Science and Technology Facilities Council

MINUTES OF THE 12th MEETING OF STFC COUNCIL HELD BY VIDEOCONFERENCE 24th MARCH 2020

Attendees	
Council Members:	Mark Thomson (chair) (MAT) Richard Kenway (Co-chair) (RK) Maggie Aderin-Pocock (MAP) Isabelle Baraffe (IB) Mike Dunne (MD) (pm only) Karen Holford (KH) (am only) Anupam Ojha (AO) Hiranya Peiris (HP) Sheila Rowan (SR) Tony Ryan (TR) (pm only) Frances Saunders (FS) (pm only)
Apologies:	Dick Elsy David Rugg
In Attendance:	Ben Olivier- Observer Ruth Elliot (RE) – UKRI observer Jayne Lawrence (JL) – Chair of Science Board Maya Riddle (MR) Private Secretary Janice Masone (JM) Minutes Secretary
Invited Guests:	Item 3 – Peter Noble, Neil Geddes and Mark Affonso Item 5 – David Colling, Peter Clarke and Neil Geddes Item 6 – Amber Vater, Neil Geddes, Liz Fellman and Chris Mutlow Items 7/8 – Liz Fellman and Grahame Blair Item 9 – Peter Noble and Mark Affonso

INTRODUCTION		
Chair, Mark Thomson		
1.	**Welcome and opening comments**	
	1.1	MAT welcomed everyone to the twelfth meeting of STFC Council, which was held entirely by videoconference in order to comply with government guidance regarding travel and social contact during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic.
	1.2	Apologies were received from David Rugg and Dick Elsy who was unable to join as he is playing a vital role in coordinating UK industry in the supply of ventilators and other lifesaving equipment.
	1.3	MAT reminded Council members that they are required to keep the Secretary informed of any changes to their personal register of interests as they arise.
	1.4	Welcome and introductions were made for Ben Olivier who was attending Council for the first time as an observer before his official membership began on 1 April 2020 .
2.	**Minutes, Matters Arising and Actions from 30th January 2020 – STFC (UKRI) 20/06**	
	2.1	Council approved the minutes from 30th January 2020
	2.2	The actions from January will be reviewed in May.
	2.3	**Matters Arising** None noted.
3.	**Business Continuity/Coronavirus update**	
	MAT invited Peter Noble (PN), Neil Geddes (NG) and Mark Affonso (MA) to give Council an update on STFC's plans for the COVID-19 pandemic.	
	3.1	<u>Introduction</u> i. Council received a brief overview of STFC's business continuity plans prior to the Coronavirus outbreak and a more detailed update on how STFC ensured a rapid response to changing government guidance, planning for transition and recovery and consideration of prospective risks.
	3.2	<u>STFC Business Continuity</u> i. Over late 2019 and early 2020 PN and his team worked to develop robust business continuity processes to manage and keep the organisation running through low, medium, high levels of disruption in respect of managing legal/regulatory, service delivery, financial and reputational risks over various amounts of time. ii. This work began before the COVID-19 pandemic but has enabled the organisation to respond quickly in a proportionate and measured way to the swiftly evolving situation. **Council agreed it would be useful to discuss STFC's Business Continuity model at the July meeting**.
	3.3	<u>Planning for Transition and Recovery</u>

