

**ACCESS Review
Management Response Statement
8th October 2014**

1. Introduction

The response presented here comes in two parts: a prospective response that specifically focusses on the broad outcomes of the review and charts a way forward to the next phase of ACCESS from this important juncture and an appended appraisal of the review panel's report with specific responses to that document. This response document is a product of consultation among senior management and chair of the ACCESS board.

The review process has been very constructive and very professionally conducted. We are grateful to all the role players in the NRF, the reviewers themselves and the members of the ACCESS community for their time and effort. As always these processes are imperfect and in hindsight there are some procedures and processes that we would have preferred to do slightly differently, but the cut and thrust of these events are understood.

We note the observations by the review panel that ACCESS has a "challenging scientific and technical mandate together with the complex arrangements and governance mechanisms that were established for its management, oversight and implementation" and that "in practice, the magnitude, dimensions and complexity of inter-and trans-disciplinary activities required to pursue ESS may not easily be accommodated in a single CoE." We regard these as important messages and lessons for both the ACCESS hosts and team, and its key stakeholders in the Department of Science and Technology and National Research Foundation. This should be the basis for constructive engagement in the next steps toward a second phase.

The review has provided the ACCESS stakeholders and funders and the ACCESS community with an important opportunity to develop ACCESS from its imperfect, yet successful establishment phase, into a renewed and powerful instrument. This will require some bold decision-making, strong leadership and trust among the stakeholders and the community. It will also require clear goal-setting (mandating) and firm management in order to achieve the outcomes envisaged in the review. The planning, which has already begun (prior to the review, see below) will require a significant commitment from the key stakeholders both in terms of precedent setting institutional development/arrangements and in the level of resourcing. ACCESS' management and board are excited and eager to assist in this process. It is thus urgently required that the key stakeholders plot out a process that will define the scope, scale, shape, size content, desired outcomes and impact in clear detail for such a new phase of the programme.

2. Interpretation of the outcomes

2.1 The general outcomes of the review are understood in the most simple terms as (in no particular order):

- i. ACCESS is a valuable and unique programme in South Africa and beyond.

- ii. There have been successes and shortcomings in this initial phase.
- iii. The research programme should have more focus on a more exclusively defined set of inter-/trans-disciplinary questions that are compelling and exciting (as opposed to the broad inclusive approach taken).
- iv. The education programme is very successful and should be further integrated into the research programme as designed in the future.
- v. Networking has been very successful and created new opportunities for collaboration (even trans-disciplinary) among new partners locally and internationally.
- vi. Knowledge brokering and service rendering is limited to date, but examples of these activities exist and effort is distributed in the system.
- vii. ACCESS has not had stable leadership over its existence and this is a limiting factor which should be addressed.
- viii. ACCESS is not funded adequately relative to the expectations of its impact and role in the GCGC. Leverage of funding has been opportunistic but substantial at the theme level.
- ix. The model of a CoE is not appropriate for ACCESS and a new model for the programme, at a scale fit for purpose should be designed and implemented.

2.2 The review has made 6 substantial recommendations (distilled here):

- i. Design a new governance structure (an example given)
- ii. Redesign the research strategy with a compelling and exciting focus in a trans-disciplinary space.
- iii. Take a more strategic focus on the education and training front.
- iv. Develop an aligned strategy for networking and collaboration.
- v. Similarly for an information brokerage “package”.
- vi. Fund the programme commensurately with expected outcomes.

3. Management Responses

3.1 The ACCESS management team and board have largely anticipated the outcome of this review process and the recommendations emanating from it. It is recognised that the decisions about the structure and function of ACCESS in its next phase are dependent on deliberation among the key stakeholders and are inexorably linked with the outcomes of the review of the GCGC (assuming that this is indeed taking place). Nevertheless the ACCESS management concurs with all of these recommendations in general and already taken several steps in respect of several aspects of the findings and recommendations:

