Valuing Nature Placements 2016

Final Report - June 2017

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The Valuing Nature Programme is a 5 year £6.5M research programme which aims to improve understanding of the value of nature both in economic and non-economic terms, and improve the use of these valuations in decision making. It funds interdisciplinary research and builds links between researchers and people who make decisions that affect nature in business, policy-making and in practice. See www.valuing-nature.net.

The Valuing Nature Programme is funded by the Natural Environment Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Context

The Valuing Nature Placement Scheme provides researchers of all disciplinary areas to extend their skills and knowledge on issues of 'valuing nature'. The scheme specifically allows individuals to spend up to three months working on a topic related to the Valuing Nature remit in a new disciplinary, institutional or applied setting. This includes a learning experience outside the researcher's usual area of expertise, developing understanding of new concepts, methodological techniques or data use, or approaches to policy or practice uptake. Specifically the placement scheme is designed to encompass placements that promote:

Cross-disciplinary dialogue and exchange of ideas around issues of valuing nature – for instance, arts and humanities researchers or natural and social scientists exposing themselves to different models of knowledge production and problem-framing by spending time with a new research group, disciplinary researcher/team, or in a laboratory.

Uptake and usability of academic knowledge and skills in practical contexts concerned with valuing nature – for instance, academic researchers working directly with non-academic stakeholders to understand better how to produce or augment existing research that promotes valuing nature agendas in policy development and delivery processes. This may include working with known users of valuation research, or exploring new audiences and settings.

The 2016 placements were funded by the Natural Environment Research Council as part of the Valuing Nature Programme. This is a 5 year £6.8M research programme which aims to improve understanding of the value of nature both in economic and non-economic terms, and improve the use of these valuations in decision making. The placements are thus part of significant research investment in interdisciplinary valuation research that endeavours to build links between researchers and people who make decisions that affect nature in business, policy-making and in practice. They contribute to the Programme's wider aim to build an interdisciplinary research community capable of working across the natural, biological and social sciences, and the arts and humanities, and link researchers to businesses, policymakers and practitioners.

In total **12** placements were funded from over 50 applications to Valuing Nature Programme Coordination Team. All were selected on the grounds of their excellence and promise in terms of supporting the development of an interdisciplinary valuation research community and linking research to wider users. A summary of placements is provided overleaf and described below.

Summary of 2016 Placements

Name	*Placement Title*	*Home*	*Host*
Bhatia, Natasha	Valuing the impact of storm surges on society and human welfare in terms of the cultural services provided by estuarine flood alleviation sites	University of Hull - Institute of Estuarine & Coastal Studies	Hull University Business School
Binner, Amy	From valuing nature to policies and decision making: Co-developing and implementing a 25 year planning tool for the natural environment	University of Exeter	Defra
Bloomfield, Dan	Cornwall Council and the University of Exeter: maximising the human health and wellbeing value of nature in a local government context	University of Exeter	Cornwall Council
Feger, Clément	A 'rapid context diagnostic' on organizational, political and institutional factors affecting use of ecosystem services research in decisions and impact on outcomes	None	University of Cambridge & WWF
Jones, Laurence	Integrating environmental, social and health data in Wales to inform and support innovative policy implementation by Welsh Government	Centre for Ecology & Hydrology	Welsh Government
Kenworthy, Joseph	Valuing coastal services: Stressor induced impacts, tipping points and societal wellbeing	University of St Andrews - School of Biology	University of St Andrews - Environmental Economics Research Group
Langan, Charlie	Assessing and implementing a natural capital approach for Scottish estate management	University of Aberdeen	The MacRobert Trust

