



**AGREED MINUTES OF THE THIRTY-FOURTH MEETING OF STFC COUNCIL  
HELD AT RUTHERFORD APPLETON LABORATORY  
ON 24<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2024**

<b>Attendees</b>		
<b>Council Members:</b>	Mark Thomson (chair) (MAT) Sheila Rowan (SR) Jon Butterworth (JMB) * Michele Dougherty (MKD) Mike Dunne (MD) Patricia Hodgson (PH)* Anu Ojha (AO) Angeli Moeller (AM) Hiranya Peiris (HP) * Andy Schofield (AJS) Hitesh Thakrar (HT) * Pam Thomas (PT) Carsten Welsch (CPW)	<b>Observers and Secretariat:</b> Paul Monks (PM), DESNZ CSA Tara Shears (TS), Chair of Science Board Keith Grainge (KG), Chair of Science Board (PPAN) Jacqui Cole (JC), Chair of Science Board (F&L) Maya Riddle (MR), Private Secretary Janice Masone (JM), Minutes Secretary
<b>Additional Attendees: Joint Session of STFC Council and Executive Board (items 5-7)</b> Grahame Blair (GB), Executive Director Programmes Liz Fellman (LF), Executive Director Strategy, Planning & Communications Dave Newbold (DN), Executive Director National Laboratories: Science & Technology Alan Partridge (AP), Executive Director National Laboratories: Large Scale Facilities Peter Thompson (PT), STFC HR Director Paul Vernon (PV), Executive Director Business & Innovation Chris Wrench (CW), STFC Finance Director		
<b>Invited Guests:</b>	Joanne Brown (JB), HR - Item 4 Adam Vickers (AV), Finance- Item 5 Maggie Wilson (MW), Programmes- Item 6 Becky Lee (BL), Science Board secretariat - Item 7	
<b>Apologies:</b>	Georgia Giatras (GG) Chief Operating Officer	

<b>Chair: Mark Thomson</b>		
<b>1. Welcome and opening comments</b>		
	1.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) welcomed everyone to the thirty-fourth meeting of STFC Council, which was held by in the Visitor's Centre at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory. Some members and invited guests joined the meeting by videoconference.
	1.2	No apologies were noted from Council members. Georgia Giatras sent her apologies for the joint session of STFC Council and Executive Board.
	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. No conflicts were reported for any of the items on the agenda for this meeting.
<b>2. Minutes, Actions and Matters Arising from the meeting held on 16 November 2023</b>		
	2.1	<b><u>Minutes</u></b> Subject to some minor amendments which have now been actioned, Council approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meetings held on 16 November 2023.
	2.2	<b><u>Actions</u></b> The actions from previous meetings were reviewed and were either complete or in progress.
<b>Chair: Sheila Rowan</b>		
<b>3. Executive Chair Update- presentation</b>		
	3.1	Sheila Rowan (SR) invited Mark Thomson (MAT) to give an update to Council on key issues since the last meeting.
	3.2	<b><u>People Update</u></b> MAT's presentation included an update on various key appointments in STFC and UKRI:  i. Council was delighted to hear that MAT will continue in his role of Executive Chair until December 2024. Council felt this extension will provide some stability for the organisation in a time of wider change in UKRI.  ii. Charlotte Deane is the new Executive Chair of EPSRC. Council welcomed the news that there are firm plans for STFC and EPSRC to work more closely together. A joint EPSRC/STFC Council meeting will be held in May 2024.  iii. Council will bid farewell to Sheila Rowan, Mike Dunne, and Anu Ojha in April 2024. MAT was pleased to report that three new members have been successfully recruited to replace them.  iv. MAT thanked Council members for their help with the recruitment activities for the PPD and UK ATC Directors.  v. MAT flagged that progressing recruitment for the STFC EDI Manager role was delayed due to a lack of HR resource but was expected to go live shortly. Council questioned whether the change in the Government's position in this area had had any impact on STFC and UKRI's position. MAT confirmed that there was no pressure to stop sensible initiatives which were of benefit to the organisation,
	3.3	<b><u>Corporate Update</u></b> The corporate update focused mostly on preparations for a Spending Review in

