Minutes of the STFC Council meeting

15th January 2026

Caxton House, London

Attendees

Council members:
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

Other attendees:
Adrian Bevan, Deputy Chair of Science Board (F&L) – Items 5 and 6
Dave Newbold, Exec Director National Labs – Items 5, 6 and 8
Ralph Aßmann, Chair of the Accelerator Review – Item 6
STFC Accelerator review secretariat – Item 6
Grahame Blair, Executive Director, Programmes – Item 6 and 8

1 Welcome and introductions

1.1 Andy Schofield welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1.2 It was noted that Carsten Welsch had a conflict of interest with the Accelerator Review item due to his role with the Cockcroft Institute.

2 Minutes and Actions from December 2025

2.1 The minutes from 17th December virtual meeting were approved as an accurate record without corrections.

2.2 The outstanding actions were complete, except for one which was in progress.

3 Reflections on the joint meeting with the Executive Board

3.1 Concern was raised that the communication plan presented the previous day was insufficient and that there needed to be a detailed plan that would give clarity for all stakeholders, with appropriate feedback mechanisms. *[Secretary's note – there is a more detailed plan, but this was not presented at the meeting].*

3.2 A letter to the particle physics, astronomy and nuclear physics (PPAN) community was planned to go out later in the month and it was agreed that this would ideally be synchronised with the all-staff talk. It was agreed this would be shared with Council for input.

3.3 Council highlighted the importance of coordinated communications to inform staff, the research community, and stakeholders including other research councils and facility users.

3.4 More generally, greater clarity on the new UKRI funding model and the explainer was requested.

3.5 Council welcomed that UKRI was providing opportunities for applied research and greater industrial engagement in bucket two. This would provide university partners with new opportunities aligned with the government priorities for impact and growth. However, it would require a cultural change within the research community to fully embrace these opportunities as well as clear messaging on how to access the new funding streams and pathways for career development.

4 Executive Chair update

4.1 Michele Dougherty (MKD) provided an update on recent developments. This included:

- 4.1.1 The funding model for the Hartree Centre was changing although it would continue to operate under STFC governance and will maintain its focus on industry engagement and partnerships.

- 4.1.2 Discussions were underway with the Diamond Light Source board and stakeholders about closer collaboration.

4.2 It was noted that work was underway to harmonise risk registers across UKRI and it was agreed to provide an update at a future meeting.

Science and Technology Facilities Council

5 Science Board F&L update

5.1 Adrian Bevan presented an overview from the November 2025 Science Board Facilities and Labs meeting, which had been held at UK ATC. This included:

5.1.1 A highlight of the tours organised was the MOONs detector which was now being sent to Chile for installation at the European Southern Observatory and presentations on the LISA Pathfinder mission and other scientific achievements.

5.1.2 A Hartree update, which showcased the successes and benefits of STFC innovation.

5.1.3 STFC public outreach activities and the strong engagement at the UK ATC open day.

5.1.4 80-90% success rates for start-ups at STFC sites and whether the model could be shared more widely.

5.1.5 The International Accelerator Review had been well received by Science Board.

5.2 Recommendations from Science Board included:

5.2.1 STFC should investigate ways to capture facility impacts including through Research Fish and KPIs to improve reporting to stakeholders and funders.

5.2.2 Setting up a Communications task-and-finish group to support the STFC transformation.

5.2.3 Encouraging project management training for doctoral students.

5.2.4 Considering the strategic value of case studentships especially to engage companies with tech transfer.

5.3 It was noted that the high level of survival of start-ups was in part due to the ecosystems on STFC's campuses including unique capability from STFC and key anchor tenants.

6 Accelerator International Review

6.1 Ralph Aßmann (RA) presented findings from the review, which was tasked with advising on whether STFC should continue to fund UK accelerator science and technology and what a world-class programme should look like.

6.2 The review confirmed that the UK has had a pioneering role in accelerator science and technology from the beginning and currently operated world-class accelerator research infrastructures and institutes.

