

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of reference of the JNCC Chief Scientists Group

The Chief Scientists Group (CSG) advances natureⁱ conservation and recovery through better coordinating the generation and use of science and evidence across the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies (SNCBs). Terms of Reference were approved by the Joint Committee on 17 November 2025.

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of the CSG is to advance nature conservation and recovery through better coordinating the generation and use of science and evidence across the SNCBs. 'Science' includes the natural sciences and the social / behavioural sciences. Specifically, the CSG supports the delivery of evidence to UK and devolved governments to inform policy and practice relating to nature conservation and recovery through: a) sharing scientific expertise and knowledge; b) agreeing common standards for biodiversity and geodiversity monitoring, data management and reporting; c) coordinating reporting into relevant international conventions across the countries; d) identifying and exploring joined up solutions to the twin challenge of tackling climate change and biodiversity loss; e) identifying and capitalizing on opportunities related to emerging technology and external partnerships; f) providing peer review of joint work and agreeing common messages when appropriate; and (g) stimulating and enabling conditions that maximise the impact of evidence on policy and practice.

2. Authority

- 2.1 The CSG is a sub-committee of the Joint Committee, from which it derives its authority and to which it regularly reports.
- 2.2 The CSG has delegated authority from the Joint Committee in respect of the functions and powers set out in these Terms of Reference.
- 2.3 The CSG has authority to investigate any matter within its Terms of Reference.

3. Role

- 3.1 Specifically, the role of the CSG is to:
 - a) Share scientific expertise and knowledge across country conservation bodies. This involves identifying strategic priorities where collaborative working is required to make the best possible use of available resources and avoid duplication.
 - b) Agree common standards for biodiversity and geodiversity monitoring, data management standards, and common approaches to reporting, to maximize the value of datasets to all users.
 - c) Coordinate reporting into the relevant international conventions across the countries. Countries have their own policies and priorities but monitoring of biodiversity, geodiversity, ecosystem services and conservation responses

need coordination at the UK level to maximize the value of the data, including ensuring it feeds into management decisions.

- d) Identify and explore joined up solutions to the twin challenge of tackling climate change and nature loss, working with the Climate Change Committee where appropriate. Climate change and nature loss are inherently intertwined: climate change exacerbates nature loss, and nature loss exacerbates climate change. Science is needed to both inform and evaluate nature-based solutions (to climate change and other challenges including pollution).
- e) Identify and capitalize on opportunities related to emerging technology and external partnerships. The CSG will network with relevant groups and leverage expertise and resources to advance the mission of the JNCC and country agencies.
- f) Provide science quality assurance through peer review of joint work and develop, agree and promote common messages when appropriate.
- g) To stimulate and enable conditions that maximise the impact of evidence on policy and practice.

4. Membership and Attendance

- 4.1 Membership comprises the chief scientists and one other from each of the five SNCBs plus one member of the Joint Committee. Secretariat support is provided by the JNCC.
- 4.2 The CSG will be co-chaired by a suitably qualified and experienced independent member of the Joint Committee, appointed by the Joint Committee, and the Chief Scientist of the JNCC. In the event that neither Co-Chair is present, the members may appoint any member to be a 'substitute Chair' for that particular meeting.
- 4.3 The CSG should corporately own an appropriate skill mix to allow it to carry out its overall function. Members of the CSG should be experienced scientists with the appropriate range of skills to discharge their duties in an effective and efficient way and should have a good understanding of the objectives and priorities of the SNCBs.
- 4.4 Joint Committee members or members of the scientific advisory committees of the SNCBs can be co-opted onto the CSG (as agreed between the Joint Committee Chair and the CSG Co-chairs) to help fulfil the duties and obligations of the CSG as the need arises.
- 4.5 Joint Committee members or members of the scientific advisory committees of the SNCBs as well as staff of the SNCBs may attend at the invitation of the CSG Co-Chairs, and they may collectively or individually be requested to withdraw from meetings if required to do so by the Co-Chairs.

5. Independence, objectivity and conflicts of interest

- 5.1 CSG members must abide by the Nolan principles.

5.2 A member or attendee who becomes aware of a potential conflict of interest relating to matters to be discussed by the CSG should give prior notification to the Co-Chairs or Secretariat. If the conflict only becomes apparent at the meeting, they should declare this at the meeting and, where necessary, withdraw during discussion of the relevant agenda item. Declarations of interest will be a standing item.

6. Meetings

6.1 The CSG normally meets in person three times a year on a rotational basis among the four countries. The sub-committee will also hold virtual meetings as required to undertake other work intersessionally by whatever means is most efficient.

6.2 The CSG will be provided with a secretariat function by the JNCC Chief Scientist Directorate. The sub-committee Secretary will record the meeting and decisions of the sub-committee and minutes will be prepared within 10 working days of the meeting and presented to the Co-Chairs for comments. Sub-committee members will then be circulated the minutes for comment. Draft minutes, agreed by the Co-Chairs and commented on by members, may be shared with the Joint Committee in draft. Minutes of the previous meeting will be formally adopted at the next meeting.

6.3 A forward programme will be prepared and reviewed at each meeting. Members may propose amendments or additional discussion items. Before each meeting the Co-Chairs will agree an agenda that addresses strategic and relevant time sensitive issues.

6.4 Papers will be the responsibility of the Chief Scientist leading on the item and will be provided to the Secretariat for circulation normally at least two weeks before meetings except in the case of urgent business. Papers will normally be available to sub-committee members no later than seven working days ahead of the scheduled meeting.

6.5 A meeting of the CSG will be deemed quorate if six members, with at least one representing each SNCB, are present.

6.6 The CSG works primarily at the strategic level and may delegate detailed work to Interagency Working Groups (IAGs). Where the CSG commissions work from one of these groups, there will be clear reporting to the CSG. Interagency Working Groups can escalate issues to CSG according to their remit. Any issues or irreconcilable differences will be referred to the CSG for advice and decision.

7. Reporting and Communications

7.1 The Co-Chairs of the CSG will report on its work to the Joint Committee following each meeting and confirmed minutes of CSG meetings will be shared with the Joint Committee.

7.2 The CSG will liaise with the JNCC Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee (ARAC) over matters of risk related to science, data or evidence. ARAC may, in its deliberations, identify an aspect of risk that it feels is more appropriate for the CSG to explore in depth.

8. Review of Effectiveness

8.1 The Joint Committee will review the effectiveness of CSG every two years, based on an assessment prepared by the committee, considering best practice in corporate governance, and recommend any changes to the Terms of Reference to facilitate the effective and efficient conduct of its business. Any changes to the Terms of Reference will be agreed by the Joint Committee.

¹ ‘Nature includes biodiversity, geodiversity and the natural elements of our landscapes and seascapes. It encompasses all the underpinning features and forces that have continued since the Earth was formed from summit to seabed including rocks, landforms, soils and processes like weather systems’; and its accompanying shorter form: ‘Nature includes biodiversity, geodiversity and the natural elements of our landscapes and seascapes’.