Minutes of the STFC Council meeting - 9 June 2026

Attendees

Council members:
Michele Dougherty (Chair)
Andy Schofield (SIM)
Adrian Belton
Stan Bentvelsen
David Charlton
JT Janssen
Jana Kolar
Jayne Lawrence
Angeli Moeller
Andrew Pontzen
Hitesh Thakrar

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

Other attendees:
Grahame Blair, Exec Director Programmes
Roger Eccleston, Exec Director National Labs & Head of RAL
Chris Wrench, STFC Transformation Finance Lead
Keith Zimmerman, COO
Duncan Robertson, Interim Chief of Staff
Item 3: Members of STFC team and Dr Anneke Lubben, FSAG Chair, University of Bath

Apologies:
Julia Sutcliffe, CSA DBT
Carsten Welsch

1 Welcome and opening remarks

1.1 Michele Dougherty welcomed everyone to the extraordinary Council meeting to discuss the very hard work that the STFC transformation team and our advisory bodies had been doing.

2 STFC Facilities & Labs Prioritisation scene setting

2.1 Council were reminded of the prioritisation principles, scenario modelling and the options that had been considered:

2.2 Programme units had been formed to provide coherent options, with directors tasked with identifying measures for stopping or reducing activities, as well as exploring income generation opportunities.

2.3 Because of the shortfall against the savings required, it had been necessary to include additional measures for consideration in the Science Board Facilities & Labs and the Facilities Strategic Advisory Group (FSAG) consultations.

2.4 Council asked several points of clarification.

3 Facilities Strategic Advisory Group (FSAG) feedback

3.1 The Chair of FSAG joined for the item. FSAG included representatives from the research councils and had worked to develop pragmatic suggestions on how STFC could move forward. Feedback included:

3.1.1 Importance of protecting critical capability, in particular Diamond Light Source as it had a very broad user base but also eBIC, Muons, and Lasers for Science.

3.1.2 There was strong collective support for maintaining all three major facilities.

3.1.3 Saving measure and income generation targets were seen as ambitious and there were risks that these could take facilities to the limits of survivability.

3.1.4 FSAG recommended prioritising UKRI-funded users, proof-of-concept allocations, and commercial use.

3.1.5 STFC should continue to explore alternative access models, increasing income generation, reducing duplication between MDFs, and harnessing international partnerships.

3.2 Council discussed the importance of the facilities for other research councils and whether there might be scope for support for some of the capability that was under threat.

3.3 It was suggested that an aggregate list of commercial facility use across UKRI should be developed to enable coordinated industry engagement.

4 IS8+ sector report

4.1 Council noted the governance within STFC to oversee engagement with the IS8 areas and the work to identify opportunities that mapped onto the IS8 areas, in particular exploiting STFC's unique capabilities.

4.2 Council welcomed the approach and it was noted that more detailed discussion would be scheduled for the September Council meeting.

5 Science Board Facilities & Labs Prioritisation Recommendations

5.1 Howard Stone summarised Science Board's assessment of the savings measures being considered by STFC, which had been discussed at several extraordinary meetings.

5.2 Science Board had adopted a RAG rating system focusing on the impact to research capability with green indicating manageable risks, amber signalling significant risks, and red denoting irreplaceable capability.

5.3 Points of note included:

5.3.1 Some cuts could result in irreversible changes to the research landscape, affecting multiple disciplines across UKRI's portfolio.

5.3.2 Assumptions about finding capability elsewhere or relying on international facilities were challenged.

5.3.3 The package of measures would affect a very large number of users across a wide range of science disciplines and therefore more detailed impact assessments and substantial community consultation were advocated.

5.3.4 STFC should develop a long-term strategic plan for the 10-to-20-year horizon for what the facilities and labs should look like.

5.4 Council discussed decommissioning liabilities.

6 Update from Science Board PPAN

6.1 Keith Grainge reported on PPAN Science Board's four scenarios for project funding based on flat cash, 10%, 20%, and 30% reductions.

6.2 Key points included:

6.2.1 The 30% scenario only supported must-continue projects at minimal viable levels with high programmatic risks and stagnation of the field.

6.2.2 The 20% scenario allowed for mitigations of some of the major risks from the 30% scenario.

6.2.3 The recommended 10% scenario allowed for a major international project but reverted cuts to maximum levels for other projects.

6.2.4 The flat cash scenario presented the most balanced programme with possibility of having a healthy PPAN programme on a 10-year time scale.

6.2.5 Risks included impacting the UK skills pipeline, loss of international credibility, and reduced scientific return on subscriptions.

6.2.6 The need for protection of project funding from international subscription inflation was emphasised.

6.3 Council were concerned about the imbalance in the 10% programme recommended by Science Board PPAN and advised further consideration to enable a more balanced programme across PPAN.

6.4 It was noted that the recommendations were based on scientific excellence/impacts only and that there would be regional impacts.

7 Pathway forward & next steps

7.1 The proposed pathway would enable STFC to be financially sustainable by 2029/30. The total savings required included new pressures from PPAN postdoc commitments and impact of foreign exchange on international commitments. Additional financial support was required from UKRI over the next three years to reach a balanced position.

7.2 There were two gateway points: September 2027 to assess cost reduction progress, and April 2028 to review progress with revenue generation.

7.3 A light touch international review of the PPAN programme would be taking place at the end of June, reporting to the STFC Executive Chair.

7.4 A formal proposal was going to UKRI Executive Committee, UKRI Board and to the Minister. It was hoped that a high-level announcement would be made before parliamentary recess in July.

7.5 Further work was required and deep dives into impacts were planned over the summer.

7.6 Council emphasised the importance of highlighting the impacts and consequences of the measures being proposed. It was also essential to have a robust comms plan and it was noted that UKRI was leading on the communications.