

Minutes of the STFC Council meeting

Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2025

Virtual meeting

**Attendees**

Council:

Michele Dougherty (Chair)

Andy Schofield (SIM)

Stan Bentvelsen

David Charlton

Lucy Edge

Patricia Hodgson

JT Janssen

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)

STFC Secretariat

Other attendees:

STFC Strategy team members (item 3-4)

Roger Eccleston, Exec Director National Labs: Large Scale Facilities (Item 4)

Keith Zimmerman, COO (item 3-5)

Chris Wrench, Director of Finance (items 3-5)

STFC Communications team members and UKRI Head of Comms (item 5)

## 1. Welcome and Executive Chair update

- 1.1. Michele Dougherty (MKD) welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted.
- 1.2. No conflicts of interest were recorded
- 1.3. There was a new UKRI Mission Statement: “to advance knowledge, improve lives and drive growth”. There would also be a new funding model for UKRI aligned with the mission and government priorities.
- 1.4. UKRI was holding an Innovation for Growth Summit on 24th November 2025.
- 1.5. There will be an Infrastructure Advisory Committee (IAC) meeting on 20th and 21st November 2025 in Liverpool.
- 1.6. MKD had been appointed as UKRI Responsible Officer for space and was in discussions with UK Space Agency (UKSA) to understand the impact of UKSA being incorporated into the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT). Council member Lucy Edge will also support.
- 1.7. Council members were invited to feedback on the UKRI Conference the previous week and they noted the following:
  - Ian Chapman (IC), UKRI CEO, reinforced his message that UKRI will focus on delivering for the UK and the taxpayer, with the universities as key delivery partners
  - IC is expecting swift action from STFC to make savings but is offering to help where he can and recognises the challenges
  - IC and Tom Adeyoola, new CEO of Innovate UK, agreed to attend a future STFC Industry & Business Board meeting to talk about innovation and growth
  - Council members enjoyed the event but would have liked more of an action focus
- 1.8. Sir Andrew Mackenzie’s term as UKRI Chair was coming to an end and Council members were invited to submit any candidate suggestions to the headhunters.

## 2. Minutes from 17th, 18th September and 23rd October 2025 meetings

- 2.1. Council approved the minutes subject to a couple of minor amendments.
- 2.2. It was noted that there had been a delay in getting the missing minutes published on the website due to requirements over accessibility. It was agreed that future minutes would be uploaded in a timely manner.
- 2.3. It was agreed that Council would continue to review and advise on the communications plan as new information from UKRI becomes available.

## 3. Allocations update

- 3.1. The UKRI Board and the science minister have signed off on the UKRI allocations, and advice has gone to the Secretary of State. However, it was not possible to disclose any figures with Council until after government approval.
- 3.2. The new UKRI funding model divided the budget into three main 'buckets': curiosity-driven research, government priorities and helping companies scale and grow, with an enabling platform that supported across all three areas.
- 3.3. STFC was anticipating significant challenges that will require further measure over those already planned as part of the transformation programme. Legal commitments will be

honoured, but achieving a sustainable financial position by the end of the spending review will require difficult choices.

- 3.4. An overview of the cost-saving strategies under consideration was provided.
- 3.5. Council raised concerns about the impact of the measures on the talent pipeline, the viability of core science programmes, and the need for transparent communication with the research community.
- 3.6. Rapid engagement with stakeholders would be undertaken once allocations were confirmed.
- 3.7. Council discussed opportunities to exploit government priorities and grow external revenue.

#### **4. The future of STFC**

- 4.1. An evolution of STFC was proposed to focus on providing world-leading facilities and capabilities for UKRI, a more agile organisation able to pivot to government priorities and utilising the campuses as vectors for growth.
- 4.2. The proposed changes were being discussed by UKRI Executive Committee and if approved would go to the UKRI Board in January.
- 4.3. Several members were very supportive of the direction of travel and compared STFC with the Paul Scherrer Institute in Switzerland and the GIANT innovation campus in Grenoble.
- 4.4. However, council members also expressed concerns about the complexity of the proposed structure, the risk of eroding core scientific missions, and the challenge of maintaining agility in a crowded stakeholder landscape.
- 4.5. These concerns were acknowledged and the need for clear governance and focus recognised.

#### **5. Communications timeline**

- 5.1. The Comms team were preparing planning for staff communications including webinars, leadership events, and targeted messaging once the allocations are public. In parallel, the team was preparing for sector engagement and science press inquiries.
- 5.2. Communications about the immediate funding changes and the longer-term organisational transformation were being coordinated with a UKRI approach to ensure consistency and clarity, with timelines dependent on government and Treasury approvals.
- 5.3. It was noted that a UKRI allocations explainer was being developed, but that it was not possible to disclose details in the public domain until these were approved.
- 5.4. Council members emphasised the need for rapid and transparent engagement with the research community, particularly the PPAN community, once funding decisions are known. The risk of strong negative reactions was recognised, and plans were in place to manage this at both STFC and UKRI levels.

#### **6. Any other business**

- 6.1. Council noted ongoing operational challenges, including forecasting and procurement system issues with the new Oracle Fusion system and grant award delays, in part due to the new grants funding system functionality.

- 6.2. Science Board PPAN were developing a set of principles and lessons learned to guide the upcoming programme review and prioritisation process for the PPAN area.
- 6.3. It was noted that Science board update papers had been issued to Council to be discussed by exception and that both Science Board's will be given reasonable slots at the January meeting.
- 6.4. There will be an extraordinary Council meeting on 17th December 2025 to share further detail on the UKRI allocations and their impact.