



**MINUTES OF THE TWENTIETH MEETING OF STFC COUNCIL
HELD AT RUTHERFORD APPLETON LABORATORY AND BY VIDEOCONFERENCE
29th July 2021**

Attendees

Council

Mark Thomson (chair) (MAT)

Members:

Sheila Rowan (Co-chair) (SR)

Jon Butterworth (JB)

Dick Elsy (DE)

Mike Dunne (MD)

Patricia Hodgson (PH)

Anu Ojha (AO)

Hiranya Peiris (HP)

David Rugg (DR)

Andy Schofield (AS)

Pam Thomas (PT)

Apologies: Maggie Adarin-Pocock, Ben Olivier

In

Paul Monks (PM), BEIS Chief Scientific Advisor

Attendance:

Dan Shah (DS), UKRI Deputy Strategy Director & observer

Tara Shears (TS), Chair of Science Board

Maya Riddle (MR), Private Secretary

Janice Masone (JM), Minutes Secretary

Invited

Liz Fellman (LF), Exec Director Strategy, Planning & Comms – Items 4-7

Guests:

Grahame Blair (GB), Exec Director Programmes – Items 7, 8 & 9

Neil Geddes, Exec Director National Labs Science & Technology – Item 6

Helen Beadman (HB), Associate Director – International User Facilities – Item 8

Bryony Butland (BB), Programme Director UKRI research sustainability and infrastructure – Item 9

Mark Affonso (MA), Director of Finance – STFC – Item 10

Chair, Mark Thomson		
1. Welcome and opening comments		
	1.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) welcomed everyone to the twentieth meeting of STFC Council. Some members attended in person at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory and some by videoconference to comply with government guidance regarding travel and social contact during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic.
	1.2	The following information regarding attendance was noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Maggie Adarin-Pocock and Ben Olivier gave their apologies for this meeting ii. Mike Dunne (MD) gave apologies for the morning session iii. Council members were delighted to welcome Paul Monks (PM) BEIS Chief Scientific Advisor to the morning session of this meeting. iv. Council members welcomed Daniel Shah (DS) to the meeting. DS recently joined the UKRI Strategy Team as Deputy Director and this was his first STFC Council meeting.
	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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Mike Dunne, who was not present at the start of the meeting, declared an interest for the XFEL agenda item as he runs a free electron laser at Stanford University. No other members raised any additional conflicts with items on the agenda for this meeting.
2. Minutes, Matters Arising and Actions from 27th May 2021		
	2.1	Subject to some minor corrections, Council approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting held on 27 th May 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	<u>COVID RECOVERY AND FUTURE WAYS OF WORKING</u> Council received an update on STFC's Covid-19 recovery activities and plans for a hybrid working trial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Covid-19 Recovery: In early August, EB will consider moving STFC sites to level 2 assuming no change to current government direction of travel. Council members were pleased to learn that there was support available for staff who might be anxious about returning to work on site and for those who have found remote working a challenge. ii. International travel: Council advised ensuring strong contingency and clear processes are in place for those traveling to STFC sites from abroad and for

