

Minutes of the join STFC Council and Executive Board meeting

Thursday 18th 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:

STFC Comms and UKRI head of External Affairs – item 3

STFC Strategy – item 5

Apologies:

JT Janssen

1 Welcome

- 1.1 Andy Schofield welcomed everyone to the meeting and the above apologies were noted.
- 1.2 No new conflicts of interest were declared, and council members were reminded of confidentiality.
- 1.3 The meeting commenced with a reflection on the previous day's joint meeting with the Executive Board.

2 Minutes from 14 May - 28 Aug 2025 meetings

- 2.1 Council approved the minutes subject to a couple of minor amendments.

3 STFC Communications Plan

- 3.1 STFC and UKRI communications personnel joined the meeting and presented a phased communications plan for STFC.
- 3.2 The aim was to build trust and align with UKRI and DSIT organisational communication. UKRI will take a lead on the allocations communications, and an explainer will be published in the New Year.
- 3.3 Council raised concerns about the lack of transparency with our communities. We should be more honest about the challenges ahead and the need to make some tough decisions otherwise we risked losing their trust.
- 3.4 It was noted that there were uncertainties as the allocations process was still in progress and there was a limit on what could be communicated at this point, but it was agreed that we should not be disingenuous.
- 3.5 It was agreed that the communications plan should be updated and brought back to a future Council meeting for review

4 Executive Chair Update

- 4.1 Michele Dougherty (MKD) provided an update. Key points of note included:
 - UKRI was undertaking a Zero-Based Review (ZBR), which had potential to reset budgets
 - UKRI would be focusing more investments on the delivery of the government's industrial strategy and enabling companies to grow and scale
 - the next phase of Hartree National Centre for Digital Innovation had undergone a Gateway review.
 - Tom Adeyoola, the new CEO of Innovate UK, was going to Daresbury to attend the new supercomputer opening and to get an insight into the business and innovation activities on site
 - the UKRI Infrastructure Team was undertaking a refresh of the UK Infrastructure Roadmap. It was agreed that the draft will be shared with Council

5 STFC Forward Look and Strategic Vision

- 5.1 A new Strategic Delivery Plan for STFC had been produced but that it was already out-of-date. The former UKRI CEO had also asked all councils to produce a strategic forward look.

- 5.2 Council thought that further work was required on the mission and vision statements in the forward look and advised delaying submission pending further clarity on the organisational direction.

6 Science Board PPAN Update

- 6.1 Keith Grainge presented some science highlights:
- new results from LHCb show persistent anomalies in $B^0 \rightarrow K^*0\mu^+\mu^-$ angular distributions
 - first images from the Vera C Rubin Observatory had been received. The novel camera can simultaneously see a 9.6 degree field of view
- 6.2 The last formal meeting was in May, where major business included:
- a review of two Statement of Interest's (Sols) relating to muons
 - an update on the PPAN roadmap process. This had been due to be published but now needed updating. As a stopgap the science board had sent out some communications to the community
- 6.3 There has also been a couple of extraordinary meetings. Primary concerns were:
- insufficient transparency with the PPAN community. It was emphasised that Science Board can be used as a sounding board for community reaction to forthcoming challenges
 - the planned communications around the Sol process for astronomy grants due to end in 2027
 - delays in grant funding, and particularly the impact on early career researchers
- 6.4 There had been an excellent response from STFC on a revised proposal for the studentship algorithm, which Science Board PPAN was expected to endorse.
- 6.5 It was queried whether it would be worth sharing the draft PPAN roadmap with Council and noted that it was significantly out of date and better to wait until the next iteration.

7 UKRI CEO Update

- 7.1 Ian Chapman (IC) joined the meeting and provided an overview of his background and experience.
- 7.2 He outlined his priorities for UKRI. He wanted better clarity on where UKRI investment of public funds were going and what impact it was having. As part of the zero-based review across UKRI, funding would be delineated into three key areas:
- discovery science – investing for the future and supporting a breadth of research
 - supporting government priorities, in particular the industrial strategy
 - helping companies to start, scale and grow
- 7.3 Members had an open Q&A with IC and discussion included:
- doing more to facilitate companies with high growth potential
 - future changes to the Research Excellence Framework (REF)
 - the need to be choiceful in investments, which would mean doing less things but ensuring they were world-leading/impactful
 - UKRI should be more agile with greater internal mobility

- 7.4 Council flagged concern over restrictions on communications with STFC communities. IC responded that we should be transparent but that we did need to be in line with DSIT.
- 7.5 IC thanked Council members for their time and service for UKRI.

8 Science Board Facilities & Labs Update

- 8.1 Jacqui Cole (JC) presented some science highlights:
- new results from LHCb show persistent anomalies in $B_0 \rightarrow K^* 0 \mu^+ \mu^-$ angular distributions
 - first images from the Vera C Rubin Observatory had been received. The novel camera can simultaneously see a 9.6 degree field of view
- 8.2 Key points of note from Science Board F&L were:
- a Multidisciplinary Facility User (MFU) panel had been set up to replace the previous panels which were not working properly. JC had set them the task to produce an inter-facility roadmap
 - five new members had been appointed

9 Industry & Business Board (IBB) update

- 9.1 Hitesh Thakrar gave an update on IBB. Key points included:
- a successful venture capital event had been held in June 2025, which 35 investors had attended and resulted in an angel fundraise for one of the startups
 - IBB went to Edinburgh for an interesting tour of the exascale facility and looked at the startups coming out of the Higgs Innovation centre
 - two new members had been recruited to IBB, bringing expertise in robotics and nuclear
 - PsiQuantum, which had its UK presence in Daresbury, had raised a billion dollars in the previous week. This was the highest amount raised by a quantum photonics company this year
 - the next event being planned is an Industry Partner Day

10 Any other business

- 10.1 MKD This was Jacqui Cole's last in person meeting, but she will join the online Council meeting on 18th November.
- 10.2 It was also Paul Monks' last meeting, and MKD thanked him on behalf of Council for his sage advice to STFC.
- 10.3 Paul Monks notified council that his last day as CSA would be the 30th September and he had enjoyed the past four years on STFC Council. He was remaining part of the UKRI family as he was taking on the chair of both the British Geological Survey (BGS) and the Henry Royce Institute.
- 10.4 MKD thanked members for their open and constructive dialogue and acknowledged the pace and complexity of the current challenges.