



**AGREED MINUTES OF THE THIRTY-SIXTH MEETING OF STFC COUNCIL
HELD AT RUTHERFORD APPLETON LABORATORY AND VIDEOCONFERENCE
ON 14th MAY 2024**

Attendees	
Council Members:	<p>Mark Thomson (chair) (MAT) Andy Schofield (AJS) Jon Butterworth (JMB) Michele Dougherty (MKD) Lucy Edge (LE) JT Janssen (JTJ) Jana Kolar (JK) Patricia Hodgson (PH) Hiranya Peiris (HP) Pam Thomas (PT) Carsten Welsch (CPW)</p>
	<p>Observers Paul Monks (PM), DESNZ CSA Keith Grainge (KG), Chair of Science Board (PPAN)* Jacqui Cole (JC), Chair of Science Board (F&L) Secretariat Maya Riddle (MR) Janice Masone (JM), Secretariat</p>
Invited Guests:	<p>Item 4: Chris Wrench (CW), Finance Director; Georgia Giatras (GG), COO</p> <p>Item 5: Dave Newbold (DN), Exec Director National Labs; Katharine Hollinshead (KH), lead for Quantum Strategy; Michael Cuthbert, Director NQCC Jason Green, Programme Lead</p>
Apologies:	<p>Angeli Moeller (AM) Hitesh Thakrar (HT)</p>

Chair: Mark Thomson		
1. Welcome and opening comments		
	1.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) welcomed everyone to the thirty-sixth meeting of STFC Council, which was held at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory. Some members and invited guests joined the meeting by videoconference.
	1.2	<p>The following points regarding attendance were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. MAT welcomed JT Janssen (JTJ), Lucy Edge (LE) and Jana Kolar (JK) to their first meeting as new members of STFC Council. ii. Apologies were noted from Angelie Moeller (AM) and Hitesh Thakrar (HT) iii. MAT introduced JT Janssen (JTJ) to Council, JTJ attended this meeting as an observer but will formally take up the role of Council member from April 2024.
	1.3	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Professor Pam Thomas reported that she is no longer CEO of the Rosalind Franklin Institute, the register should be updated to reflect this. ii. Professor Hiranya Peiris reported that she is on a project which has received QTFP funding. Though not a direct conflict with any of the discussion items on the agenda, it is noted here for information.
2. Minutes, Actions and Matters Arising and Actions from the meeting held on 13th March 2024		
	2.1	<p><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 13th March 2024.</p>
	2.2	<p><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</p>
Chair: Andy Schofield		
3. Executive Chair Update- presentation		
	3.1	Andy Schofield (AJS) invited Mark Thomson (MAT) to give an update to Council on key issues since the last meeting.
	3.2	<p><u>People</u> MAT's presentation included an update on his role as Executive Chair of STFC, which has been extended to the end of December 2024. MAT is now the longest serving member of UKRI's Executive Committee. Interviews are shortly due to be held for his successor. Alongside this, the UK Government has nominated MAT to campaign to become the next Director General of CERN.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council members welcomed both the news of MAT's extension and the news that he was campaigning to be the next DG of CERN. ii. Council felt the extension would provide continuity and an opportunity for better succession planning. It was acknowledged that the CERN DG campaign is a