		<p>STFC staff who may need to travel internationally for work.</p> <p>iii. Future Ways of Working: STFC views hybrid working as an additional benefit to current flexible working conditions.</p> <p>iv. The trial will enable STFC to measure and evidence the impact of hybrid working on operational efficiency and go on to implement a policy that enables the organisation to be effective, equitable and fair for all staff.</p> <p>v. Council members shared experiences from their own organisations and advised careful calibration and definition of what hybrid and flexible working means, and how any policy in this area will affect equality, diversity and inclusion in the organisation</p>
3.2	<u>CORPORATE AND STFC HIGHLIGHTS</u>	<p>Council discussed the latest news and initiatives from STFC and UKRI.</p> <p>i. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI): Council supported the initiative to revamp and update the portraiture and photographs around the Harwell site to reflect the diversity of the modern workforce.</p> <p>ii. Environmental Sustainability: Council supported STFC's plans for carbon reduction in the current financial year by for improving the efficiency of the RAL Scientific Data Centre by installing new, energy efficient free-cooling chillers.</p> <p>iii. Health and Safety: Council was delighted to learn that STFC won the 2021 Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Industry Sector Award for Research and Development. Council commended STFC's staff for a consistently excellent performance in this area, especially given that an R&D environment is not always a naturally safe one.</p> <p>iv. Recruitment and Retention: Council members congratulated the Early Careers Team for being shortlisted (by students) in the category of "the most popular graduate recruiter in scientific research and development" sector award of the National Graduate Recruitment Awards for 2021.</p> <p>v. High Level Visits: Over the lockdown period Harwell/RAL and Daresbury had safely and successfully hosted several high level visits from senior government and UKRI officials and other stakeholders. A lot of work has gone into planning these visits and there are positive indications that this coordinated effort is raising awareness and understanding of the scale of the facilities at senior levels in BEIS, UKRI and across government.</p> <p>vi. Council members reviewed the list of forthcoming visits and encouraged strong, specific messaging, particularly thinking about government spending review priorities. The campuses and facilities have so much to offer and a great story to tell on a local, national and international scale. Council members felt it well worth emphasising how the research and innovation ecosystem reaps the benefits from them far beyond office space.</p>
3.3	<u>Live Issues</u>	<p>Council received an update on the live issues occupying STFC's senior management since the last meeting.</p> <p>i. Hartree: There is a need to make a significant financial commitment before the outcome of the current spending review is confirmed. Council</p>

		<p>recommended approaching UKRI and BEIS to provide the necessary securities. Paul Monks (PM) cautioned that whilst BEIS does consider this a priority, the department does not routinely hold unallocated funds.</p> <p>ii. Diamond: Governance arrangements, particularly for the Diamond II project, continue to be challenging. Council members felt this was indicative of a wider issue and a need for greater harmonisation across public sector research establishments (PSREs) and institutes where many different governance models were in operation.</p> <p>iii. Particle Physics Programme: Ten years of flat cash and increasing university costs have resulted in a squeezed programme. A major symptom of this is the imbalance that exists between the CERN subscription and the rest of the national programme. STFC is currently undertaking detailed financial modelling of this issue and a paper will come to Council in the autumn for discussion.</p> <p>iv. Budgets: The 2021/22 budget is challenging but manageable, and STFC is expecting similar in 2022/23. The main concerns continue to be the impact of flat/inflationary funding in the core science programme tensioned against ever-increasing costs. The outcome of the 2021 spending review will be critical. Advice and guidance from Council will be increasingly important.</p>
	3.4	<p><u>STFC Science Highlights</u> MAT was proud provide an update on just some of the recent STFC related scientific accomplishments.</p> <p>i. Thanks to £9.4m STFC ALIGO + funding to UK universities and institutes future research into the ripples in space-time caused by the death spiral of two celestial juggernauts, a neutron star and black hole</p> <p>ii. Scientists from STFC RAL Space and the Open University are collaborating on a European Space Agency (ESA) and NASA mission to investigate the occurrence and behaviour of water on the Moon</p> <p>iii. Scientists and engineers have recently been given the go-ahead to build the Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO), the world's largest radio telescope.</p>
Chair: Mark Thomson		
4.	UKRI Spending Review Update – presentation	
	4.1	Mark Thomson invited Dan Shah (DS) to give Council an update on UKRI's preparations for the 2021 Spending Review. Liz Fellman (LF) joined the meeting for this discussion.
	4.2	Council received an overview of current UKRI activities to prepare the Spending Review. UKRI has been commissioned to set out an initial view of its potential submission in early August, with high level drafts due to be with BEIS by mid-August. Submissions to Treasury (HMT) are expected to be in September.
	4.3	DS explained the work that has gone into creating the content of the bid, which is coordinated by a cross-UKRI group with representation from all councils and crosscutting areas. Executive Chairs individually and through Executive Committee have provided regular strategic oversight throughout. Various multi-year settlement scenarios have been developed with contingency plans for a second single-year settlement. Recognising the value of providing specific