6.3 There were four areas where the UK was competitive at the highest international level, which should be the focus on future programmes:

6.3.1 Sustainable RF accelerator technologies for high-power accelerators, optimising efficiency and stability.

6.3.2 Expanding application reach of RF and plasma accelerators in medicine, materials science, defence and industry.

6.3.3 Novel accelerator concepts, particularly those combining particle and high-power laser technologies.

6.3.4 AI-assisted control and optimisation to enhance performance, reliability and efficiency.

6.4 There was a strong case for maintaining national capability which provided international standing and industrial competitiveness.

6.5 The review recommended establishing a coherent national strategy for accelerator science, defining priorities, improving efficiency and creating an advisory panel for strategic and industrial input.

6.6 Council raised a number of points for clarification.

6.7 Council thanked RA and the team for a comprehensive report.

7 Accelerator International Review – Council only

7.1 It was noted that several recommendations had been made by the Accelerator Review. Given funding uncertainties, Council did not feel able to make any decisions at this point but agreed that an accelerator strategy was required.

7.2 Council advised on greater marketing of the industry benefits and utilising multiple communication streams to highlight commercial advantages.

7.3 It was also commented that the accelerator capability and facilities at Daresbury supported the government's regional growth plans for the Liverpool-Manchester corridor.

8 Science Board PPAN update

8.1 Keith Grainge provided a comprehensive overview of the December 2025 Science Board PPAN meetings. This included:

8.1.1 Science Highlights:

8.1.1.1 Solar neutrinos were detected using, for the first time, coherent elastic neutrino-nucleus scattering in the LUX-ZEPLIN dark matter experiment.

8.1.1.2 Latest LHCb results on charge-parity violation in beauty and charm.

8.1.2 An update on UK Space Frontiers 2035, which was the UK Space Agency's pilot for a 10 year programme for space science and exploration.

8.1.3 A discussion on the UKRI Infrastructure Fund and impacts of UKRI's Executive Committee's recent deprioritisation of LHCb 2030+ and EIC projects. Science Board was concerned that it had not been consulted.

8.1.4 The peer review panel for particle physics theory consolidated grants was reconvening because there was not a ranked list and the STFC Executive Board did not support the proposal to further reduce investigator time as this would take it to an unacceptable level.

8.1.5 The Astronomy grants panel recommended that there be a minimum of 40 Small Awards and then either three or one Large Award depending on what funding was available. Preparations were underway for the next Nuclear Physics grants round.

8.1.6 Science Board flagged that reductions and delays to issuing grants was causing university resourcing issues and meant that the field of Particle Physics (Theory) missed the January international recruitment deadlines for post doctoral research assistants (PDRAs) for 2026.

8.1.7 Several Statements of Interest (SOIs) for astronomy had been reviewed. Given the current uncertainties, Science Board recommended pausing the next SOI.

8.2 It was noted that the UKRI Executive Committee had had to make hard decisions about the UKRI infrastructure portfolio, which had been based upon expert advice from the cross-UKRI Infrastructure Advisory Committee. Moving forward, Council advised on clearer communication and the importance of managing expectations.

8.3 Council discussed the particle physics theory consolidated grants and raised concern about funding investigators at very low percentages and the practicalities of distributing PDRAs amongst many academics. An alternative model was discussed that would increase the number of PDRAs and only fund principal investigators but at higher levels. However, it was noted this could have equality implications as co-investigators would not be funded in this scenario and they tended to be early careers.

8.4 Council supported the advice to pause the next SOI call.

9 EDI Update

9.1 Council noted the update and agreed to have a more detailed discussion at a future meeting.

9.2 It was suggested that there should be more about social mobility in the next EDI plan.

10 Closing remarks

10.1 Future meetings were noted:

10.1.1 12th March virtual meeting.

10.1.2 13th and 14th May in person, at UK ATC, Edinburgh.

10.2 An STFC Industry Day would take place on 2nd June 2026 and Council members were offered the option to participate in company selection and briefing sessions.