- i) ACCESS has appointed a senior leadership team (working within the Global Change Science Committee) to develop a new focussed inter-/trans-disciplinary science strategy based on the Seasonal Cycles Africa concept that has been presented. It is noted that the review has endorsed this concept albeit with a caution to develop this concept to the appropriate level of focus and detail. This would incorporate the education and training strategy as well as that of networking, knowledge brokering and service rendering (assuming these remain KPAs in any new format of the programme).
- ii) ACCESS itself and in consultation with the key stakeholders has raised the question of the appropriateness of the CoE structure and has presented a similar concept for its structure and function as given in the review report
- iii) It is noted that the discussion around funding levels, scale, leadership, hosting, longevity of the programme (distinct from that of a CoE) and a renewed mandate, is dependent on

consultation process among the key stakeholders and the outcome of the review of the GCGC. These discussions have already begun among the key stakeholders in anticipation of the outcome of the review and will continue in the coming year.

4. Planning for the next phase of ACCESS

As indicated above, ACCESS has already commenced with the process of planning for a second phase of the programme, in line with the review panel's recommendations. The major departure from the establishment phase is the identification of an overarching theme that provides the platform for a more integrated and inter-/trans-disciplinary research and education programmes. Working with the Global Change Science Committee, several consultations and workshops have already taken place and a clear idea on the design of the Seasonal Cycles Africa (current working title) is emerging. This programme provides the ESS community with a number of opportunities (among others) which meet the expectations given in the review panel's recommendations:

- a) It builds on existing programmes, international collaborations and research entities and provides a common currency across institutions and disciplines.
- b) It takes full advantage of South Africa's unique ESS attributes and phenomena.
- c) It provides the country with an opportunity for a strategic contribution to global climate science issues.
- d) It provides a compelling and exciting set of focussed research questions that span the entire scope of the Global Change Research Plan including the adaptation and innovation elements of the plan; thus an ideal vehicle for inter-/trans-disciplinary research.
- e) Provides unique and compelling user-led science application and research opportunity in real world problems given that the concept is deeply embedded in society and the economy.
- f) It provides for unique and excellent education and training integration across all levels of education from junior school to post-doctoral.

The next steps in implementation comprise a number of items:

- a) Further development and publication of the Seasonal Cycles concept
- b) Consultation on the research and education development for an implementation plan
- c) Discussion and decisions on the operational framework for implementation
- d) Design and mandating of the second phase of ACCESS
- e) Appointment of a Director

As indicated above, the ACCESS Board, leadership and management are eager to proceed with this phase and look forward to constructive engagement with the key stakeholders in the GCGC (DST and NRF) in this regard

Signed



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ACCESS Acting Director

Appendix to Management Response Statement (Retrospective view of the Review) September 2014

A1. Introduction

This aspect of the management response addresses specific items and issues raised in the ACCESS review report. It is not an exhaustive treatment of every item raised or contested, and is rather limited to the substantive and principal items. The issues raised in this section of the report are intended as a basis for discussion among the key stakeholders in order that the appropriate lessons and messages are commonly understood and shared.

A2. Scope and context

The review itself was limited to that of ACCESS independently (with reference to its role in the GCGC) and then in terms of strict CoE criteria. This was anticipated and is acceptable and understandable but the report does reveal the limitations of this approach without the proper context. The outcomes and recommendations emanating from review of the Global Change Grand Challenge needs to be taken into account in order to give context to the ACCESS review. This lack of context does emerge on several occasions in the review report (see page 5 / line 196; p10/ line 345 and para commencing line 360) primarily in the fact that ACCESS has lacked a clear mandate from the GCGC other than that given in the GC research plan. Thus the review panel notes that ACCESS had to develop its own mandate and co-evolved with the GCGC. While the panel was mandated to evaluate ACCESS' contribution to the GCGC it notes that it was not provided with the mandates of the other elements of the GCGC programme to assist them. Also, while the panel does mention the age/stage of the programme, not enough cognisance of the stage of development and maturity of ACCESS in this context (of both ACCESS and the GCGC) is taken into account. The report does not give sufficient consideration to the lead time required for impact to manifest using the approach adopted, save for a brief mention (page 13/504) which notes that the period of evaluation of impact may be too short to assess this. Thus much of the current form and structure and indeed performance of ACCESS is dependent on this context but yet it is evaluated in the absence of this contextual information. This does leave the programme somewhat in no-mans-land in this assessment. **Action: ACCESS will consult immediately with its key stakeholders and funders to address the contextual strategic issues.**

