



Press release: 00:01, Monday 9 June 2014

ESRC launches *The Nexus Network* to foster new connections across food, energy, water and the environment

In the past five years, there has been a surge of interest in the idea of the 'nexus', as a way of thinking about the interdependencies, tensions and trade-offs between food, water and energy security, in the broader context of environmental change. These systems are inextricably linked, and integrated approaches are required, which move beyond sectoral, policy and disciplinary silos.

To better coordinate UK research efforts in this area, the ESRC is launching ***The Nexus Network***. The ESRC has committed **£1.8 million of funding** to *The Nexus Network* over the next three years. It will be led by the **University of Sussex**, in partnership with the **University of East Anglia** and the **Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership**.

The Nexus Network will foster debate, innovative research and practical collaborations across the linked domains of food, energy, water and the environment. **Participation in the network is open** to researchers from all disciplines, and to decision makers in government, business and civil society.

The core aims of *The Nexus Network* are:

- *To encourage debate, fund innovative research and improve decision making across the linked 'nexus challenges' of food, energy, water and the environment;*
- *To support interdisciplinary, cross-sector collaborations between social and natural scientists working on nexus topics, and between academic researchers and those in government, business and civil society engaged in these debates;*
- *To enable researchers and stakeholders in business, policy and civil society to develop and share new methodologies, data, conceptual frameworks, skills and practices directed towards nexus challenges.*

The Nexus Network is the first in a **linked series of ESRC investments**, the second being a 'sustainable prosperity' steer in this year's ESRC Centres and Large Grants Call. It is ESRC's vision that as *The Nexus Network* grows, it will work with this community to scope future calls, ensuring that the research it commissions builds on, and is directly informed by, the interdisciplinary community it is supporting through the network.

Anyone with an interest in these debates is actively encouraged to join *The Nexus Network*, by signing up at thenexusnetwork.org.uk/join

The Nexus Network has also committed **£500,000 to provide grants** for pilot projects, blue-sky ideas, working papers and placements. **An initial call for proposals has been issued today**, for a series of up to ten 'think pieces' or working papers, of no more than 8,000 words in length, which can help to scope and define nexus approaches, and stimulate debate across the linked domains of food, energy, water and the environment. For more information, see thenexusnetwork.org.uk/funding-available

Commenting on the launch, Professor James Wilsdon, Director of the Nexus Network, said:

"I want to encourage anyone with a commitment to tackling the linked challenges of food, energy, water and the environment to join The Nexus Network. The language of the nexus highlights the need for interconnected thinking between different resource flows, between the natural and social sciences, and between the research community and decision makers. Whether you are a researcher, or work in government, business or an NGO, we'd encourage you to get involved and help to shape this exciting agenda."

Professor Paul Boyle, ESRC Chief Executive added:

"The Nexus Network provides a real opportunity for social science thinking to make a huge contribution towards tackling some of the urgent global challenges that we face. Understanding the interconnections between food, energy and water and the implications for the environment is an essential area for further research. The network will build a new research community bringing together interdisciplinary researchers with business and other users, to develop richer thinking and possible solutions."

Professor Ian Bateman from the University of East Anglia said:

"The natural environment underpins life on earth and provides vital inputs to the production of the most essential goods necessary for sustainable societies. However, the production of these goods and services is inextricably linked through a nexus of interdependencies. Deciding to increase food production or the extraction of natural gas can have implications for the availability of high quality fresh water; building new houses provides much needed homes, but can reduce the availability of recreational lands and impact upon biodiversity."

Dr. Jake Reynolds from the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership said:

'While business is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of natural capital,

there is an urgent call to explore not only natural capital elements themselves but also the connections between them. In an era of growing resource pressures, The Nexus Network will play a crucial role in identifying system-level responses to protecting livelihoods and natural resources. Our business networks will bring a distinctive, pragmatic perspective to nexus challenges.”

For more information, please contact: Professor James Wilsdon, Director, The Nexus Network, University of Sussex, on +44 (0)7712 527986 j.wilsdon@sussex.ac.uk. You can also follow us on twitter [@uk_nexus](https://twitter.com/uk_nexus).

Notes

- 1. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)** funds research into the big social and economic questions facing us today. We also develop and train the UK's future social scientists. Our research informs public policies and helps make businesses, voluntary bodies and other organisations more effective. Most importantly, it makes a real difference to all our lives. The ESRC is an independent organisation, established by Royal Charter in 1965, and funded mainly by the Government.
- 2. The Nexus Network:** Funded by the ESRC, the Nexus Network brings together researchers, policy makers, business leaders and civil society to develop collaborative projects and improve decision making on food, energy, water and the environment.
- 3. Partner Organisations**
 - The Science Policy Research Unit (SPRU) at the University of Sussex is an interdisciplinary research centre in science and technology policy and management. www.sussex.ac.uk/spru
 - The STEPS (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) Centre is an interdisciplinary global research and policy engagement centre, funded by the ESRC, which unites development studies with science and technology studies. <http://steps-centre.org>
 - The Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment (CSERGE), based at the University of East Anglia is a leading interdisciplinary research centre in the field of sustainable development and decision making. www.cserge.ac.uk
 - Over 25 years CISL has brought together business, government and academia to deepen leaders' insight and understanding through our executive programmes, build deep, strategic engagement with leadership companies, and create opportunities for collaborative enquiry and action through our business platforms. www.cisl.cam.ac.uk