



**MINUTES OF THE TWENTY-SECOND MEETING OF STFC COUNCIL
HELD BY VIDEOCONFERENCE
18th November 2021**

Attendees

Council Members: Mark Thomson (chair) (MAT)
Sheila Rowan(Co-chair) (SR)
Maggie Aderin-Pocock (MAP)
Jon Butterworth (JB)
Mike Dunne (MD) – pm only
Dick Elsy (DE)
Patricia Hodgson (PH)
Anu Ojha (AO)
Ben Olivier (BO)- am only
Hiranya Peiris (HP)
David Rugg (DR)
Andy Schofield (AJS)

Apologies: Pam Thomas (PT), Paul Monks (PM)

In Attendance: Ruth Elliot (RE), UKRI Finance Director & observer – pm only
Tara Shears (TS), Chair of Science Board
Maya Riddle (MR), Private Secretary
Janice Masone (JM), Minutes Secretary

Invited Guests: Liz Fellman, Exec Director Strategy, Planning & Comms – items 4 & 10
Peter Thompson, STFC HR Associate Director – items 4 & 5
Tom Britten, COO – items 4 & 5
Neil Geddes Exec Director National Labs Science & Tech – items 6 & 7
Grahame Blair, Exec Director Programmes – items 6, 8 & 9
Dave Newbold, Director Particle Physics – item 6
Paul Vernon, Exec Director Business & Innovation - item 7
June McCombie, Chair of APPE – item 8

Chair, Mark Thomson			
1. Welcome and opening comments			
1.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) welcomed everyone to the twenty-second meeting of STFC Council, which was held by videoconference.		
1.2	Mike Dunne (MD) and Ruth Elliot (RE) gave apologies for the morning session, Ben Olivier (BO) gave apologies for the afternoon session		
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. No members raised any additional conflicts with items on the agenda for this meeting.		
2.	Minutes, Matters Arising and Actions from Minutes and actions from 30th September 2021		
2.1	Council approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting held on 30 th September 2021.		
2.2	The actions from previous meetings were reviewed and were either complete or in progress		
Chair: Sheila Rowan			
3.	Report from the Executive Chair		
3.1	Sheila Rowan (SR) invited Mark Thomson (MAT) to give his presentation to Council Members. The main discussion points are noted below.		
3.2	<p><u>COVID-19 Recovery</u></p> <p>STFC made a smooth transition to Operational Level 2 since the easing of Covid-19 related restrictions in England during summer 2021. In late November STFC sites were well attended and operating at a steady state. MAT assured Council that there is flexibility to ensure STFC remains in line with government guidance should the situation change as winter approaches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council members asked how STFC monitored onsite transmission/infection rates. MAT explained that staff are encouraged to self-report through an email address monitored by STFC's Bronze Team. Covid cases are also reported through line management as part of absence management processes. These mechanisms give a good indication that onsite transmission rates are very much lower than in other parts of public life. ii. STFC management remain confident that forward planning and longer-term defences against Covid will enable the organisation to function even if public transmission rates begin to rise during the winter months. Council members continue to be impressed by STFC's response to the pandemic. 		
3.2			
3.2	<p><u>Hybrid working trial</u></p> <p>MAT's presentation included headline data for STFC's hybrid working trial. UKRI plan to report on its hybrid working trial outcomes in March 2022. Given the wider range of working environments in STFC, there are plans to pause and reflect at that point before continuing with the trial until December 2022.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council advised looking at survey data based on age and experience to see whether any preferences for onsite or remote working are more common in 		

		<p>certain demographics. Some Council members felt strongly that whilst video conferencing certainly has an important function in the modern workforce, face-to-face interactions are still the best way to share knowledge and information. It was felt younger staff and new starters particularly benefit from this.</p> <p>ii. There was a discussion about how other organisations are managing to balance hybrid working and business need and whether any common challenges have been identified. MAT confirmed that STFC is comparing experiences and sharing best practice with similar organisations through AIRTO.</p>
	3.3	<p><u>EU/EEA staff update</u></p> <p>Overall numbers of new starters from the EU/EEA are looking positive and 2021 figures are expected to increase. The majority work in the National Laboratories. Council members were encouraged to learn that staff exit data has not shown a disparity between EU nationals to UK nationals. MAT will provide a more detailed update at next meeting</p>
	3.4	<p><u>RISE Network Action Plan</u></p> <p>MAT was proud and delighted to report that Executive Board (EB) recently agreed an 11-point action plan, to pilot initiatives on behalf of UKRI Racial Inclusion and Striving for Equity (RISE) Network. The first two pilot activities are ((ii) Reverse Mentoring Programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Inclusion and Diversity Qualifications: Members of Executive Board and STFC senior managers will receive EDI training during the coming year. ii. Reverse Mentoring Programme: Council strongly supported this initiative, commenting that it provides a real opportunity for minority ethnic staff to challenge and educate senior managers. MAT has taken part and found it very insightful.
	3.5	<p><u>Spending Review</u></p> <p>Council received an update on the latest activities surrounding the Spending Review allocation at Government, UKRI and Council level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council welcomed the news of a 3-year settlement and felt it gave an opportunity to plan, although as with previous settlements, the promise of better funding in future years follows the need for hard decisions in the short term. It was felt this approach over years could threaten the UK's world leading position. ii. Council noted other recipients of government R&D funding such as ARIA and R&D budgets in other departments outside BEIS. STFC's priorities such as the Skills Factory and delivery of National Space Strategy are key areas for STFC to leverage in order to tap into these conversations. STFC's proactive visit strategy has an important role to play in getting these messages across iii. Council observed the important role played by UKRI. There is a risk that if the R&D uplift is not propagated down to the Councils, resulting effects such as cutting grants, running facilities below capacity can lead to unintended consequences. Council recommended raising awareness with stakeholders who feel empowered to support the message that UKRI's approach to Council allocations is critical to STFC's survival, STFC's unfunded pressures and high level of pre-commitments. iv. Council remained supportive of STFC's approach and priorities for the CSR.