		long one, MAT was strong in his assurances that this nomination and the campaign itself would not impact on his commitment to STFC.
	3.3	<p><u>Spending Review</u></p> <p>Council members were interested to learn about Spending Review (SR) process which is initiated by HM Treasury, cascaded through the departments, through to UKRI. MAT briefly outlined the process employed by UKRI to prepare its submission based on input from its individual Councils such as STFC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. In answer to questions about timing MAT explained that the current SR period runs until 31 March 2025, so the next SR will have to be completed before this, although at this stage it is unknown whether the next SR period will run for a single year or multiple years. ii. Council asked about STFC's plans for UKRI's SR submission, MAT confirmed that they will have the opportunity to review this at the July meeting.
	3.4	<p><u>Strategic Update</u></p> <p>MAT gave Council an update on some of the key strategic activities for STFC. The following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council considered STFC's phased approach to pitching the Boulby Dark Matter Observatory (DMO) and questioned whether MAT's departure would impact it. MAT confirmed that the case is progressing well, and was confident this will continue to do so. This is likely to be an SR priority for STFC. ii. The Space Gateway is a flagship project to scale up UK Space capability and will bring together business, industry, and science in the space sector. A business case is currently going to through UKRI approval processes. iii. MAT highlighted that STFC has generally performed quite well under the Infrastructure Fund, most recently the Electron Ion Collider (EIC) and RUEDI have been successful. He also reported that XLZD had been successful in the Wave 4 Preliminary rounds.
	3.3	<p><u>Budgets Update</u></p> <p>MAT outlined the work undertaken by STFC to manage a range of pressures and set budgets for the organisation. This included an overview of UKRI's pressures and their chosen approach to manage by reducing Council allocations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council members acknowledged UKRI's conservative approach and advised STFC to ensure it is prepared to leverage any underspends that may emerge later in the financial year.
	3.5	<p><u>Selected Highlights</u></p> <p>Council members discussed some of the highlights in MAT's presentation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Some Council members raised concerns from the Astronomy community who felt they hadn't been adequately informed about key events such as the Science Board Prioritisation Exercise. MAT confirmed that following that following the RAS Community Forum in late 2023 and spring 2024 there are firm plans to communicate with the Astronomy Community at NAM. ii. MAT highlighted how STFC's facilities are contributing to the fight against cancer. There was keen interest from Council members in visiting the CLF's

		Octopus Group, which had used advanced laser imaging techniques to study the structure of the mutate proteins which help it to evade drugs.
	3.6	<p><u>Live Issues</u></p> <p>MAT gave an update on some of the key issues facing STFC which included the continued development of the UKRI Operating model and Opex Challenge, the impact of inflation on the international portfolio, pay and budgets for FY2024/25 and 2025/26.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. As described in MAT's financial update, the impact of implementing the pay scales and meeting UKRI Opex targets presents more challenging circumstances in setting budgets than in years past. ii. Council discussed the ongoing issues with ESS operations and the proposed plan to achieve flexibility to address In-Kind pressure without additional funds by reducing UK access to ESS in the early stages of operations. This led to a discussion of fusion provision after ILL is shut. Council members suggested engaging with First Light Fusion at the appropriate time.
		Chair: Mark Thomson
	4.	Budget Update
	4.1	Council welcomed Chris Wrench (CW) and Georgia Giatras (GG) to the meeting for this discussion. CW and GG described the challenges faced by STFC in setting budgets for FY2024/25 which are expected to continue in to FY2025/26.
	4.2	<p>Council made the following observations and comments regarding the presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council supported the Executive's approach to managing fiscal pressures in 2024/25 and understood that this will not resolve expected future pressures. ii. CW explained that at the mid-year point there may be an opportunity to reassess budget allocations, Council encouraged the Executive to ensure they were able to take full advantage of any opportunities that may be present at that point. iii. As of the date of this meeting (14 May 2024). STFC was still waiting for final confirmation of budgets from UKRI. Once budgets for this year are set, work will begin on FY2025/26. iv. Council advised the Executive to regularly engage with Council and both Science Boards on budget setting activities for FY2025/26.