Name	*Placement Title*	*Home*	*Host*
Papworth, Sarah	Valuing nature: how do conservation decision-makers choose what to save and how to save it?	Royal Holloway, University of London - School of Biological Sciences	Royal Holloway, University of London - Department of Psychology
Robinson, David	Valuing Soil Change in Natural Capital assessments	Centre for Ecology & Hydrology	Bangor University
Saratsi, Eirini	Investigating & linking tangible and intangible forms of heritage of urban green spaces to better embed them in the policy and practice of valuing nature.	University of Kent	Historic England
Wilkinson, Timothy	Exploring biodiversity values in the Somerset Levels with 'ecological entrepreneurs'	University of Exeter	RSPB
Willis, Cheryl	Determining the Impacts of Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) on Cultural Ecosystem Services and Human Well-being	University of Exeter	Plymouth Marine Laboratory

Our approach to the placements

From the outset our vision for the placements was that they did not proceed in isolation, but rather that award holders shared their aspirations for their placement in a group setting, and reflected on how their activities could best incorporate the wider aims of the Valuing Nature agenda, as well as promoted among the research community.

To this end the Programme Co-ordination Team saw advantage in drawing award holders together as a group at the outset of the placements in January 2016, and then at the end of placements in May 2016, to capture further some of our collective learning.

At the warm-up event Placement holders learnt more about the Valuing Nature Programme and our vision for the placements. As part of the process we asked participants to introduce and

contextualise their placement for fellow award holders and members of the Programme Co-ordination Team. Participants spoke for 10 minutes about overall aspirations for the placement and planned outputs and outcomes that could be shared with, or involve, the wider Valuing Nature Network (VNN).

At the warm-up event we also encouraged reflection on any challenges or issues anticipated in realising the objectives of the placement and maximising its value to placement holder and the VNN community. Within this, we provided a communications briefing, discussed basic requirements for sharing experiences with the Valuing Nature Network, and outlined what the Programme Coordination Team could do to assist award holder in their ventures.

We also held a wrap-up meeting in July 2016 at the University of Kent. This was opportunity to for placements to: share with members of the PCT and other placement holders their experiences and achievements; explore how the outputs and outcomes of could be shared more generally with, or involve, the wider Valuing Nature community, as well as develop further relationships (such as follow on work) with hosts and; contribute suggestions and ideas for the wider development of the placement opportunity process to inform NERC priorities for potential further funding in this area. As part of the wrap-up meeting we asked placement holders to again prepare a formal presentation of 10 minutes and covering the objectives of the placement, key activities undertaken and the nature of the learning experience, as well as outputs and outcomes. Placement holders were filmed at both the warm-up and wrap=up events to create a record of their expectations and experiences. These videos, along with presentations and blogs from each placement holder are available on the Valuing Nature website (http://valuing-nature.net/valuing-nature-placements-2016).

Overview of Placements

Valuing the impact of storm surges on society and human welfare in terms of the cultural services provided by estuarine flood alleviation sites

Placement Holder: *Natasha Bhatia*

A three month research placement was undertaken within the Hull University Business School (HUBS) with the aim of expanding on an environmental sciences background, in order to build environmental economics expertise, increase understanding of Risk Assessment and Risk Management techniques in a coastal management setting, and gain knowledge into flood risk and

flood modelling using GIS. In addition, this placement was seen as an opportunity to create links between the home organisation, in this case the Institute of Estuarine and Coastal Studies, and the host organisation (HUBS).

The research project undertaken during the placement aimed to use a business and economic setting to research the environmental, social and cultural impacts of the 2013 storm surge. On the 5th December 2013, a low pressure weather system coupled with the rising tide caused a storm surge, which heavily affected the whole UK coastline, but in particular the East coast between the Humber Estuary and the Wash were particularly affected. Although the ecological and economic effects of the storm surge have been studied extensively on the Humber, primarily by local authorities and statutory bodies, little is known about the social and cultural impacts. In terms of managing this dynamic system in the future, it is important that these four aspects- ecological, economic, social and cultural- are integrated into a holistic ecosystem approach to management.

