It emerges from **high quality science** which probes and informs research areas necessary for us to achieve our core purpose. This science needs to be **developed and communicated** in a way that enables us to effectively support external debate. It needs to be respected, and proven to have influenced change in policy development and implementation, and good practice.
7. We have benefitted considerably from the work of the Committee in supporting our strategic science efforts – helping devise strategic evidence needs, quality assuring reports, sustaining inputs to PhD and Masters training, running public events, and developing of much of our work through the work of sub-groups and ensuing implementation.
8. We believe science leadership will be emerge from two key outcomes:
  - An enhanced reputation for NatureScot as a leading generator and user of good quality science which reinforces our brand identity; and
  - Improved mechanisms to develop the science leadership skills and capabilities of NatureScot staff.
9. The first outcome focuses on our external activity and the second is the underpinning internal development work, which will require wider engagement and support from the SAC, SG and other partners.

**The Committee is asked for views on these two outcomes in encapsulating good science leadership for NatureScot.**

10. We propose the following areas of work to meet each outcome.

**Outcome 1: an enhanced reputation as leading generator and user of good quality science**

- Refreshed approach to communicating research outputs to enhance our influencing impact – this could include a range of new standard products (accessible research summaries; annual research reviews; authoritative hot topic reviews/syntheses – aka SPICE briefings). This would build on the success of our quarterly [Science Newsletters](#).
- Enhanced communication training for a cohort of our science communicators.
- Identifying high profile opportunities for promoting our science/scientists work (conferences/blogs etc), building on e.g. annual Scottish Ecology, Environment and Conservation Conferences for undergraduate and postgraduate research ([2020 plans](#) cancelled due to COVID-19).

### **Outcome 2: developing our scientists to develop skills and enhance their reach and reputation**

- Develop formal and informal CPD programmes, which are built around support for publication of papers and ensuring expertise remains current.
- Mentoring by Committee members and academics.
- Developing lecturing opportunities and broadening links with key postgraduate courses.
- Refreshing our graduate trainee approach, by moving to two year appointments to enable greater experience and skill development.
- Reviewing CPD approaches elsewhere (e.g. in [RESAS](#), [Marine Scotland science](#), [SEFARI](#)) and range of activity earning credits, and how this is monitored/managed.

**The Committee is asked to comment on these ideas and to identify other areas we should explore, drawing on experiences elsewhere.**

### **Development approaches**

11. We envisage this developing into a long-term development programme and are keen to engage with scientists – natural and social – across NatureScot to help shape the programme and ensure uptake and involvement. We are proposing to establish an ‘Action Learning Set’ (ALS are small groups who come together to address challenging and complex issues, by meeting on a regular basis and working together to explore and resolve an issue), which we have found helpful in teasing out organisational development challenges.
12. Finally, we are keen to demonstrate some early outputs from this programme and would welcome Committee members’ thoughts on any early actions or opportunities we could explore to kick start this work and demonstrate early progress.

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