		example and evidence, Council was pleased to hear the case is being developed to include exemplars of how past investments have impacted across the R&D ecosystem including the UK universities system.
	4.4	Council members engaged in an in-depth discussion with DS and shared some of the concerns around the future funding landscape from their own organisations and science communities. Council members were pleased to have the opportunity to offer advice about creating a strong bid that will appeal to politicians and the community and display UKRI's important role in delivering against key government priorities. Overall, Council members were supportive of the work undertaken to develop UKRI's submission and thanked DS and his team for their work.
	4.5	DS thanked Council for their advice and input and the opportunity to present the analysis and work underpinning UKRI's SR submission.
5.		STFC Spending Review Priorities
	5.1	MAT invited Liz Fellman (LF) to lead the discussion on this item.
	5.2	Following a meeting with the Council Spending Review sub-group, LF presented Council with an overview of STFC's spending review priorities. Council gave detailed feedback to strengthen and focus how investment in each area will enable STFC as part of UKRI to deliver government priorities particularly in the areas of Skills/futureproofing sovereign capabilities, Space, Artificial intelligence, Digital and Defence.
	5.3	LF thanked Council members for their input. An updated slide deck reflecting discussion from this meeting will be circulated to members for further feedback.
6.		Technology and Accelerator Advisory Board (TAAB) Update
	6.1	Liz Fellman (LF) was joined by Neil Geddes (NG) for the update on the latest news from the Technology and Accelerator Advisory Board (TAAB).
	6.2	At the most recent meeting of TAAB, board members discussed and gave advice on a range of topics including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. UKRI Strategic Themes which were most relevant to STFC ii. Forward plan for cross-cutting technology areas and TAAB's role in advising STFC's activities within these areas iii. Particle Physics Technology Advisory Panel (PPTAP) iv. TAAB's recommendations for the Accelerator Strategy and discussed the Accelerators Mission Statement v. UKRI Digital Research Infrastructure activities and setup of an STFC e-infrastructure Advisory Group (SEAG)
	6.3	Council was grateful to TAAB for their advice and input to a number of pressing issues facing STFC and the UK more broadly, and asked to be kept up to date on these issues as they develop.

7	Science Board update	
	7.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) invited Tara Shears (TS) to give an update from the most recent meeting of Science Board. Grahame Blair (GB), Liz Fellman (LF) were present for this item.
	7.2	<p>Council noted with interest the science highlights covered in TS's report and felt they all gave a good account for investment in UK science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. ISIS small angle neutron scattering (SANS) instrument has a key role in developing an alternative to antibiotics for killing bacteria ii. Year 3 Dark Energy Survey involving researchers from UK universities released results containing the most precise measurement of universe composition and growth to date. iii. Researchers in UK universities contribute to resolving a long standing mystery involving the source of Jupiter's x-ray auroral flares
	7.3	Discussion at Council focused on Science Board's observations around project management for large, complex Particle Physics, Astronomy and Nuclear Physics (PPAN) projects. Science Board has increasingly found that proposals are often weak in this area either through lack of resource or through lack of awareness. In any case, Council fully concurred with Science Board's concerns regarding the additional risk, which can arise from weak project management.
	7.4	Council supported Science Board's assertion that the RAL Project Office is a valuable asset to the community and urged STFC to take steps to raise its profile and develop or at least maintain it as a resource. Council advocated strengthening processes to make project management a mandatory requirement for grant proposals and advised STFC management to update guidance for PPAN projects accordingly. GB and LF agreed to take this forward.
	7.5	Council members thanked TS, GB and LF for an interesting update and discussion.
8.	European X-Ray Free Electron Laser (XFEL)	
	8.1	Grahame Blair (GB) and Helen Beadman (HB) were present for this discussion. Mike Dunne, who declared an interest in this subject, did not take part in the discussion.
	8.2	In 2024, the European XFEL will change its cost repartition model for allocating operating costs to shareholders. The new model is based on 50% facility share and 50% science usage. The UK's usage is larger than its facility share (currently 2.13%) so this change will result in a subscription increase for the UK. A European XFEL Council working group is considering measures to mitigate the impact of the new cost model for both high and low-using shareholders, a final decision will be made in November 2021.
	8.3	To better understand how the UK community currently used the facility and whether that was expected to grow, Council reviewed the input and advice provided by STFC's advisory panels. Generally, advisory panel advice indicated that whilst facility usage will certainly grow; it is difficult at this stage to quantify how much as there had not yet been a "standard" year for comparison.