Several techniques were required in order to research the social and cultural impacts of the storm surge. GIS and stakeholder engagement were used alongside an extensive background search to provide information on the social and cultural benefits that are provided by the environmental areas on the Humber Estuary. Non-market valuation techniques were used to ascertain how people value these cultural benefits that are provided by their local natural environment in the wake of the storm surge. ISO Risk Assessment and Risk Management techniques in the form of Bow-Tie analysis was used to identify the threat-impact pathways associated with the cultural services found at each site, and used to form a picture of the cultural services available, and the potential impacts that may be caused by the flooding. A set of management guidelines was then devised, with the aim of protecting the cultural services provided by the environmental sites on the Humber from any future flooding scenarios. Finally, GIS flood modelling techniques were used to create a hypothetical flooding scenario for 2115, which takes into account current climate change predictions.

Further details: http://valuing-nature.net/placements-2016-natasha-bhatia

From valuing nature to policies and decision making: Co-developing and implementing a 25 year planning tool for the natural environment

Placement Holder: *Amy Binner*

The placement integrated interdisciplinary knowledge from environmental, biological, and economic research within a high profile valuing nature project, working closely with policymakers to improve the uptake and usability of valuation research. A central focus was to explore trade-offs between ecosystem services, their contribution to engagement with the environment and impacts on human health and wellbeing.

Dr Binner co-developed the UK National Ecosystem Assessment –Follow On Integrated Model (TIM) and this placement provided an opportunity to work inside Defra to compile a detailed assessment of user needs for spatial decision support tools across the entire Defra network. This work provides a basis for developing TIM, transforming it from a complex computing model accessible to only a

small number of academics, into a usable and pragmatic decision support tool for the Government's 25 Year Plan for the Environment which is capable of dealing with complexity while providing clear and interpretable outputs.

As part of the placement, decision makers across the whole Defra network (including Natural England and the Environment Agency) participated in individual interviews, group discussions and workshops to explore potential use and uptake of the tool in different institutional settings and assessed co-development options. The placement also provided an opportunity to explore the cross-disciplinary dialogue between academics, practitioners and policymakers and consider how this needs to be developed to foster improved communication and knowledge exchange.

The placement generated a number of outputs including: a detailed report on user needs for Defra; a menu of costed TIM extension options for Defra; Carbon fund analysis and report for Defra, a slide-pack on environmental dashboards for the Environment Analysis Unit, two workshops; two conference presentations (one national and one international) and a final report on key learning points.

Further details: http://valuing-nature.net/placements-2016-amy-binner

Maximising the human health and wellbeing value of nature in a local government context

Placement Holder: *Dan Bloomfield*

Cornwall Council and the University of Exeter were partners in this placement, which built on other ESRC and NERC-funded work in this area. Dr Dan Bloomfield from the University of Exeter worked primarily with the Strategy Team in Cornwall Council. The opportunity was to engage, via the Council, a wider local authority community. Local authorities potentially have a considerable role to play in the rolling out of nature prescription activities, which are a very targeted way of realising the health and wellbeing value of nature. Commissionable services for patients and service users can be delivered using Council assets such as parks and other green spaces. This placement aimed to:

- ensure that the benefits to human health and wellbeing of nature-based activity are much more widely known within Cornwall Council;
- identify and elucidate how such activity can support a range of Council policies and strategies;
- enumerate how nature-based activity for health can best employ Council assets;
- promulgate, though a range of outputs, our understanding of how local government in general can most effectively engage with, and benefit from, work in this area.

Further details: see http://valuing-nature.net/placements-2016-dan-bloomfield

A 'rapid context diagnostic' on organizational, political and institutional factors affecting use of ecosystem services research in decisions and impact on outcomes

Placement Holder: *Clément Feger*

In this placement with Dr Bhaskar Vira at the University of Cambridge, Clément Feger co-developed context diagnostic methods for biodiversity and ecosystem services valuation practitioners wishing to generate change in the context in which they operate. These drew both on social science theoretical frameworks and on practitioners' real-world experiences. Dr Feger co-produced the tools by designing visuals and lists of questions derived from theories, by conducting interviews with nature valuation practitioners and by organizing two workshops, one at Stanford University and one at Cambridge University.

