

**AGREED MINUTES OF THE THIRTY-EIGHTH MEETING OF STFC COUNCIL
HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK AND VIDEOCONFERENCE
ON 10th SEPTEMBER 2024**

<u>Attendees</u>	
Council Members:	<p>Mark Thomson (MAT) (chair)</p> <p>Andy Schofield (AJS)</p> <p>Jon Butterworth (JB)</p> <p>Michele Dougherty (MKD)</p> <p>Lucy Edge (LE)</p> <p>JT Jassen (JTJ)</p> <p>Jana Kolar (JK)</p> <p>Patricia Hodgson (PH)</p> <p>Angeli Moeller (AM)</p> <p>Hiranya Peiris (HP)</p> <p>Hitesh Thakrar (HT)</p> <p>Pam Thomas (PT)</p>
	<p>Observers:</p> <p>Paul Monks (PM), DESNZ CSA</p> <p>Keith Grainge (KG), Chair of Science Board (PPAN)</p> <p>Jacqui Cole (JC), Chair of Science Board (F&L)</p> <p>Secretariat:</p> <p>Maya Riddle (MR)</p> <p>Janice Masone (JM),</p>
Invited Guests:	<p>Items 3-4: Chris Wrench (CW), Finance Director & Georgia Giatras (GG), COO}</p> <p>Item 4: Christine Ashton (CA), UKRI CIO</p> <p>Items 6-9: Liz Fellman (LF), Exec Director Strategy, Planning & Comms</p> <p>Items 6-7: Dave Newbold (DN), Exec Director National Labs, Philip Amison (PA), Rosanna Greenop (RG) & Susanna Mitolo (SM) (STFC Strategy team)</p> <p>Item 8: Nicole Ashman (NA) & Philip Amison (PA) (STFC Infrastructure team)</p> <p>Item 9: Jake Gilmore (JG) (head of RAL Comms)</p>
Apologies:	Carsten Welsch

Chair: Mark Thomson		
1. Welcome and opening comments		
	1.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) welcomed everyone to the thirty-eighth meeting of STFC Council, which was held by videoconference.
	1.2	The following points regarding attendance were noted: i. Apologies were noted from Carsten Welsch
	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.
2. Minutes, Actions and Matters Arising and Actions from the meeting held on 18th September 2024		
	2.1	<u>Minutes</u> Subject to some minor amendments which have now been actioned, Council approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meetings held on 18 th July 2024.
	2.2	<u>Actions</u> 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	<u>Matters Arising</u> The following matters arose from discussion of the minutes and actions. i. Andy Schofield (AJS) reported that EPSRC's Senior Independent Member has finished his term and asked STFC to ensure that momentum is kept up for the joint Task and Finish Group which has a Quantum and AI focus. Establishing this group was an action from a previous Council meeting.
Chair: Mark Thomson		
3. UKRI Priorities Update		
	3.1	Council welcomed Christine Ashton (CA) to the meeting and MAT invited her to update Council on UKRI's priorities. Georgia Giatras (GG) and Chris Wrench (CW) also joined the meeting for this discussion.
	3.2	CA described the principles applied to UKRI's bids for 2025/26 budgets and longer-term planning for the Spending Review (SR) in Spring 2025. The Budget is expected to be strongly focussed on supporting the new government's missions and there will be more scrutiny on public spending. UKRI aims to strike the right balance, building on its collaborative strengths whilst supporting Councils and their communities with their unique challenges. The following points were raised in discussion: i. Spending Review: Given recent discussions on Higher Education Institutes (HEI)s at UKRI Board, Council asked how information on commitments such as Horizon, will be gathered from universities in devolved nations which are not under the remit of Research England. CA confirmed that DSIT has been clear from the outset that gathering a complete picture is a priority. ii. Cross Cutting themes: Council asked how UKRI's strategy will link up with work already taking place across the Councils, including STFC, and further, how UKRI will leverage funding across multiple government departments which may have all or part of a theme in their remit.

