



**AGREED MINUTES OF THE TWENTY-FIFTH MEETING OF STFC COUNCIL
HELD AT THE UK ASTRONOMY TECHNOLOGY CENTRE in EDINBURGH
and by VIDEOCONFERENCE
18th May 2022**

Attendees

Council

Members:

Mark Thomson (chair) (MAT)
Sheila Rowan (Co-chair) (SR)
Maggie Aderin-Pocock (MAP)*
Jon Butterworth (JB)
Mike Dunne (MD)
Patricia Hodgson (PH)*
Angeli Moeller (AM)*
Anu Ojha (AO)
Ben Olivier (BO)
Hiranya Peiris (HP)
Andy Schofield (AJS)
Hitesh Thakrar (HT)
Pam Thomas (PT)

Maya Riddle (MR), Private Secretary
Janice Masone (JM), Minutes Secretary*

Apologies: None noted

In Ruth Elliot (RE), UKRI Finance Director, UKRI observer*

Attendance: Paul Monks (PM), BEIS CSA
Tara Shears (TS), Chair of Science Board

Invited Liz Fellman (LF), Exec Director Strategy, Planning & Comms – Items 3,4 and 7
Guests: Rosanna Greenop (RG)*, Head of Strategy –Item 3
Chris Wrench (CW), UKRI Finance – Item 4
Anne-Marie Scott (AMS, UKRI Finance) –Item 4
Grahame Blair (GB)*, Exec Director Programmes –Item 7

Chair, Mark Thomson

1. Welcome and opening comments

- 1.1 Mark Thomson (MAT) welcomed everyone to the twenty-fifth meeting of STFC Council, which was held at the UK Astronomy Technology Centre at Edinburgh and by videoconference.
- 1.2 There were no apologies noted for this meeting. Council welcomed new members Angeli Moeller and Hitesh Thakrar to their first official 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. No members raised any additional conflicts with items on the agenda for this meeting.

2. Minutes, Actions and Matters Arising and Actions from the meeting held on 8th March 2022 – STFC (UKRI) 22/12 and 22/13

2.1 **Minutes**

Subject to a small amendment, Council approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting held on 8th March 2022.

2.2 **Actions**

The actions from previous meetings were reviewed and were either complete or in progress. More detail on progress can be found in the Action Register which is an annex to these minutes

2.3 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes or actions of the meeting held on 8th March 2022.

3. STFC Strategic Delivery Plan for 2022-25- STFC (UKRI) 22/14

- 3.1 Mark Thomson (MAT) invited Liz Fellman (LF) and Rosanna Greenop (RG) to give an update on the STFC Strategic Delivery Plan (SDP) which is due to be externally published in late summer 2022.
- 3.2 RG reminded Council that they had last reviewed an early draft of the SDP in March 2022 and highlighted the key changes and updates since then. This included a more focused summary graphic, better defined near-term (3 yr actions), case studies and a layout which gave more emphasis to STFC's role in delivering to relevant government strategies. Council members were invited to give further advice and feedback on this version of the SDP.
- 3.2 A lively discussion of the SDP followed. Council members encouraged STFC to be more ambitious in defining how it will deliver key aspects of its important role in enabling the UK to become a science superpower. With some further amendments, the SDP will even more strongly emphasise how STFC is the delivery partner of choice, and signpost future opportunities, particularly in areas such as Space, Innovation, Skills and international partnerships.
- 3.3 Council members were generally supportive of the direction of travel, and thanked The Strategy Team for their hard work. It was noted that it was no easy task to capture and encapsulate the full breadth of activities and ambitions in STFC's remit. The team in turn thanked Council members for the feedback and discussion and invited further comment on this draft version of the SDP by correspondence up to the end of May 2022.

4. Finance Update- STFC (UKRI) 15

- 4.1 Council welcomed Chris Wrench (CW) and Anne-Marie Scott (AMS) to the meeting to give the finance update. The update included the provisional outturn position for FY2021-22, including lessons learnt regarding the management of underspends and the progress toward settling the FY2022-23 budget.
- 4.2 Discussion focused on the Programmes Directorate (PD) underspend which was emerged late in FY2021-22. Council members asked about the operational mechanism for identifying and dealing with underspends and how this particular situation had arisen.
- 4.3 AMS explained that contributory aspects were changes to UKRI guidance to Councils regarding underspends late in the financial year and the need for better understanding of the grants accrual policy within PD. CW added that PD and Finance are currently working on a plan to address these challenging and improve processes for the new financial year.