The placement confirmed the need for the development of such context diagnostic tool, as a way to enrich and refine the ecosystem services valuation theory of change. It also showed that the use of such context diagnostic tools can lead practitioners to have challenging reflections on their own roles, norms, strategies and action. As a main output, a 60 page report has been written and is now undergoing a soft peer-reviewed process. The work has been communicated to the Natural Capital Project team as well as to some members of WWF-UK.

Further details: http://valuing-nature.net/placements-2016-cl%C3%A9ment-feger

Integrating environmental, social and health data in Wales to inform and support innovative policy implementation

Placement Holder: *Laurence Jones*

Wales is one of only a few countries globally to have committed to sustainable development in its constitution. In 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations Act was passed, a radical and ground-breaking piece of legislation which enshrines in law the principles of sustainable development. One of the 7 goals includes "A Resilient Wales" to maintain and enhance a biodiverse natural environment that supports social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change. The supporting Environment (Wales) Bills enables Wales' resources to be managed to deliver significant economic, social and environmental benefits. Wales holds extensive digital datasets on the environment, health and society. However, these data are not yet fully integrated, and there is considerable scope to use these data in new ways. This placement involved working across a range of Welsh Government departments to scope the availability and use of these data to understand the role of the environment in human health and well-being and inform sustainable management to build resilience, and support the future health and well-being of people in Wales. Wales was identified as an ideal testbed due to its investment in digital technologies and targeted national programmes in the health, social and environment sectors.

Further details: http://valuing-nature.net/placements-2016-laurence-jones

Valuing coastal services: Stressor induced impacts, tipping points and societal wellbeing

Placement Holder: *Joseph Kenworthy*

Coastal sedimentary habitats support an array of economically valuable ecosystem services including regulatory functions such as carbon cycling or pollutant amelioration. In addition, the aesthetic value and health benefits of coastal systems are often ignored and/or underestimated. The provision of coastal services is under threat from both environmental and anthropogenic impacts that are likely to alter provisioning for the future. The purpose of Joseph Kenworthy's placement was to build upon his ecological knowledge to encompass aspects of ecosystem valuation and human health and consider how his own work on multiple stressors might impact ecosystem values, as alternate stable states are established after environmental tipping points are exceeded.

The placement holder took part in lectures and seminar series and conducted literature reviews focussing on the implications of multiple stressors in coastal habitats. These explored the use of cost-benefit analyses and the valuation techniques focussing on multiple ecosystem services upheld by sedimentary systems. Without assigning values to system service flows it is impossible to fully understand the consequences of changes to coastal ecosystems. These values can be related to policy, supporting decisions relating to the conservation and protection of exploited habitats

The findings of this placement are currently being formatted into a literature review summarising the placement findings regarding the ecosystem services derived from sedimentary habitats, focussing on our current state of knowledge and how stressors will likely affect their economic impact

Further details: http://valuing-nature.net/placements-2016-joseph-kenworthy

Assessing and implementing a natural capital approach for Scottish estate management

Placement Holder: *Charlie Langan*

A natural capital approach presents an opportunity to assess a wide diversity of perspectives and values in land management decisions, but there remain substantial challenges to its practical implementation at the local scale for land managers, where most natural capital decisions are made. The MacRobert Trust, the charitable organisation managing the MacRobert Estate, hosted the placement. The estate is located 30 miles west of Aberdeen at the eastern edge of the Cairngorms National Park, and covers 7,200 acres of agricultural and wooded lands in an area popular with tourists and walkers. The Trust works closely with its nine tenant farmers and the local village community on a range of projects.