5.	Quantum Strategy Update	
	5.1	Council welcomed Dave Newbold (DN), Katharine Hollinshead (KH). Michael Cuthbert (MC), and Jason Green (JG) in presenting this item for discussion.
	5.2	<p>Since the last Council meeting in March, STFC has worked to incorporate advice and comments from members into the latest iteration of the draft Quantum Strategy. This draft has also been reviewed by Sir Peter Knight. The audience for this version of the strategy is STFC and UKRI colleagues, NQTP, DSIT Office for Quantum, NPL, Science Boards and for consultation with other key stakeholders including current and potential strategic partners in academia, industry, and the public sector. A more concise version (circa four pages) will be published externally</p> <p>Key changes and updates include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Balancing ambition with the collaborative nature of NQTP and the current programme. ii. The section on Delivery (Near-Term Actions, and Costs, Risk and Uncertainties) has been moved to a separate document
	5.3	Council agreed that the current iteration was very much improved and would present a compelling picture to key stakeholders. Council will look forward to seeing the next iteration.
6.	Science Board Update (PPAN)	
	6.1	MAT invited Keith Grainge (KG) to give an update from the second meeting of Science Board (PPAN) which took place on 29 th February and 5 th March 2024 by videoconference.
	6.2	<p>The main aims of the meeting were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To provide advice in relation to the Statements of Interest (SOIs) and PPRP reports presented. ii. To receive an update on implementation of the governance changes. iii. To discuss the Strategic Challenges of PPAN Prioritisation and to raise any issues around strategic prioritisation of the PPAN programme through a joint session with Executive Board (EB).
	6.3	<p>On behalf of the Board, KG highlighted the following issues which were noted by Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Once the UKRI Sustainability framework is more mature, the Board flagged the need for a broader discussion on sustainability within STFC. ii. The change in the treatment of overheads on technical staff on grants and the need for a solution to apply across the board; and related to this the increasing impact of rising indirect costs and ever lower levels of funded academic time. Council members recognise the seriousness of these issues which regularly feature in discussion at meetings. iii. STFC staff are impacted by continuing headcount/resource reductions; it is critically important that the Board to meet often enough to complete its

		<p>programme of work.</p> <p>iv. Science Board questioned when final decisions would be made regarding support for CTA and Darkside, and also to better understand the longer term funding profile for LHCb and how this related to the experimental decision.</p>
7.	Science Board Update (Facilities and Labs)	
	7.1	Jacqui Cole (JC) was invited to give an update from the second meeting of Science Board (Facilities and Laboratories) which took place on 19 and 20 March 2024.
	7.2	<p>The main aims of the meeting were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To receive an update on and discuss the strategic work being undertaken in the National Laboratories, including the National Labs Strategy and Research Office setup ii. To receive a briefing on the Skills Centre and an update from ASTeC iii. To discuss the Terms of Reference for the Neutron review and the Terms of Reference for the Facility User Advisory Panels (Life Sciences and Soft Materials, Physical Sciences and Engineering) iv. To receive updates from EB and Council, the Chair and Deputy Chair of Science Board (Facilities and Laboratories) and a general governance update
	7.3	<p>On behalf of the Board, JC highlighted the following issues which were noted by Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Board were enthusiastic in discussing the National Laboratories Strategy, Research Office, Research Culture, and the Skills Centre and are looking forward to receiving regular updates as these develop. ii. The Board wished to flag the excellent world-leading sustainability work undertaken at ASTeC, particularly with the leadership opportunity for UK and presented by CESA. The Board emphasised that it was crucial for STFC to consider the balance of the investments between sustainability, core and transformative work in accelerators. iii. The Board noted the challenges on workload and capacity for ASTeC, which are further compounded by issues relating to UKRI Infrastructure Fund. The Board understood that losing expertise is extremely challenging to manage whilst successfully delivering the project and noted the Research Office could play a role in providing a mechanism to prevent staff being overcapacity when they are on multiple grants.
8.	Joint EPSRC/STFC Council session 15th May 2024	
	8.1	<p>On 15th May STFC Council members held an informal joint session with EPSRC Council members. This meeting was held at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory and included tours of the facilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The two main areas of discussion were critical technologies and physical and digital infrastructure ii. The Councils were aligned in thought and approach in many key areas of strategy and priority.

9.	Any other business	
	9.1	There will be Council meetings in May and July. MR wished to flag that the September Council meeting will be held at Warwick University on 10 September. There will be an option to attend Senior Staff Conference. If time allowed, some Council members suggested a tour of WMG. About us WMG University of Warwick
10.	Closing Remarks	
	MAT thanked members and guests for their contribution. The next meeting will be virtual and will be held on 18 th July 2024.	