Minutes of the joint STFC Council meeting with the STFC Executive Board

14th January 2026

Caxton House, London

## Attendees

STFC Council:
Michele Dougherty, Chair
Andy Schofield, Senior Independent Member and co-chair
Stan Bentvelsen
David Charlton
Lucy Edge
Patricia Hodgson
JT Janssen
Jana Kolar
Jayne Lawrence
Angeli Moeller
Andrew Pontzen
Hitesh Thakrar
Carsten Welsch

Council Observers:
Julia Sutcliffe, CSA DBT
Keith Grainge, Chair of Science Board (PPAN)
Howard Stone, Chair of Science Board (F&L)
STFC Secretariat

STFC Executive Board:
Roger Eccleston, Exec Director National Labs: Large Scale Facilities
Liz Fellman, Exec Director Strategy, Planning & Comms
Dave Newbold, Exec Director National Labs: Science & Technology
Paul Vernon, Exec Director Business & Innovation
Chris Wrench, Director of Finance
Keith Zimmerman, COO
Grahame Blair, Exec Director, Programmes

Other attendees:
STFC Strategy team – Items 1-5
STFC Head of Communications and UKRI Head of Council Communications - Item 5

## 1 Welcome and introductions

1.1 Michele Dougherty (MKD) welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the new ex-officio member Julia Sutcliffe, the Chief Scientific Advisor (CSA) from the UK Department for Business and Trade (UK DBT). All attendees introduced themselves and Howard Stone noted it was his first council meeting as the new Chair of Science Board (Facilities and Labs).

1.2 Julia Sutcliffe disclosed that she is a Council member of Innovate UK.

## 2 Allocations update including new UKRI funding model

2.1 Chris Wrench (CW) presented the new UKRI funding model, which divided allocations into three buckets in a broadly 50:25:25 ratio:

2.1.1 Bucket one - curiosity-driven research

2.1.2 Bucket two - targeted programmes predominantly aligned with the industrial strategy and other government missions

2.1.3 Bucket three - supporting businesses to scale and remain in the UK

2.2 In addition, there was an enabling platform, which provided underpinning support across all three buckets.

2.3 The governance of each bucket varied, with traditional council structures managing curiosity-driven research, responsible officers overseeing mission-focused programmes, and Innovate UK playing a key role in business innovation.

2.4 STFC had received its indicative allocation, with the final confirmation of allocations to Councils expected in the spring. The process of aligning legacy commitments and legal obligations with the new structure was ongoing. Allocation of digital research infrastructure funding was also still outstanding. There was welcomed ring-fenced funding to address critical estates risks as part of the UKRI estates modernisation programme.

2.5 Attendees discussed the impact of the new model on STFC facilities, including the need to secure funding for key assets.

2.6 Science Board PPAN had requested further information on how the funding for curiosity driven research across all the different research councils had evolved from the pre-bucket era to today, but this was not available.

2.7 Council members sought more information about how much income was already coming from external funding and targets for additional revenue. It was noted that STFC facilities were already supporting across the eight industrial growth sectors and this had previously been mapped.

## 3 Transforming STFC

3.1 Roger Eccleston (RE) and Keith Zimmerman (KZ) provided updates on the future evolution of STFC.

3.2 A new vision for STFC was being developed to provide a compelling future for staff and to guide the transformation programme and decision making. This was still work in progress but centred around one STFC, with two separate but complementary missions.

3.3 An overview of the transformation programme was provided, which was driven by the need for STFC to achieve a sustainable financial position by the end of the spending review period (end of financial year 2029/30). The programme included work streams focused on efficiencies and cost savings, organisational reform and pivoting towards industrial activities to generate additional revenue.

3.4 It was noted that it will take time to deliver some of the cost savings and these would be phased over the spending review period. Some proposals needed further development, but this would be taken forward as part of the transformation programme.

3.5 Council members requested more detailed information on work streams and long-term planning.

3.6 It was suggested that the Industry and Business Board could help advise on growth of income generation.

3.7 Council welcomed the positive focus on the vision for STFC and looking to the future. The role of facilities and campuses was felt to be compelling but needed further development and significant improvement was required to articulate an exciting vision for PPAN.

## 4 Science Board PPAN Prioritisation process

4.1 Keith Grainge (KG) outlined the process for prioritising and making recommendations to STFC's core PPAN research programmes.

4.2 Science Board PPAN had developed a set of guiding principles including scientific excellence, value for money, balance, and the protection of grants and student numbers.

4.3 The process for developing financial scenarios included issuing a proforma adapted from a previous balance of programmes review to gather information. It was important to consider the impacts of potential reductions to each project to enable options analysis and ensure a sustainable and world-class programme.

4.4 Council agreed that the Science Board would not be able to complete their work without this information. Members also recognised that although painful, it would be better to stop/slow some projects and allow future headroom for new things, rather than salami slicing across everything leading to a sub-optimal programme.

4.5 The current timescales for the review were very tight and did not allow sufficient time to consult with advisory panels. Based on lessons learnt from previous exercises this could risk the quality of the recommendations.

4.6 It was agreed that advisory panels should be consulted and that the prioritisation process will be extended to allow community input.

4.7 The group recognised that Science Board (PPAN) was taking on a very difficult task and should be highly commended for this and the critical nature of their advice.

## 5 Communications Plan

5.1 STFC Head of Comms presented a timeline for communications, highlighting key milestones through to April. These events were intended to inform staff and stakeholders about the implications of the funding situation and STFC transformation activities.

5.2 The group agreed that the community must be informed about the reality of funding challenges and that moving forward it was also important to include opportunities for two-way feedback.

5.3 It was noted that work was underway to coordinate communications with other research councils to avoid inconsistent messaging and confusion across the sector. The group agreed that this was important for effective stakeholder management.

## 6 Closing remarks

6.1 MKD thanked everyone for a constructive meeting.