The objective of the placement was to work alongside the MacRobert Trust to explore implications and practicalities of incorporating a natural capital approach into the management of Scottish land and estates. Specifically the placement examined evidence to assess whether a natural capital approach can improve understanding of impacts and dependencies to identify opportunities to inform land management actors in Scotland. The placement aimed to identify where better information about natural capital values may contribute useful guidance in business decisions and strategies, and explore different approaches to incorporate the multiple perspectives of stakeholders, including tenant farmers, the local community, and beneficiaries of the Trust's wider sustainability objectives. The placement attempted to develop practical steps land managers may take to operationalize a natural capital approach by evaluating the implementation of emerging natural capital tools that are currently available. Research assessed the practicalities and challenges presented by natural capital methodologies for land managers, using the MacRobert Trust estate as a case study. The placement also examined options for institutionalising natural capital approaches within land management organisations.

Further details: http://valuing-nature.net/placements-2016-charlie-langan

Valuing nature: how do conservation decision-makers choose what to save and how to save it?

Placement Holder: *Sarah Papworth*

Evidence-based decision-making is crucial for ensuring best practice outcomes in diverse applied fields, including conservation. However, many practitioners rely on intuition and personal experience (system I decision-making) rather than reviewing and analytically processing information (system II decision-making). Conservation science is a value-based discipline, yet conservation planning has tended to assume that decision-makers are using system II decision-making. Thus a key question is how, and when, personal values and individual differences (system I) impact the decisions made by conservation practitioners.

The placement included training in psychological theory and methods, which were relevant for answering this question (placement phase I) and allow cross-disciplinary exchange of ideas between the candidate and host at the Department of Psychology at Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL). The placement was also used to develop and execute a project that forms part of the candidate's long-term research programme, using methods from social and biological sciences to understand human behaviour in contexts relevant to biodiversity conservation. The candidate's past research is truly interdisciplinary: although the candidate has formal training in both anthropology and biology, this placement allowed the candidate to gain understanding of key concepts and related methodological techniques in psychology.

Further details: http://valuing-nature.net/placements-2016-sarah-papworth

Valuing Soil Change in Natural Capital assessments

Placement Holder: *David Robinson*

Valuing nature can be seen as having two complimentary approaches, green accounting methods supplementing economic indicators like GDP, and trade-off analysis using cost-benefit (CBA) valuation approaches for example as articulated in the discussion in *Science* between Bateman (2013, 6141; 45-50) and Obst (2013, 6157;420). Although much independent research has been done on the development of natural capital and ecosystem service frameworks, Obst (2015, 527,165), a recent article in *Nature* identified that the soils area of green accounting in the UN System of Environmental Economic Accounts (SEEA) was the least well developed. In order to develop this area and identify the soil information required to address this deficit we need to understand the requirements of both CBA and accounting valuation approaches.

Therefore, the goal of this placement was to learn about how CBA (Gibbons), Life Cycle Assessment (Styles) and accounting methods (SEEA, Hockley), and identify how the soils information we have can be used to inform these approaches. Moreover, the placement aimed to provide time to review the work on soils and tipping points which is only recently gaining traction and identify potential thresholds that may be pertinent to ecosystem service delivery.

Further details: http://valuing-nature.net/placements-2016-david-robinson

Investigating & linking tangible and intangible forms of heritage of urban green spaces to better embed them in the policy and practice of valuing nature

Placement Holder: *Eirini Saratsi*

The overall aim of this placement was to advance knowledge of how we can better embed the tangible and intangible heritage values of urban green spaces held by individuals, communities and the society, within valuing nature research (and relatedly the wider ecosystem approach).

The placement was hosted by Historic England, the government's expert advisory service on England's historic environment. The motivation for the placement built from previous research which highlighted that people hold strong cultural heritage associations with urban green spaces. The placement holder worked with Historic England to advance knowledge around tangible and intangible heritage values of urban green spaces and set up priorities for further research. A series of activities were carried out reflecting the goals of valuing nature programme. These included: thirteen in depth interviews with experts in leading heritage conservation bodies and local authorities; extensive review of secondary sources on heritage values and public parks and gardens; a general assessment of existing data sets held by Historic England; training on image processing and web design; participation and presentation of findings in meetings with academics and policy

practitioners; and preparation of research outputs. The Placeholder also worked towards the development of a tool for assessing heritage values and valuing nature in parks and gardens.