	8.4	In June, STFC's Executive Board (EB) considered a range of options and recommended proceeding with option D-, which did not place a cap on UK usage with subscription only limited by a facility cap. Council members carefully weighed up the merits of each option alongside the advice from STFC advisory panels and EB and strongly endorsed EB's recommendation for option D. It was felt this option presented the best opportunity for the UK XFEL community to grow without constraint and represented the best value for money for the UK.
9.	Research System Sustainability- Presentation	
	9.1	Bryony Butland (BB) joined, with Grahame Blair (GB) remaining for the discussion of this item.
	9.2	This recently established programme aims to examine and address the unintended consequences of current funding policies, particularly around the operation of the Full Economic Costing (FEC). There is growing evidence to show that these policies leave research organisations unable to plan or invest for the future, cover long-term costs or respond quickly to new opportunities and priorities. If a more financially sustainable model is not found, it will reduce the ability of UK researchers and research organisations to conduct research. The UKRI Board recently agreed the high-level aims and structure of the programme that will deliver this solution.
	9.3	Council shared their views on the aims of the programme and the issues facing many research organisations. Council members broadly supported the aims of this programme and saw it as a vital tool for resolving the current R&D funding crisis, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. However, Council emphasised that any reform should not result in a cut to research volume, which could have real consequences for UK universities in a global market. Council members will encourage their university colleagues to engage and share data to make a collective case for positive reform
	9.4	BB thanked Council members for their feedback and ideas. Council was interested to see how the programme will evolve and invited BB to return in late 2021/early 2022 for an update.
10.	Finance & Governance update	
	10.1	Mark Affonso (MA) joined the meeting to give a brief overview of the most recent Finance and Governance Committee (FGC) meeting.
	10.2	<p>Council noted the content of the paper and the following points were raised in discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Trusted Research: Council joined FGC in extending thanks and appreciation to Justine Mannino for the positive impact and huge amount of work done to ensure STFC is ahead of the curve on this issue. Council was pleased to note that STFC is also ahead of many external organisations. ii. Financial planning/budgets: MA highlighted the work of the Finance Team who are busy delivering rapidly changing multiple allocations and undertaking a complex tensioning exercise. Council agreed the Finance Team had put in a strong performance and thanked them for their hard work. iii. Recruitment and Retention: Council was interested to understand whether STFC could implement an internal pay ladder that was within Civil Service pay constraints. Council suggested that the FGC could review and advise Council on this issue.

		<p>iv. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Council welcomed the FGC's assurance that bullying and harassment is being taken seriously by UKRI and that there has been constructive exploration of performance management, bullying and harassment policies and training. In considering UKRI, STFC and the diverse range of academic communities, there are examples of good practice, though this is certainly not the case across the board. Council agreed with the FGC's assertion that top-down leadership was required to properly address these issues.</p> <p>v. Risk and Assurance: Council found the inclusion of narrative to accompany the risk report very informative and useful.</p>
11.	Any other business	
	8.1	The Innovation Business Partners Board to consider and identify large crosscutting programmes that will benefit from STFC engagement and input from many communities at an early stage.
	8.2	STFC senior management is looking at organisational resilience and succession planning across the organisation. This is a recent development so processes are still maturing. Council may be asked for input in due course.
	8.3	At a recent joint session of Science Board and TAAB, the matter of coordinating education and training activities across STFC was discussed. Council agreed it would be useful to review the annual report from the Education Training and Careers Committee (ETCC) at the next meeting.
12.	Closing Remarks	
	MAT thanked members and guests for their contribution. The next meeting will take place at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory. There will be a joint meeting with Executive Board on the afternoon of the 29 th September, followed by a full Council meeting on the 30 th September.	