		<p>iii. CA confirmed that UKRI is working with DSIT on the cross-government piece and how the utilisation of powerful tools such as the data bank and considering key areas to focus on and the best way to invest in taking this forward.</p> <p>iv. Collective Talent Fund: UKRI is talking to DSIT about studentships and fellowships, Council advised that it was vitally important to maintain continuity in this area.</p> <p>v. Commercialisation: Council asked about UKRI's plans here, and how this might link to the National Wealth Fund. CA confirmed that UKRI's chair is enthusiastic about opportunities for commercialisation and working closely with business and industry, as is Government.</p> <p>vi. Government Missions: Council members were interested to hear UKRI's plans to engage with the five Mission Boards given that UKRI has important contributions to make in each area. CA explained that membership of the Boards is not yet clear, but UKRI will continue to work closely with DSIT as their sponsor department.</p>
4.	Finance and Governance Update	
	4.1	Georgia Giatras (GG) and Chris Wrench (CW) remained present for this discussion.
	4.2	<p>Council noted the content of the Finance and Governance Committee (FGC). Discussion focused on the following points:</p> <p>i. Aggregate Risk: Council considered FGC's deliberations regarding the creation of a risk which captures the aggregated impact of individually managed and mitigated risks which collectively indicate a gradual decline and put at risk STFC's position as an internationally respected science capability. Council recognised this as an important issue, particularly the "opportunity cost" which doesn't fall into the scope of the risk but also has potentially wide-reaching consequences.</p> <p>ii. Carbon budget: Council understood the potential impact some aspects of this policy, which is currently under development, could have on STFC's ability to deliver its science. Council supported the FGC's view that STFC should ensure these challenges are well understood both by UKRI and STFC and further advised that positive social engagement with staff and community will be key.</p> <p>iii. Finance Update: Council noted the Finance Update which had been discussed at the recent FGC meeting. Headcount and Energy costs remain the biggest challenges for balancing budgets. The following points were discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headcount: Noting that STFC directly employs more staff than other Councils, Council shared the concerns expressed by the Executive and Finance Committee regarding the affordability of next UKRI pay rise. STFC is taking every step available to it to manage down headcount whilst maintaining the ability operate and deliver its science aims. • Electricity Costs: Consumption and demand are well understood by STFC, but the Cabinet Office fixed price does not translate to invoicing. Council supported the work of the Finance team to better understand future pricing and volatility given that energy costs represent a significant part of STFC's expenditure.