Further details: http://valuing-nature.net/placements-2016-eirini-saratsi

Exploring biodiversity values in the Somerset Levels with 'ecological entrepreneurs'

Placement Holder: *Tim Wilkinson*

This placement with the RSPB explored the values attributed to biodiversity in the Somerset Levels by 'ecological entrepreneurs' from the NGO community (e.g. Somerset Wildlife Trust), active citizen groups (e.g. Flooding on the Levels Action Group) and private enterprise (e.g. Coates English Willow). Through interaction with 'ecological entrepreneurs' it aimed to explore if, and with what motivations, there is an appetite to promote nature on the Somerset Levels for visitors, and how biodiversity could attract people and income.

Following the extreme weather events implicated in major floods on the Somerset Levels in 2013-14, environmental and financial pressures are necessitating increased collaboration: organisations 'working together'. However, such rhetoric belies the micro-level challenges of inter-organisational dialogue and action, particularly in the case of hard-to-quantify, non-use values of nature like biodiversity.

This placement aimed to facilitate the exchange of ideas about biodiversity values among 'ecological entrepreneurs'; to aid articulation of claims about the role of biodiversity in health and wellbeing, and clarify tactics for motivating pro-environmental behaviour. Outcomes are to inform future development pathways for the Somerset Levels and shape RSPB engagements with entrepreneurial networks.

Further details: http://valuing-nature.net/placements-2016-timothy-wilkinson

Determining the Impacts of Harmful Algal Blooms on Cultural Ecosystem Services and Human Well-being

Placement Holder: *Cheryl Willis*

The intangible yet meaningful ways that nature underpins well-being has found notable expression in the concept of cultural ecosystem services and benefits (Church et al., 2011, 2014) which appear to be particularly resonant in coastal and marine areas (Wheeler et al., 2012; White et al., 2010). Natural and human stressors on these environments can severely disrupt these benefits. Stressors such as rising sea temperatures and ocean acidification for example, can result in conditions favourable to harmful algal blooms (HABs). Globally, these have been shown to be increasing in frequency, magnitude and location over the last two decades (Anderson, 2003) which could have wide ranging impacts on cultural ecosystem services and human well-being.

Cutting edge research is currently underway at Plymouth Marine Laboratory to model HABs and project their occurrence in the future using ecosystem models. This placement provided Dr Willis with a unique opportunity to work with ecosystem modellers, learning about the natural science research and the level of complexity and uncertainty associated with these models. She had the opportunity to extend this research to include the social and cultural impacts of HABs, building on both her own and broader previous work in revealing cultural services and well-being benefits of coastal and marine areas.

Further details: http://valuing-nature.net/placements-2016-cheryl-willis

General Learning from the 2016 Placements

A number of key benefits and learning outcomes arising from the placement experience have been recorded in placement reports and group discussion. These are listed in detail below, together with a wider record of challenges and opportunities. In general spending an uninterrupted period of time understanding a new issue or context for valuation research was itself highly valued by placement holders. The placements were viewed as rather transformative experiences, challenging prevailing wisdoms about models of working between both placement holders and the host. Part of the reason placement holders found the experience so enriching was in the opportunity to engage in conversation across disciplinary and/or research and practice boundaries. Many self-reported better appreciation of user needs in valuation and the challenges of embedding concepts and approaches into practice, with some promising collaborations now being formed.

Summary of key benefits and learning outcomes

Contextualising and transforming approaches to valuing nature research

- Building an understanding of how research fits into a bigger picture.
- Confirming how much the placement holder didn't know about their own research area.
- Confirming that research is on the right track and clarifying thinking including refining approaches/model of working.
- Challenging perceptions of own research/encouraging new thinking about research.
- Changing the way that research projects will be approached in the future.
- Reinforcing personal commitments to interdisciplinary working and especially co-operation between ecologists and social scientists.
- Thinking about valuing nature in a more holistic way, especially in non-monetary terms.
- Greater understanding now of the full range of ways in which people can value nature.