A3. The purpose of ACCESS

On page 10 (lines 325 to 338) the panel identifies the balance between enquiry driven (knowledge generating) research, and user-led science (science for utility to address specific problems), and how this should be managed by ACCESS and the GCGC), as a key element that should be examined and strategized by the stakeholders. Thus the purpose of the ACCESS programme (strategically) needs to be clarified in terms of its role in the GCGC. This is fundamental to devising the future strategy of the programme and that of the GCGC. This issue has been discussed several times in ACCESS board meetings and highlighted in several other documents and also in the review report. Fundamental to this is how the key stakeholders articulate the desired outcome and impact and to be creative in devising the appropriate metrics thereof. **Action: ACCESS will ensure that the planning for the next stages of the programme**

define its purpose and associated metrics in consultation with the appropriate programmatic leadership.

A4. Leadership

The importance of leadership in providing direction and continuity has been emphasized in the review. In the short history of ACCESS, there have been several changes in leadership, which has coincided with leadership changes in the GCGC and NRF. Without going into the details, suffice to say that the issue is complex and inter-twined with several unfortunate externalities. It should however be recalled that the NRF did make a decision that it required a full-time director employed by the programme *only after its establishment* (and the departure of the then incumbent) and that the decision to hold-off on the recruitment of a Director was made in conjunction with the DST and NRF board members. This decision (after recruitment efforts failed to find a suitable candidate) was made in lieu of the short time span leading up to the review and also due to limited funding with which to budget for such a position. It should be noted that (as per the suggestion given by the panel) ACCESS is replete with expertise that could serve in the leadership roles envisaged however this would require some fairly radical approaches to the institutional setup (see page 5/ line 192). **Action: joint decisions on leadership will be made as part of the negotiations about the structure and operating model that will emerge subsequent to this review process being concluded.**

A5. Outputs

The review did not pronounce on any of the substantial outputs of the programme and limited itself to the principle issues. Thus some of the significant contributions and achievements that ACCESS has made in several arenas, including scientific knowledge generation, publications, data acquisition, graduation of post-graduates, rates of transformation and other such outputs are not celebrated and highlighted. This maybe a consequence of the mandate and briefing (which was really focussed on the structure and function of the programme) but is nevertheless regarded as a limitation of the report. In the absence consideration of ACCESS substantial achievements, it is very difficult to assess the true value of the programme, not just to the DST/NRF and CSIR but in fact to the substantial ACCESS community and makes it challenging to assess how to build on what has already been achieved.

A6. Research scope

The main critique delivered by the review panel related to the tension between the need to focus on a specific set of science questions and outcomes versus the need to be representative, equitable, improve and extend the research networking and serve the goals of the GCGC (as given in the broad ranging GC Science Plan). This tension was not adequately addressed by the review and lies at the heart of the problem regarding the role and expectations of ACCESS. ACCESS has never been clearly and unambiguously mandated by its principal stakeholders and therefore it has adopted, in consultation with the key stakeholders, a strategically broad approach comprising several foci (reflecting the scope of the GC Science plan) with the aim of developing these and creating the cross-focal interactions and collaboration (which has started to occur). In order to implement the review's recommendation on a relatively more focussed approach (and inter-/trans-disciplinary within that) the strategy will have to

articulate with that of the GCGC in general, in order that ACCESS continue to play its role in that programme. It is thus inaccurate to claim that ACCESS does not have a science strategy (p2/69, p5/199 and p17/680). Furthermore, in several instances the review panel does recognise the need to ACCESS to be even broader than it currently is (p5/75; p11/389-395) p12/430; 437-445) and assume a role beyond its ACCESS' existing role in the implementation of the GCGC Science plan. The complexity here is that on the one hand ACCESS would need to develop depth around a specific theme or focus but yet be broad in its approach to research, education structure and function in order to ensure inter-/trans-disciplinarily. This then again pertains to the nexus between ACCESS and the GCGC in general and planning in that context.

