

Minutes of the join STFC Council and Executive Board meeting
Wednesday 17th September 2025
Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Harwell

Attendees

Council:

Michele Dougherty (Chair)
Andy Schofield (SIM)
Stan Bentvelsen
David Charlton
Lucy Edge
Patricia Hodgson
Jana Kolar
Jayne Lawrence
Angeli Möller
Andrew Pontzen
Hitesh Thakrar
Carsten Welsch

Council observers:

Keith Grainge, Chair of Science Board (PPAN)
Jacqui Cole, Chair of Science Board (F&L)
Paul Monks, DESNZ CSA
Secretariat

Other attendees:

Grahame Blair, Exec Director Programmes
*Roger Eccleston, Exec Director National Labs: Large Scale Facilities
Liz Fellman, Exec Director Strategy, Planning & Comms
Dave Newbold, Exec Director National Labs: Science & Technology
Paul Vernon, Exec Director Business & Innovation
Chris Wrench, Director of Finance
Keith Zimmerman, COO
STFC Transformation & Strategy team

Apologies:

JT Janssen

1 Welcome and scene setting from the Executive Chair

- 1.1 Michele Dougherty (MKD) welcomed attendees to the joint STFC Executive Board and Council meeting.
- 1.2 Apologies were noted and MKD indicated that she needed to step out at 14:15 to present a conference talk and Andy Schofield (AJS) would take over as chair.
- 1.3 MKD asked for any conflicts of interests.
- 1.4 STFC was embarking on a major transformation initiative, which was being led by STFC COO, Keith Zimmerman, who would be providing an overview of the programme at the meeting.
- 1.5 In parallel, she had been discussing longer term options for STFC with the new UKRI CEO, Ian Chapman (IC). He had asked her to produce a paper outlining her vision, which might ultimately go to the UKRI Executive Committee.

2 Introduction to STFC Transformation

- 2.1 Keith Zimmerman (KZ) predicted the transformation programme would take 18-24 months and would render STFC a more agile, efficient and effective organisation. It was currently in the design phase.
- 2.2 A transformation steering group was being formed to design and deliver the programme. He anticipated that a business case would be produced to enable the change.

3 Transformation Programme

- 3.1 KZ provided an overview of each of the 10 transformation workstreams.

3.2 Workforce Planning

- 3.3 This workstream was focused on organisational reform and would operate across the other workstreams. The aim was to reduce management overhead and protect frontline roles.
- 3.4 A voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) was underway.

3.5 Professional Services

- 3.6 The focus was a review of services such as admin, comms and marketing with the aim to reduce duplication and siloed operations.

3.7 Technology & Engineering

- 3.8 The focus was on improving the operating model and exploiting expertise and skills programmes across STFC and wider across UKRI.
- 3.9 A consolidation of facilities, workshops and equipment was needed.

3.10 Digital

- 3.11 The focus was on improving the operating model between STFC and UKRI, including addressing gaps and high priority areas such as cyber security.

3.12 Project & Portfolio Management

- 3.13 The focus was on strengthening project and programme oversight and ensuring that we have the capability and capacity to deliver projects before taking them on.

3.14 Procurement

- 3.15 The focus was on improving the current model and capability.

3.16 Science Research Rationalisation

3.17 The focus was on reviewing research activities within STFC to ensure strategic alignment and optimise engagement with Higher Education Institutions and collaborators.

3.18 Project Rationalisation

3.19 The focus was on reviewing all projects to identify potential savings and strategic fit and to optimise impact.

3.20 International Expectations

3.21 The focus was on reviewing commitments and improving the UK's return on investment.

3.22 Income Generation

3.23 The focus was a step-change in activities to generate revenue and pivoting to support the government's Modern Industrial Strategy, as well as better leverage of the Harwell and Daresbury campuses for innovation and growth.

3.24 This will require a shift in organisational culture.

4 Next steps

4.1 KZ explained that the aim was to build an operating model that was capable of being scaled up and down. The workstream leads were due to present their recommendations to the STFC executive board in January 2026.

4.2 Comments and reflections from Council included:

- caution not to spend too much on the transformation programme and to define quantifiable benefits
- concern over unintended consequences and suggestion to use the Science Boards to advise on prioritisation to avoid damaging core scientific capabilities and to ensure a continued vibrant programme
- suggestion for branding support to articulate STFC's value proposition for industry
- the need to engage with STFC's communities and stakeholders

4.3 It was noted that Ian Chapman's attendance at council the following day provided an opportunity to understand his views and contribute to shaping the transformation narrative.

5 Closing remarks

5.1 Michele Dougherty thanked everyone for their contributions. She relied on council being a critical friend and looked to their help as the thinking on STFC's future evolved.