		i. PN outlined STFC's planning activities for dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and briefly described the four alert levels that drive these activities. This includes establishing an STFC Masterplan for Coronavirus to support the transitional phase for approximately 3-6 months by empowering strong local leadership with Executive coordination, aligned with UKRI and with oversight from STFC Executive Board and Council oversight. ii. As of 24 March 2020, STFC is at Level 3: Delay -which limits interpersonal contact to delay spread of coronavirus and continue business where possible. A move to Level 4: (Suspension) was expected imminently. STFC is working closely with UKRI with the aim of keeping the organisation running with staff safety and wellbeing being the highest priority during this challenging and unprecedented situation. iii. Council asked about arrangements for building contractors working on the RAL site and it was confirmed that the main contractor, in line with other large contractors across the UK, has taken the decision to pause work for an initial period of three weeks. MA confirmed that work has already begun to assess the financial implications of delaying or slowing construction. iv. Council discussed the challenges for Campus Tenants during this time and heard that in the first instance they are directed to government guidance and support but that STFC is working with UKRI to develop strategies for longer-term support. v. Plans are underway to develop an STFC-wide recovery framework which will prioritise and accelerate STFC's business continuity activities through Levels 4,3,2 and business as usual. The plan will review potential ways of working and include ongoing tracking of risks such as sickness, supply chain, payments, financial forecasting, planning and monitoring.
	3.4	<u>STFC's Coronavirus related activities</u> i. Council members were keen to hear what STFC is doing to in support of the research effort and whether there was central coordination of these efforts at UKRI Level. RC@H, CLF and Diamond are actively contributing through existing collaboration mechanisms. ii. There are further potential opportunities for STFC to contribute in HPC, protein modelling, drug discovery and data modelling which STFC has flagged through UKRI who is coordinating efforts across the Research Councils. Council members advised ensuring that these "good news" stories are published on STFC and UKRI's websites regularly.
	3.4	<u>Coronavirus-Prospective Risks</u> iii. Council discussed the risks and proposed mitigation identified with managing the organisation during the pandemic. These included the immediate challenges associated with home working and maintaining productivity and longer-term ones around the uncertainty in the duration of a Level 4 suspension and developing the agility to manage periodic lockdowns in the future. iv. Council was reassured that mitigation was in place to manage these risks. Guidance for home working has been implemented and in the longer term, STFC's 3 (+) month transition plan and the work underway to model and

		reciprocate Level 3-4 escalation. v. Council will be kept updated as the situation evolves
Chair, Richard Kenway		
4.	**Executive Chair Update**	
	4.1	Richard Kenway (RK) invited Mark Thomson (MAT) to give an update on events and issues at STFC since the last meeting in January 2020.
		Strategy Overview
	4.2	STFC Strategy Map i. STFC Senior staff provided feedback on the Strategy Map at the Leadership Conference held in February 2020 and a number of updates were made as a result which were highlighted in the presentation. Council members have been heavily involved in the development of the Strategy Map and supported these updates, particularly noting the new wording for STFC's aim to develop STEM skills at all levels needed by UK research and industry. ii. Council members discussed the new Operational Excellence goal, agreeing this was a useful addition, encompassing all aspects of running a complex organisation like STFC. Council suggested referring to a "healthy working environment" in the enabler for creating a safe, modern and sustainable working environment when it is next updated. UKRI 2025 project iii. In January, Council received a presentation from Isobel Stephen on UKRI's plans to develop a strategy for UKRI that clearly sets out what the organisation will deliver, how it will be done and how performance will be measured. iv. Phase 1, to engage staff in the completion of a high-level externally facing summary of strategic goals, performance targets and operating model is due to be completed at end of March. Phase 2 will run through April and May and will focus on external engagement on the high level strategy. It remains to be seen if the timeline will be impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown.
		Corporate Update
	4.3	STFC Council i. Over the last few months, STFC was delighted to welcome three new members to Council, Maggie Adarin-Pocock (MAP), Hiranya Peiris (HP), and most recently, Ben Olivier (BO) who officially starts on 1 April 2020. ii. Council members were pleased to note that membership for both Richard Kenway (RK) and Tony Ryan (TR) had been extended to March 2021. RK and TR are highly respected and their experience and loyalty is appreciated. iii. This was the last Council meeting for Karen Holford, (KH). On behalf of everyone at STFC, MAT led Council members in thanking her and wishing her all the best for the future. Executive Team: iv. Council members strongly advised MAT to continue with the recruitment exercises for the Executive Director, BID and Executive Director, National Laboratories-Large Facilities despite the current disruption.