Action: ACCESS will continue to develop its planning for a renewed scientific programme and present this as part of its perspective in negotiations on programme structure.

A7. Development strategy

This quote (from Page 9 / para line 315) is important as it contains several of the issues and contentions plaguing ACCESS: *“There is a general perception, based on interviews and exchanges with the participants in this review that some participate in ACCESS because what it can offer, not because what it needs. The top down approach has hampered the community-wide engagement and full fledge support. ACCESS has not met its objective of making the whole greater than sum of individual contributions. Integration and trans-disciplinary collaboration in ACCESS are missing, but networking and enabling aspects are working. There are some pockets of strong scientific activities, but the overall science mission for ACCESS is still evolving and requires urgent attention.”*

The balance between “top down” and “bottom up” in the process leading to the establishment of the ACCESS Theme projects was carefully negotiated with DST at the time it was implemented (in fact DST provided additional funding to support this approach). This strategy was adopted to balance the imperative to meet two aims that the review panel did not fully appreciate. These were 1. to deliver on the science and 2. to be inclusive, transformative and build partnerships in this first phase of the programme. This is a somewhat difficult balance to get right simultaneously, and achieve the buy-in of all partners of the variety of statuses and capacities (each competing for scarce resources and perusing their own institutional mandates). It can be argued that ACCESS, through its initial open call, and creation of new trans-institutional teams, achieved what it should have in the first phase and indeed is still “evolving”. Thus this critique, while perfectly valid, lacks the context it requires for full appreciation of the drivers that led to the current stage of development of ACCESS. It is acknowledged that the time is now right to develop ACCESS in a new direction given that it has become established. **Action: ACCESS will ensure that this item is thoroughly debated and addressed during the process of establishing a renewed mandate for ACCESS.**

A8. Capacity Building

In terms of capacity building there are some mixed messages. While the success of the programme are noted and lauded, on two occasions the panel has referred to the balance between the investment in the science focus and the investment capacity building (p10/337; p13/482). The HCD plan for the GCGC has not been formally adopted and broader strategic planning by the stakeholders, particularly in terms of transformation, is required. This is necessary because some of the challenges are systemic and beyond the reach of ACCESS alone to have significant impact. ACCESS has been led by DST to prioritise this aspect

of the work (particularly with regard to transformation) and the result is that ACCESS is perceived by many as more of an HCD programme than a research programme. This is neither desirable nor accurate and therefore as the weighting of effort toward the recruitment of post-graduate students in this establishment phase was a deliberate and strategic decision. An equitable division of labour and role of each of the components of the education and training system should be devised and then the contribution of programmes such as ACCESS (and other components of the GCGC) can have well defined roles and targets in this process. It is not adequate that the metrics for achievement in this regard be reduced to simple demographic targets as the challenges are much deeper and complex than this simple approach. It is necessary that this issue be firmly and boldly addressed by the leadership in science management in the country. **Action: ACCESS will continue to play its role in HCD and also ensure that the issues revealed in this review that pertain generally to the GCGC are brought to the attention of the appropriate authorities.**

A9. Funding & international collaboration

It is worth highlighting that the panel has articulated very clearly that the programme has been under-funded relative to its expected role performance and the panel recognises that this is has been a proper constraint. It has noted that according to the panel, a departure from the norm is required in order for ACCESS to succeed. This would be both in the levels of funding (including sufficient funding to attract and recruit the right leadership), the operational processes and indeed in the metrics of success (see page 12, para line 472). On international collaboration (as a source of funding), the panel concludes that this has been opportunistic on the part of the programme, but fails to note that these opportunities emerged out of DST/NRF bilaterals. The late introduction of SASSCAL as an entity in the global change programme space has also been a vexing challenge, and while this challenge was not part of the brief of the panel, is a consideration in how SASSCAL impacts on the role and mandate of ACCESS and in how ACCESS is resourced currently and in the future.

A10. Knowledge Brokering

The panels comments on the knowledge brokering and service rendering aspects of the ACCESS programme are valid and acceptable (as a CoE) but should be ameliorated by the two factors of the age/stage of the programme and the fact that some of this function is disassociated in the form of units in the GCGC which have and are still to be established.

- End -