	3.6	<p>Highlights and Live Issues</p> <p>i. Highlights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Webb Space Telescope is now in French Guyana, launch is planned for mid-late December. STFC/UKRI is planning to mark this really exciting occasion with events at UK ATC and RAL. • A new radio frequency (RF) distribution system now in place for ESS. This system is part of the UK's in-kind contribution and has been delivered on time and on budget. Council joined MAT in congratulating the team at Daresbury Labs on this successful work. • WEAVE has taken delivery of a new fibre positioner built in Oxford in preparation for first light. Thankfully staff and the facility at La Palma are all safe following the earthquake • Daresbury Laboratory is launching its new Digital Cluster in November. This exciting development will play a vital role in the Government's Levelling Up agenda in the north west. <p>ii. Live Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MAT provided an update for Council on progress in resolving major issues for Diamond, ESS, EMBL and AIT-NEO.
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Chair: Mark Thomson

	4.	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) update
	4.1	Council welcomed Maya Riddle (MR) Peter Thompson (PT) Joanne Brown (JB) Tom Britten (TB) to give an update on EDI, including a preliminary action plan arising from the joint Council/Executive Board workshop on EDI held in May 2021. The discussion at this Council meeting will also form the basis for the next joint meeting session on the new UKRI EDI strategy.
	4.2	STFC is serious in its commitment to create a more equitable and inclusive workplace, but there are challenges. Using head hunters for senior appointments, and roles feeding into senior appointments has met with limited success although have been very effective for Council. MAT sought support from Council members in improving diversity as vacancies arise in their field of expertise, their knowledge of their field will be critical in identifying a more diverse range of candidates.
	4.3	Discussion focused on exit interviews. PT explained this is currently done via an Oracle based survey and only has a low take up rate (around 24%). Gender data is easily available because this is a mandatory field, but it is difficult to identify or isolate any other characteristics. One of the action points from RISE network is to improve this.
	4.4	Council emphasised the crucial importance of the exit interview to the health of an organisation and felt that an online survey was not adequate to deliver this. Done properly, the information from these interviews could be used to inform the STEM pay case, enable better recruitment and retention processes and potentially identify areas of bullying and harassment in the organisation. Council asked PT to explore setting up a pilot exit interview process in STFC
	4.5	At the January meeting, Council will have the opportunity to join EB in reviewing the UKRI Strategy in detail. Some Council members had seen parts of it and were disappointed to note that there was only 1 bullet on driving change.

5.	Science Board Update	
	5.1	Tara Shears (TS) was invited to give the update from Science Board. She was joined by Grahame Blair (GB) and Neil Geddes (NG).
	5.2	<p>The Science Board update highlighted serious concerns from Science Board and the Advisory Panels regarding the grants line and rising external pressure. Science Board believe the situation is unsustainable and that mitigation is no longer possible. The main points raised by the advisory panels and Council's discussion are noted below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. PPGP has stated that the levers used to mitigate pressure in previous rounds (reducing academic time and non-staff costs) will lead to a substantial loss of science and academic posts. ii. Both PPGP and AGP have little to no ability to offset above inflationary pressures, this practice only damages the UK science programme and high quality science is lost. iii. In answer to questions from Council about how cuts are made it was confirmed that the PPGP looks across the programme and bases the decision on scientific value but with no wider strategic framework in mind. The AGP has a more challenging job because of how Astronomy grants rounds are structured iv. STFC's senior management recognise all of this feedback as a fair analysis of the situation; unless there is an uplift to core funding, there will be issues.
	5.3	Connected to pressure on universities, Council discussed the policy of not naming academics on projects they may have worked on if they aren't named on the grant. Changing this would enable up and coming academics to build their reputation among their peers. It was unclear whether this practice was a condition of the grant or the university holding the grant. Grahame Blair took an action to investigate further and report back to Council in January.
6.	Particle Physics Review - presentation	
	6.1	Grahame Blair (GB) and Neil Geddes (NG) remained present and were joined by Dave Newbold (DN) for a presentation of the proposed Particle Physics Review. This presentation followed the discussion at Council in September and took into account feedback given at the time.
	6.2	<p>Council agreed that the presentation framed the issue much more clearly, addressed the concerns raised in the last discussion and made a coherent case for why this was the right time to review and develop a strategic view of priorities and balance the domestic programme with the international subscriptions. Further comments were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council members raised some questions around the boundary of the review, specifically relating to Quantum Technologies for Fundamental Physics (QTFP) and Particle Astrophysics (PA), which will be clarified for the next discussion. ii. The reduction in American investment in HiLumi LHC will have an impact on the UK, Council members recommended talking to the US team about this to clarify and quantify the impact
	6.3	After clarification of the boundaries of the review, Science Board, EB and Council will jointly agree the review group membership. The outcome will be a strategic