Chair: Sheila Rowan

5. Update from Executive Chair- STFC (UKRI) 22/16

- 5.1 Sheila Rowan (SR) invited Mark Thomson (MAT) to give his presentation to Council Members. The main discussion points are noted below.
- 5.2 **Covid Recovery Update**
Recognising that this may (with luck) be the last Covid update, Council members commended STFC, particularly colleagues in Estates and SHE for successfully navigating the last 26 months and keeping sites operating safely throughout the pandemic whilst managing various levels of restrictions. Whilst occupancy rates at UKRI offices remains low, Council members were encouraged to note that STFC sites are quickly returning to pre-pandemic levels of attendance.
- 5.3 **Corporate Update**
 - i. **Tom Britten:** Council members expressed sadness at the unexpected passing of STFC's COO Tom Britten. Tom was a genuinely kind person and a highly valued member of STFC's senior team. Support and counselling has been offered to colleagues who have been affected by this sad loss.
 - i. **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI):** Liz Fellman has taken over Tom's EDI responsibilities. STFC is focusing on refining its internal message on the importance of EDI to the organisation. Not only is this the morally right path, there is strong demonstrable evidence that diverse organisations are more efficient and successful. In the context of STFC, this could result in more breakthroughs at the frontiers of science & technology
 - ii. Council supported STFC's current priority to update the STFC EDI action plan including development of KPIs to track progress and impact. Council was particularly in favour of plan to launch pilot activities around inclusive leadership and Reverse Mentoring. It was felt these activities will embed EDI as 'business as usual' in STFC, which is the ultimate aim.
 - iii. Council was disappointed at the absence of EDI in the draft UKRI Strategy and the delay in publishing the UKRI EDI Strategy. It is understood these delays are due to a change in messaging from central government, however Council felt this was overly cautious and not the best approach- there are real benefits to improved diversity in an organisation and UKRI should have this aim at front and centre of its corporate strategy.
- 5.4 **Spending Review Allocations**

UKRI Councils and cross-cutting funds now have relatively firm allocations. As expected, FY2022-23 is very tight, with headroom opening up over the final two years of the Spending Review period. STFC departments have been issued with indicative budgets and planning guidance for FY2022-23.

5.5 **Strategic Delivery Plan**

Following the discussion earlier on the agenda of this meeting, and taking into the consideration current expectations of Spending Review allocations, MAT took Council through the headline priorities for STFC, as described in the draft SDP. Council members asked how uplifts to budgets for specific parts of STFC could be applied without disadvantaging other parts of the organisation, MAT confirmed that over the next year STFC will be giving this issue careful consideration.

- i. Discussion focused on some of the future opportunities in Quantum as highlighted in the SDP. Once the SDP is settled, Council advised STFC to create a strategic pathway for the organisation's role in quantum. Council expressed an interest in holding a discussion with the NQCC director on possible funding routes for quantum computing and developing a strategy around them.
- ii. **Pathway to Exascale:** Council called this out as an area where the UK is falling behind, MAT confirmed that work is underway to set out a clear vision and direction for Exascale and will make a case for the next Spending Review or other relevant fiscal events which may be more suitable.

5.6 **Conflict in Ukraine**

Minister George Freeman announced government policy on scientific collaboration with Russia on 27th March as follows: "Our aim is to introduce measures that will negatively impact the Russian state, and individuals and organisations with strong links to the Kremlin, but not to sanction individual Russian scientists or innovators with benign research interests."

- i. STFC and its departments will not enter into any new collaborations with Russian institutes or businesses. All existing links between STFC and Russian institutes will be suspended. Individual collaborations and/or individual researchers will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- ii. Impacts on some international subscriptions and partners is still be assessed. At the next Council meeting MAT's presentation will include a brief update on this as things are still developing.

5.7 **Live Issues**

MAT gave an update on some of the key issues he is currently working on.

- i. **Diamond Light Source:** Talks around governance are progressing, BEIS and HMT are in alignment on the proposed model
- ii. **Strategic Review of Particle Physics:** The first meeting was positive. The panel focused on the key questions and didn't drift into to discussions of individual projects. The main meeting will take place in June. Council will receive a more detailed update at a future meeting.
- iii. **ESS:** At the most recent ESS Council meeting, the cost sharing proposal was accepted by most members. The UK position, which is supported at ministerial level, remains that we are 10% partners, ESS continues to push for 12%.