		UK Government update v. Council discussed the new appointments relevant to STFC and UKRI and agreed it was good news that a dedicated science minister was now in place. The Budget vi. MAT highlighted the aspects of the Budget, announced on 11 March that were relevant to STFC. These included the increase in public R&D spending to £22bn per year and £800m investment in a new "blue skies" funding agency to fund "high risk, high reward research". Council members agreed it would be interesting to see how this new agency developed over the coming months. STFC Budgets vii. MAT outlined STFC's own budget planning work and Council noted the overarching aim to protect constant capacity whilst recognising the underlying pressures, particularly in core science. People Survey viii. Council members were impressed by the improvement in STFC's response rate to this survey and extended thanks to Peter Noble (PN) for his work here. There were good results for "My Team" and "My Work" but, unsurprisingly, the survey highlighted weaknesses in Leadership, Pay and Benefits which are being addressed through the Deep Dive work. Infrastructure Advisory Committee ix. This committee will advise UKRI ExCo on funding decisions for time bound larger scale investments above the delegated limit of any single Council. It is not an open call for proposals and the fund will not support ongoing development or maintenance to existing infrastructure that is not specifically focused on R&I infrastructure. x. Council members reviewed the overall approach and committee membership and were pleased to note that Sheila Rowan will be representing STFC. xi. Council members will have an important role in STFC's process for identifying strong projects to put forward for consideration. These will be discussed at the May meeting. Timelines for identifying priority projects are challenging and the process for identifying all the options is still under consideration.
		Recent Events and highlights
	4.3	Recent Executive Chair visits and events i. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, MAT hosted (former) minister Chris Skidmore and 2018 Nobel Laureate Donna Strickland at the EPAC ground-breaking ceremony held at RAL and a visit by BEIS CSA John Loughhead to the Hartree Centre at Daresbury. Science Highlights ii. STFC continues to support and produce amazing science. CLF's Octopus facility had a major role in the research of a potential drug molecule that shows promise for tackling bacterial infections that are resistant to antibiotics iii. Daresbury hosted the DUNE Anode Plane Assembly Factory Workshop in January and served as a benchmark for attendees who will be setting up their own factories iv. Council was delighted to hear that UK ATC's work on the MOONS new infrared spectrograph for ESO's VLT in Chile was completed on time and the

		delivery went to plan. v. PEARL, a small but powerful system to accelerate artificial intelligence and machine learning for analysing large scale data sets, is now available to the "AI for Science" community. This is hosted by the Scientific Computing Department at RAL, if Council members wanted further information please contact MR who will pass details on to Tom Griffin.
		Live Issues
	4.4	MAT gave a detailed update on the current issues facing STFC. Specific comments were as follows: i. Science Estates: UKRI recognise that urgent interventions are required to address the issues identified in the Estates Condition Survey. An Estates Strategic Outline Case is being developed and should be ready later in the Spring. Council confirmed they would like to see a high level summary of this. ii. Hartree Phase 4 (National Centre for Artificial Intelligence Solutions- NCAIS): The Hartree Phase 4 Business Case will undergo a Gateway Review in May and will be discussed at BEIS PIC in June. Noting possible delays, a bridging arrangement has been proposed and tentatively accepted by IBM. iii. Advanced Instrumentation Testbed (AIT): Council members were interested to hear about this new facility and neutron detector which will be built as an extension to STFC's Boulby underground lab. This is a US/UK collaboration and will provide opportunities to upgrade facilities at Boulby and enable future joint activities with the US DOE. iv. DiRAC: There is now a critical need to upgrade this facility. It is supported by a strong case and fits with aims of the emerging e-infrastructure strategy. Council heard that the funding line for this upgrade is as yet unclear though the formation of a Digital Infrastructure Advisory Committee reporting to the Infrastructure Advisory Committee may provide a possible route. v. ESS: MAT provided Council with an update on the latest negotiations regarding ESS. vi. ILC/Hyper-Kamiokande in Japan: The nature of the UK's involvement in the International Linear Collider and Hyper-Kamiokande experiment in Japan was due to be discussed in a joint meeting during April but this is unlikely given the current situation.
Chair: Mark Thomson		
5.	**STFC Computing Resource –STFC (UKRI) 20/07**	
	5.1	Council welcomed David Colling (DC -chair of STFC's Computing Advisory Committee), Peter Clarke (PC - Lead for IRIS) and Neil Geddes (NG) to the meeting for this discussion. IRIS is a coordinating body with the aim of creating a common e-Infrastructure for STFC science - https://www.iris.ac.uk/
	5.2	At the January meeting of Council, Science Board flagged the community's concerns about the future provision of computing resource and highlighted the increasingly important role of computing in enabling the delivery of world-class science. IRIS, and other members of the STFC community, have been strongly engaged in flagging this issue and its impacts, particularly as work has now begun to develop an e-infrastructure strategy for UKRI. .