Applying valuing nature concepts in practice

- A greater appreciation of the extent to which ecosystem services and natural capital thinking is embedded in policy and practice including surprisingly strong engagement with the academic community.

- A better understanding of barriers to implementing natural capital/VN approaches.
- An appreciation of knowledge gaps and how VN data infrastructures need to be integrated.
- Gaining a greater appreciation of different priorities for the policy outcomes of research including a detailed assessment of user needs of research and how academic research is viewed.
- Understanding barriers to implementing natural capital/VN approaches.
- A recognition that hosts areas are themselves highly differentiated areas of expertise and approaches.
- An appreciation that no single framework for Valuing Nature research will suit all situations.
- Learning to tailor how valuation research interests and approaches are communicated to users: clearly and concisely communicating our work, its limitations and its benefits.

Reflecting on valuing nature languages and terminology

- Observing host reactions towards terminology and language typical for valuing nature and natural capital discourses.
- Appreciating how concepts and terminology are not equivalent across disciplines and policy areas.
- Appreciating that although using people are using the same languages, but very different messages and assumption may be behind them.
- Learning the languages of different disciplinary and practitioner areas and learning how to describe valuation concepts for the first time.

Practical research development

- Greater ability to identify and evaluate opportunities for further research.
- Strengthening abilities to develop research projects and subsequent policy. recommendations with a multidisciplinary mind-set.
- Creating a network of contacts in the research to support multidisciplinary research, which may lead to collaborative opportunities.
- Cultivating interesting in specific new projects among hosts.
- Making a multitude of new connections that can been drawn upon in future work.
- Taking on new roles: such as formal advisory roles for hosts.

Key challenges and issues associated with doing a placement

- At the time the grant applications were prepared sometimes limited interaction between the placement holder and the host institution and therefore difficult to predict the requirements of the collaboration.
- Not enough time to fully realise initial goals when placement commenced; hard not to be pulled in other directions by ongoing work.

- Getting to grips with new data and the technical and specialised language was an enormous challenge in some instances.
- Keeping expectations of all parties close to what it was realistically achievable during the limited time of the collaboration; difficulty in keeping focused on one issue.
- Hosts willingness to engage: liaising with a lot of very busy professionals whose participation in the placement was mostly outside of the remit of their jobs; arranging interviews / appointments with people was often challenging.
- Overcoming scepticism about valuing nature research; explaining and accounting for one's own research area.
- Realising that in order to be familiar with the ethos and research philosophy of the host organisation, more diverse and frequent activities than the planned ones were required.
- Gaining an over-simplified picture of host areas.
- Adjusting to a slightly different way of thinking and expression.
- Feeling treated like a consultant in the host organisation.

Wider opportunities and suggestions for the VNN

- Create portals for accessing valuation literature, case studies and tools to provide an active platform for discussing issues, exchanging ideas and helping create connections and fill skills gaps.
- A longer lead-in time during subsequent call and bid preparation period would allow more time to co-develop the project ideas between host and placement organisations. This would help fine tune what is both realistic and achievable within a specified time period.
- Extend placement time to 6 months and spread the days out more. Learning takes time and understanding new concepts needs time to mull over.
- Greater integration with the Valuing Nature Network could identify additional individuals and ongoing pieces of work that placement holders could turn to for help.

Future Plans

Following the success of the 2016 Placements, NERC agreed to fund a second round in 2017. The Valuing Nature Programme Coordination Team is now applying to NERC for further funding to create a third cohort of Placement Holders.

The Placement Holders will be contacted in the longer term to track how their experience impacts their future careers, and to share any further outputs with the VNN.

The Valuing Nature Annual Conference will include an opportunity for Placement Holders to share their learning experiences with a wider audience.

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