Science and Technology Facilities Council

Minutes of the STFC Council meeting - 13 May 2026

Attendees

Council members:
Michele Dougherty (Chair)
Andy Schofield (SIM)
Adrian Belton
Stan Bentvelsen
David Charlton
JT Janssen
Jana Kolar
Jayne Lawrence
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

Executive Board:
Grahame Blair, Exec Director Programmes
Roger Eccleston, Exec Director National Labs & Head of RAL
Liz Fellman, Exec Director Strategy, Planning & Comms
Paul Vernon, Exec Director Business & Innovation & Head of DL
Chris Wrench, STFC Transformation Finance Lead
Keith Zimmerman, COO

Apologies:
Angeli Moeller
Lucy Edge

Other attendees:
STFC Head of Strategy
Item 6: Science Board PPAN Strategic Lead

1 Welcome and opening remarks

1.1 Michele Dougherty welcomed Adrian Belton to his first formal meeting as a new Council member and led introductions.

2 STFC Vision STFC

2.1 A close to final version of the STFC vision and mission was presented to Council. This had been developed with inputs from a broad range of stakeholders and staff.

2.2 It was noted that the aim was to position STFC as a destination for engagement and growth, and that phrases like 'critical enabler' and 'working in partnership' were included to reflect this.

2.3 The vision incorporated the UKRI mission to advance knowledge, improve lives and drive growth, whilst emphasising STFC’s unique facilities and capabilities.

2.4 Council commented that the vision lacked specificity to STFC and inspiration and advised this be revised to highlight STFC’s unique role.

2.5 Council queried the audience and suggested that the statements could be trialled with a broader set of stakeholders to assess their effectiveness.

2.6 Michele Dougherty thanked Council members for their comments and said that the Executive Board would revisit the statements but would ultimately make the final approval.

3 Budget and income streams update

3.1 Council were given an overview of STFC’s income streams, growth trends, and challenges. Key points included:

3.1.1 Income had risen by 50% from 2022/23 to 2025/26, with sources including grants from other research councils, funding from other government departments, and commercial activities.

3.1.2 Cost recovery varied and some research had been conducted at a loss, for example, where only 80% of full economic costs were covered.

3.1.3 STFC was strengthening its portfolio management and reinstating the annual revenue reconciliation exercises to better understand the contribution of different income streams.

3.2 Council recognised the need to diversify funding sources beyond UKRI and discussed the potential from other government departments, and from national security, defence, and AI initiatives. It was noted that profits from the Campus joint ventures were reinvested back into the campuses.

3.3 European funding including Horizon Europe was discussed.

3.4 The next Framework Programme was being negotiated, which foresees the possibility of the European Commission contributing up to 20% of the costs to a construction or a major upgrade of a research infrastructure.

3.5 Campuses were discussed and it was noted that a Gateways concept was being developed as an entry point for industry.

4 Facilities & Labs prioritisation update

4.1 Council were provided with an overview of the prioritisation process for achieving savings across STFC's facilities and labs, which would ultimately determine the shape and size of STFC as an organisation.

4.2 Departments/capabilities were being grouped into programme units to assess savings options and the process involved cross-unit meetings and validation of savings.

4.3 Overall, four main strategic options for achieving savings were being developed for meetings in June.

4.4 Council discussed the technical and financial implications of closing or mothballing a major facility, including decommissioning costs, the loss of staff expertise, and the challenges of restarting the facility after a period of inactivity. Council members cautioned against closure due to the loss of sovereign capability and some alternative options for funding were discussed.

4.5 Council thanked Keith Grainge and Science Board for undertaking a very difficult process.

5 Science Board F&L prioritisation update

5.1 Howard Stone provided an update on Science Board F&L discussion and his engagement with facility directors and advisory panels. Key points included:

5.1.1 Science Board F&L noted its dependence on facility management for scenario options and advised on the development of a 10-20-year strategic roadmap for facilities.

5.1.2 Saving options were considered. More detailed costings and impact assessments were recommended by Science Board F&L as well as the importance of considering international partnerships and the broader ecosystem.

5.1.3 Concern that financial pressures could drive decisions leading to the loss of sovereign scientific capability. There was a need for clear guidance from government and research councils on which capabilities must be preserved.

5.1.4 Science Board F&L clarified that it sees its role as providing strategic advice, with responsibility for major decisions resting with STFC, UKRI Executive and the government.

5.1.5 Science Board F&L remained concerned about insufficient communication with the user community about potential impacts

5.2 Council highlighted the critical capability provided by the multidisciplinary facilities that STFC operated on behalf of UKRI and the need to strengthen ownership across the research ecosystem. It recommended that STFC provided evidence of the impact to help other research councils recognise and advocate for them.

6 SB PPAN prioritisation update

6.1 Keith Grainge provided an update on the PPAN prioritisation process. Key points included:

6.1.1 Consolidated Grants and Astronomy Grants were out of scope for the exercise. There was a steer from the PPAN community that this was the top priority.

6.1.2 A total of 48 project lines had been reviewed by Science Board and a minus 30% funding scenario had been developed. This would have severe implications for the PPAN programme.

6.1.3 Sub-groups of Science Board have been tasked with building scenarios for minus 20%, minus 10% and flat cash, including preparing impact assessment narratives.

6.2 Council asked questions and discussion points included:

6.2.1 STFC was committed to maintain postdoc numbers at 2025-26 levels, which was putting additional financial pressure on STFC.

6.2.2 Future potential rising costs of international subscriptions particularly CERN, were a major risk to the PPAN budget and funding for exploitation activities. It was agreed that a clear impact statement of this pressure was needed.

6.2.3 A light touch international review was being planned to provide advice to STFC Executive Chair. Science Board PPAN had suggested potential international experts.

6.2.4 Council advised the STFC Executive to engage with UKRI regarding computing funding for particle physics and astronomy communities.

6.3 Council thanked both Science Boards for undertaking very difficult prioritisation processes and for all their hard work.

7 STFC Transformation delivery approach & discovery insight

7.1 Council were provided with an update on the STFC transformation programme. Key points included:

7.1.1 The transformation was being governed through a steering group chaired by Keith Zimmerman as Senior Responsible Officer for the transformation programme.

7.1.2 The discovery phase was complete, and valuable insights had been gathered.

7.1.3 Extensive efforts to involve staff in the transformation process through roadshows, workshops, and surveys, ensuring that staff understand and recognise the rationale behind forthcoming changes.

7.1.4 The next phase was to develop a target operating model that aligned with the organisation’s mission and values.

7.1.5 Successful implementation would require investment in change management expertise and development of internal capability.

7.2 The council discussed the necessity of maintaining robust communication capacity, both internally and externally, to support the transformation and noted that staff pulse checks were planned.

8 Closing remarks

8.1 Michele Dougherty thanked everyone for their contributions. There would be difficult decisions ahead and she would keep Council updated between meetings.

8.2 Council acknowledged the importance of highlighting to UKRI Executive and DSIT decision-makers the possible systems-level impacts on the stability of the UK physics ecosystem.