		framework to assist Science Board and Advisory Panels in making decisions. A paper will come to Council in January with proposed TOR for the group, the “exam questions”, operational processes and a timetable for communication with the community.
7	Industry and Business Partnership Board (IBPB) Annual report	
	7.1	MAT invited Dave Rugg (DR) and Dick Elsy (DE) to talk through some of the highlights from the IBPB. They were joined by Paul Vernon (PV).
	7.2	Council heard how the IBPB has developed into valuable sounding board for BID and agreed there was a lot more that could be done. Council supported the plan to extend membership and continue the good work of this board.
	7.3	Council discussed whether IBPB could have a role to in strengthening STFC's engagement with industry, and it was confirmed that IBPB are very enthusiastic to see this happen. The idea of holding an Industry Day at the campuses or another stakeholder dinner was explored. The last one held in 2019 was meant to kick off a series of events but unfortunately the pandemic put those activities on hold. Paul Vernon agreed to discuss this further with DE and DR offline and get a proposal together which could be shared with Council for information and feedback in due course.
8.	Advisory Panel for Public Engagement (APPE) Annual Report	
	8.1	Council welcomed the Chair of APPE June McCombie (JMc) and Jenni Chambers (JC) to the meeting. JMc and JC presented highlights from the APPE Annual update.
	8.2	JMc explained that APPE's main concerns were around the implications of removing Pathways to Impact, the development of the UKRI Public Engagement (PE) strategy and STFC's PE Strategy Refresh and, more broadly, the impact of the pandemic on public engagement activities.
	8.3	The report also highlighted the sincere gratitude from APPE for the tireless efforts of STFC's PE team in keeping up momentum despite the challenges of the pandemic. Council fully endorsed the positive comments about the STFC PE team. Their enthusiasm and hard work in continuing to inspire and engage the public with STFC science is appreciated, particularly during the pandemic and the challenges it presented. Many of the activities were powerful examples of levelling up and also aligned well with business engagement.
	8.4	The aims of the UKRI PE Strategy and who will be responsible for delivering it are still unclear. UKRI's PE team had been established 3 years ago but STFC's senior management felt it lacked purpose and direction. Council agreed to send a strong message that STFC's PE Team should feel empowered to proactively pursue STFC's PE strategy and maintain the energy and success generated from its activities. Sheila Rowan and Maya Riddle took an action to draft this message for inclusion in the Council summary report to UKRI.
9.	Finance and Governance Committee Update	
	9.1	Council welcomed Tom Britten (TB) to the meeting to present highlights from the most recent meeting of the STFC Finance and Governance Committee (FGC).

	9.2	Council was strongly supportive of the Trusted Research training designed by STFC's Trusted Research team headed by Justine Mannino. STFC is well aligned with the work happening with EPSRC and the Centre for Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI)'s database which will be an important asset for the academic community
	9.3	The FGC regularly review STFC's Corporate Risk Register (CRR) make recommendations and provide advice on mitigation strategies and risk ratings. Based on FGC's deliberations, Council reviewed STFC's CRR and made the following comments which TB will pass on to STFC's Risk Management team: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Noting that STFC's black risk for recruitment and retention had been downgraded on the UKRI corporate risk register, Council endorsed STFC's plan to maintain the black rating for this risk on its own corporate risk. Connected to this, Council welcomed the news that UKRI is working on a pay strategy to address key challenges and have some support with BEIS. ii. Council strongly recommended drafting a standalone risk for core funding (covering international subscriptions/domestic programme) as this has reputational and scientific impact. iii. Council recommended broadening the Diamond II risk which currently covers staffing to include material/supply chain issues
8. Any other business		
8.1 The following items was raised under any other business (AOB)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. TAAB- Council noted the paper including potential suggestions and recommendations around how to fund technology development. Mike Dunne (chair of TAAB) will expand on this in the next report ii. Consolidated Grant Review –In response to questions from members, MAT will check on the status of outcomes/recommendations and report back at next Council 		
9. Closing Remarks		MAT thanked members and guests for their contribution. There will be a joint meeting of Executive Board and Council on 26 th January 2022 followed by a Council meeting on 27 th January 2022.