		Whilst downstream planning and stable funding for computing has been a long-standing issue for STFC, the community acknowledged there has been some progress over the last couple of years. MAT confirmed that STFC leadership know that this is in an important issue and has a good understanding of the requirements; it is just a matter of how to tension funding for this against other priorities for the organisation.
	5.4	Council members recognised this as a serious issue for the academic community as a whole. They discussed the various ways that computing costs are currently funded across STFC and the important, and the increasingly important role that computing resource has across all scientific disciplines in the UKRI Research Councils. Two possible ways forward emerged from discussion; (a) Science Board could have a role in assessing computing requirements for projects that are past the PPRP stage so that STFC management could have an indication of future needs. (b) Council strongly recommended that STFC needs a coherent plan to interact and align with UKRI's emerging e-infrastructure strategy.
	5.5	Noting that James Hetherington, UKRI e-Infrastructure Director, will be attending the May Council meeting, it was agreed that RK will draft a short document outlining Council's view of the computing resource issue and what the priorities for STFC are in this space.
6.	**Space Deep Dive draft report- STFC (UKRI) 20/08**	
	6.1	Council welcomed Amber Vater (AV), Neil Geddes (NG), Chris Mutlow (CM) and Liz Fellman (LF) to the meeting for this discussion.
	6.2	A National Space Council is being established at Cabinet office level. In response to this the UKRI CEO has requested a "deep dive" view of space related activities across UKRI. STFC was appointed to lead on this work and sought insight and feedback from Council on the developing report.
	6.3	Over the last few months, a cross-UKRI working group has been meeting on a weekly basis to work on the draft report and recommendations. Council had the opportunity to review the Terms of Reference for the working group and recommendations noting that the draft report is not yet ready for wider circulation. **Text from this section has been redacted : official sensitive** .
	6.4	Council members reviewed the scope and recommendations and asked questions about the purpose of the exercise and whether opportunities for sharing/processing data emerging from space related activities would be a consideration. Council learned that the use of data was beyond the scope of this activity, which is to catalogue and coordinate on space related activities from across UKRI in order to ensure that it can operate from a positon of strength on the National Space Council.
	6.5	**Council looks forward to receiving an update on progress at the next meeting.**
7.	**Science Board Report- STFC (2020) 20/09**	
	7.1	Jayne Lawrence (JL) was invited to give the update from Science Board. Liz Fellman (LF) and Grahame Blaire (GB) were present for this discussion.

	7.2	JL began with reporting on some of the recent highlights from STFC facilities. These included: i. Diamond Light Source supporting researchers in the work to discover more about the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) virus, using non-infectious samples. ii. Launch of the European Solar Orbiter on 10th Feb 2020 to begin a 7 year ESA mission to observe polar region of the sun
	7.3	Council members discussed the huge amount of work that has gone into the Balance of Programmes exercise, noting that UKRI was fully engaged in understanding STFC's programme activities. The emerging themes were noted, final outputs will be reviewed by Council when they are complete.
	7.4	JL highlighted some examples of the UKSA/STFC Dual Key Relationship. Along with Science Board, UKSA endorses the outcomes of the Astronomy Grants Round. Science Board has been asked to endorse the UKSA investment into the space mission and their instrumentation as part of ESA opportunities. Council agreed this was a useful relationship.
	7.5	Council discussed the interactions between Science Board and advisory panels and noted the Science Board is seeking to clarify roles, activities and outputs on both sides. Frances Saunders (FS) explained that FSAG (which looks at multi-disciplinary facilities) has been considering mechanisms for getting input from Science Board and its advisory panels on the science cases for each facility.
8.	**Interface between Science Board and Council - STFC (UKRI) 20/10**	
	8.1	MAT invited Richard Kenway (RK) to lead the discussion on this item at the meeting. Liz Fellman (LF) and Grahame Blaire (GB) were present for this discussion.
	8.2	Richard Kenway (RK) began by highlighting some of the challenging work undertaken by Science Board over the last couple years in providing advice to STFC on its core programme. RK felt that whilst Science Board and Council understand each other's challenges, there is often a shortfall in the offer practical support in these instances. In RK's observation, this pattern was also present between Science Board and its advisory panels. .
	8.3	RK's paper included a list of questions that explored whether Council is getting the right level of information from Science Board and whether there was a need to improve the way Council provides advice. Main points were noted as follows: i. JL, as chair of Science Board, welcomed RK's paper stating that Science Board would appreciate knowing the views of Council, or having strong, clear guidance from them in certain instances. TR, as former chair of Science Board, concurred with this view, adding that it was often unclear what messages should be relayed back to Science Board from Council. ii. Council members, particularly those new into the role, felt that often they were not given enough information to form a meaningful view and give considered feedback on specific issues. iii. More longstanding members of Council and former Science Board members pointed out that the format of the report and presentation had not been updated in several years and was passed down to each chair upon their appointment. Council was of the view that updating the presentation format