Chair: Andy Schofield		
5.	Executive Chair's Update	
	5.1	Andy Schofield (AJS) invited Mark Thomson (MAT) to give an update on issues and events since the last meeting.
	5.2	<p><u>People, Equality and Diversity</u> MAT's presentation included an update on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and news on recent senior appointments. Discussion points are noted below</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council offered congratulations and good wishes to Professor Michele Dougherty, who will be taking over from MAT as Executive Chair of STFC from January 2025. ii. Council noted the EDI update, particularly the roll out of an expanded Reverse Mentoring scheme following a hugely successful pilot in 2022/23. Demand is high, but resources and workloads have been a barrier to participation for some. iii. Council was keen to review and input to the EDI action plan and requested that STFC's EDI manager attend a future Council meeting (Jan 2025). There is an existing action to invite the EDI manager to a future meeting.
	5.3	<p><u>Financial Position</u> MAT reported that more will be known about STFC's financial position in the present year at the end of Quarter 2 (Q2). The situation for the next financial year currently looks more challenging and STFC is considering a range of options to manage within the expected budget.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council explored the potential reputational and scientific impacts of reducing or stopping operation of facilities. MAT assured Council that these impacts are being highlighted to both UKRI and DSIT.
	5.4	<p><u>PPAN Programme Roadmap</u> MAT gave an overview of progress in developing the PPAN Programme Roadmap.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Astronomy community appreciated the engagement at recent town meetings and assurances that the PPAN Programme roadmap won't dramatically change the balance between Particle Physics and Astronomy programmes. ii. MAT confirmed there are plans to look at university overheads, this will be a strategic decision to which Council will have the opportunity to provide input.
Chair: Mark Thomson		
6.	Spending Review (SR) update and priorities	
	6.1	Council welcomed Liz Fellman (LF), Dave Newbold (DN), Philip Amison (PA), Rosanna Greenop (RG) & Susanna Mitolo (SM) to the meeting for this discussion. Council received an overview of the framework, priorities and next steps for STFC's SR submission.
	6.2	<p>Council gave detailed feedback on the supporting narrative for the priorities which were noted by the team. Some key points from the discussion are noted below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Strengthen the inward investment piece, convey the urgency of the Estates work to maintain and upgrade facilities at Harwell, a unique national asset.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. Ensure to highlight public engagement activities and work with other Research Councils iii. Overall, Council was generally happy with direction of travel and looked forward to reviewing the next iteration in due course.
7.	Science Board Membership	
	7.1	Liz Fellman (LF), Dave Newbold (DN), Philip Amison (PA), Rosanna Greenop (RG) and Susanna Mitolo (SM) remained present for this discussion of new membership for both Science Board (Facilities and Laboratories) and (PPAN) and updates to the Terms of Reference (ToR).
	7.2	<p>The following points were raised in discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council noted that five new members will be invited to join Science Board (Facilities and Laboratories) and four will be invited for Science Board (PPAN). One of these will be delayed until June 2025 to avoid an institutional conflict. Details can be found in the paper. ii. Council noted the changes to the Terms of Reference (ToR) recently agreed by the Executive Board which clarified terms of appointment, institutional conflicts and stated that STFC employees who work in the National Labs or other facilities that are majority funded by STFC from Science Board (Facilities and Laboratories) cannot be considered for membership. iii. Council raised some concerns about the gaps between membership which could be an issue for small, specialist communities. Council advised STFC to consider how to reach these communities and ensure they are represented. iv. Council welcomed the clear avoidance of institutional conflicts to prevent distortion but advised retaining flexibility if required in certain circumstances.
8.	UKRI Infrastructure Fund Wave 5 Preliminary bids	
	8.1	Liz Fellman (LF) and Philp Amison (PA) were joined by Nicole Ashman (NA) for this discussion. Keith Grainger (KG) declared a conflict of interest for RASOR,
	8.2	<p>Council reviewed the feedback from the Science Boards and their recommendations to submit RASOR and SASE to Wave 5 Preliminary Activities for the UKRI Infrastructure Fund. The following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. RASOR: This proposal was reviewed by Council who gave a sympathetic recommendation to clarify and strengthen the science case, particularly as this would be balanced against other priorities in the Astronomy programme over the next decade. This feedback will be passed to Executive Board to inform their discussions. ii. SASE: Council was interested in this proposal and understood the rationale from the Science Boards in prioritising it. However, there was some reservation about whether the Infrastructure Fund was the right route. Other routes to funding were explored by Council, including European funding. This feedback will be passed to Executive Board to inform their discussions. iii. More broadly, Council considered how the Clusters and strategic partners engage with the Infrastructure Fund and recommended exploring how ideas are funnelled from industry.

9.	STFC Draft Brochure	
	9.1	Liz Fellman (LF) was joined by Jake Gilmore (JG) for this discussion of the latest iteration of the STFC brochure.
	9.2	<p>Council was invited to comment on the brochure, particularly on the images and messages. The target audience for the brochure are officials and VIPs, particularly those visiting, or new to, STFC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council gave detailed feedback, including showcasing the important role played by universities and PhD students. ii. LF and JG thanked Council for their feedback on this, and previous iterations, of the brochure. This feedback, and any further comments Council may wish to provide by email, will be included in the final version of the brochure which will be approved by the Executive Board and published
9.	Any other business	
	9.1	There was no additional business was raised at the meeting
10.	Closing Remarks MAT thanked members and guests for their contribution. The next meeting will be held by videoconference on 26 th November 2024.	