- iv. **Operating Model/Operating Expenditure (OpEx):** There is a strong steer from government to reduce OpEx headcount across the civil service including arm's length bodies such as UKRI. For STFC, the main impact is on Programmes and Strategy, Planning and Communications areas.
- v. In answer to questions from Council members, MAT explained that there will be a need for prioritisation, but STFC is confident that savings can be achieved through natural wastage and slowing/freezing recruitment. As yet, impact on individual areas such as studentships and fellowship is unknown.

5.8 **Highlights**

As always, there were a wide range of exciting science and other highlights from STFC and STFC funded science to report on since the last meeting. Council noted:

- i. Dame Ottoline Leyser visited Daresbury for two days in March. She met with staff and JV partners, toured Hartree, ASTeC and ETC and hosted a round table discussion with local businesses on innovation and growth.
- ii. Council enthusiastically welcomed the news that Daresbury Laboratory, in partnership with the Space Applications Catapult, has launched a Space Enterprise Lab (SEL) This will enable regional businesses to exploit space technology and take advantage of major economic opportunities within the UK space sector

Chair: Mark Thomson

6. **Science Board Update - STFC (UKRI) 22/17**

- 6.1 Grahame Blair (GB) and Liz Fellman (LF) joined Tara Shears (TS) for the update from the most recent meeting of Science Board. This included highlights of some of the excellent science made possible by STFC facilities, the key challenges and concerns according to Science Board and funding advice and recommendations made by Science Board.

6.2 **Science Highlights**

Tara Shears began by reporting some exciting science highlights.

- i. The first highlights were reported from the ESA Solar Orbiter as it made its first close pass of the sun. Analysis of new data has only just started but there are exciting times ahead. SPICE (RAL Space is a partner) will investigate the extreme ultraviolet light from the Sun and decipher the activity taking place in the different layers of its atmosphere.
- ii. A new measurement by the CDF collaboration, the most precise to date, challenges the standard model prediction and the steady convergence between experiment and theory.

6.3 **Facility User Advisory Panels**

The PPAN roadmap guidance was developing into a very useful tool for the PPAN advisory panel chairs, Science Board felt it was worth exploring how the road mapping process could relate to user facilities and how the facility user advisory panels could be engaged in this process.

- i. Council strongly encouraged MAT to maintain the horizon scanning workshops and panels that are so important to the facilities and the user communities. MAT welcomed Council's support on this matter, and confirmed STFC's leadership recognised the importance of these activities and planned to make the case for maintaining them.

6.4 ResearchFish

Science Board highlighted issues arising from a recent communications from UKRI in response to feedback from users of ResearchFish.

- i. The community felt that UKRI's recent statement did not adequately address the issues or causes and could increase the difficulties UKRI has in encouraging Principle Investigators (PIs) to use the system in future. Science Board encouraged UKRI to take the opportunity to look at alternative options for capturing evidence and outcomes from its grants.
- ii. MAT confirmed that UKRI recognises the current system and processes have been in place for some time, technology has moved on and there may now other avenues available for capturing evidence/outcomes from grants. There are plans to review options, however, the current priority is to renew grant/finance systems.

6.5 Science Board concerns

TS shared grave concerns from Science Board about the rising costs of inflation, the war in Ukraine, and the withdrawal of Russian involvement from several international projects. Science Board specifically called out the impact on ESA and STFC's science programmes

- i. STFC recognises the challenges highlighted by Science Board and is keeping a close watch as the situation evolves and is considering some alternative routes, including working more closely with UKSA and early stage R&D. Council will have the opportunity to discuss this in more detail at a future meeting.

7. Any other business

- 7.1
 - i. **TAAB Report (STFC (UKRI) 22/19):** Some Council members expressed concern around the timescales and delivery plan for STFC's Accelerator Strategy
 - ii. **STFC Governance Update (STFC (UKRI) 22/18):** Discussion of this paper was deferred to July 2022 due to lack of time

8. Closing Remarks

MAT thanked members and guests for their contribution. The next meeting will be a virtual one and will be held on 14th July 2022