		will ensure it remained relevant and interesting. iv. In discussion, Council members converged on the view that a broad overview of the meeting could continue to be given as part of the written report, but the presentation could bring into focus one or two issues for which Science Board would welcome specific advice or input from Council. Supporting information for these discussion items would need to be circulated in advance of the meeting v. The science highlights section of the presentation was popular with all members and something that should be retained. vi. Council members felt that Science Board had an important role in reviewing the quality of scientific cases for new investments and in horizon-scanning for new initiatives from STFC's communities.
	8.4	RK thanked Council for their input to the discussion which would be fed into the governance review currently underway and also to Science Board.
9.	**Finance and Governance Update**	
	9.1	Peter Noble (PN) and Mark Affonso (MA) were present for these discussions.
	9.2	Finance Update March 2020- STFC (UKRI) 11 Mark Affonso (MA) gave an update to Council on STFC's Financial Performance. The following points were noted: i. STFC is forecasting a net overspend **text from this section has been redacted : official sensitive** for 2019/20 **text from this section has been redacted : official sensitive**. UKRI are aware and is content that STFC should aim to deliver the agreed February forecast ii. Council noted the aspects of the Chancellor's Budget announced on 11th March as outlined in the paper. iii. Council noted the launch of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2020 (CSR) to conclude in July 2020. iv. Council endorsed EB's approach to setting provisional budget allocations based for 2020/21 pending confirmation of the formal STFC allocation with UKRI. The working assumption is flat real (inflation) with ring-fence flexibility to manage pressures. This provisional budget will be used as a baseline for assessing the financial impact of the Coronavirus pandemic.
	9.3	Risk and Assurance Update- STFC (UKRI)12 Council noted the content of the update, including the new Coronavirus risk which is now a black risk.
10.	**Any other Business**	
	10.1	Sheila Rowan (SR) reported that the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee will meet for the first time in a couple of weeks.
	10.2	Maggie Adarin-Pocock (MAP) suggested that STFC could consider packaging its wide range of educational STEM videos into scientific themes aimed at children who will be home schooling during the lockdown period. Council members agreed this was an excellent suggestion, SR pointed to a similar scheme that has been extremely well received in Scotland.

		Secretary's Note- At the beginning of the lockdown period STFC launched a social media campaign showcasing its STEM video content with a very similar aim
	10.3	Anu Ojha gave a brief, positive update on the development of the Skills Factory and praised the work put in by Joanna Hart, Associate Director, National Labs. It was agreed it would be good to schedule an update for Council at a future meeting.
	10.4	MR flagged that the May meeting was originally scheduled for 2 days, given the current situation and having to meet remotely, it was agreed to split this into 2 shorter days with plenty of breaks
11.	**Closing Remarks** MAT thanked members and guests for their contribution, and everyone agreed the first fully virtual meeting of Council had gone well. The next meeting will take place by videoconference on 28 May, a joint meeting with STFC Executive Board will be held on 27 May. Exact timing to be confirmed	