		<p>2024.</p> <p>i. There's a working assumption that there will be a UK general election in 2024 and that there will be a Spending Review before then. STFC will begin its preparations early in 2024, Council will be asked for advice and input.</p>
	3.4	<p><b><u>Infrastructure Fund</u></b>  MAT reported on the outcome of the recent round of Infrastructure Fund proposals. Discussion at the meeting focused on EIC and RUEDI, both of which have major impact on STFC.</p> <p>i. Council felt the decision to fund EIC was a positive one for STFC, but recognised there were implications for the balance of programme between Nuclear and Particle Physics. MAT explained that whilst there are no longer ring-fences between the two and that the balance will be considered internally with input from STFC's advisory structure.</p> <p>ii. RUEDI is an EPSRC led proposal, but STFC has a major role to play in hosting/managing the facility at Daresbury. Council felt that establishing a diverse user community for this facility will take time and, noting that this couldn't be done through current Doctoral training schemes, advised nurturing that pipeline at an early stage in a similar way to the facilities.</p> <p>iii. Aside from establishing a user community, MAT reported that he and his team are currently talking to EPSRC to address some concerns about governance and sustainability. Mike Dunne (MD) offered his time to the Technical Review or Cost and Schedule Committees.</p>
	3.5	<p><b><u>Major Strategic Initiatives</u></b>  MAT gave Council an insight on some of the exciting strategic initiatives that STFC is involved in developing.</p> <p>i. <b>Boulby Dark Matter Observatory:</b> MAT apprised Council of aspirations to establish an international facility at the Boulby site, which would deliver one of the government's Science &amp; Technology goals and be a Spending Review priority for STFC. Council asked how the timescale for international decisions related to STFC's plans. MAT confirmed that plans are based on the same timescales, with stage 1 being a strong statement of intent.</p> <p>ii. <b>Space Gateway at Harwell:</b> The Space Gateway proposal would provide a flagship to significantly scale up the UK's capability and enhance economic development in this sector. Council recognised the challenge posed by getting the funding in place to begin. The Space Gateway does have support at high levels of government and will be an STFC and UKSA priority for the Spending Review.</p> <p>iii. <b>Future of Compute:</b> MAT highlighted the opportunities presented by the AI Research Resources (AIRR), Exascale and UKRI's Digital Research Infrastructure (DRI) programme. Council had questions around how The Hartree Centre will fit into this structure, access for the PPAN community, and training. MAT confirmed all of these are being taken into consideration as things develop.</p> <p>iv. <b>Collaboration with DOE:</b> Over the past two years MAT has been working on developing a beneficial relationship with the DOE. In early February, two events are being held in the UK which will include a meeting at RAL on US/UK Lab level collaboration on quantum and AI/Computing. These events are led on the</p>

		US side by the Office for Science. Council was pleased to hear there are plans for US and UK ministers to sign an MOU.
	3.6	<b><u>Live Issues</u></b> MAT gave an update on some of the key issues facing STFC which included constraints and challenges related to the UKRI Operating Model. Progress is slow and there is still uncertainty. The plan for the Operating Model is due to be agreed at a two-day meeting scheduled for end January, at the time of this meeting, papers were not available.
<b>Chair: Mark Thomson</b>		
<b>4.</b>	<b>Strategic HR Update – presentation</b>	
		<p>Joanne Brown (JB) and Peter Thompson (PT) joined the meeting for this item. MAT invited them to give an update on the large amount of work undertaken by the HR Team in implementing the STEM Pay scales, the subsequent analysis of the impact of this on the organisation and managing the large number of appeals in a transparent and consistent way in a very short time span. The presentation also covered the 2023 Pay Award and some in-depth analysis of changes to STFC's headcount since 2021. The following points were raised in discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. In discussing the STEM pay appeals, Council members asked whether all staff felt equally empowered to appeal and JB confirmed the data indicated an equal number of men and women had appealed.</li> <li>ii. Noting the pay differential between grades, particularly at lower levels, Council questioned whether the introduction of the two-tier STEM pay scale had created any causing challenges for the organisation. There have been anecdotal reports of disagreements, but it has been a positive step toward addressing the severe recruitment and retention issues experienced by the organisation, which remained STFC's highest risk.</li> <li>iii. Council joined MAT in extending grateful thanks to the HR team for all their hard work in overseeing this complex and challenging work.</li> </ul>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Emerging Budget and pressures</b>	
	5.1	Council welcomed STFC's Executive Board (EB) to the meeting. Chris Wrench (CW) was joined by Adam Vickers (AV) for this session devoted to discussing the emerging budget and pressures for STFC.
	5.2	<p>CW went through the current financial year (FY) position for STFC and UKRI who are targeting a balanced budget.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Council noted that if STFC's reprofiles are agreed this may result in an overspend, because of this it will be a challenge to get agreement and compounds issues in FY 24/25.</li> <li>ii. Council understood that whilst the 2022 and 2023 pay increases have gone some way to alleviating the recruitment and retention issues, it has exacerbated the financial pressure on the organisation. Council advised the Executive Board to act through taking steps to control headcount growth and develop a good understanding of how many staff are directly supported by grant and external income.</li> <li>iii. It was confirmed that this work, along with reviewing activities that could be stopped or deferred. Additionally, STFC could explore swapping capital and</li> </ul>

		resource.
		iv. Council thanked CW and AV for the discussion, it was helpful to see level of analysis undertaken to aid understanding before decisions are taken.
<b>6.</b>	<b>Collective Talent- presentation</b>	
	6.1	Maggie Wilson (MW) joined the meeting for this discussion. MW gave an update on the current position from across Councils on collective talent. This included the move towards having a core offer for all students.
	6.2	<p>Council and Education, Training &amp; Careers Committee (ETCC) had previously indicated a desire to retain the algorithmic approach to landscape awards although the current algorithm is quite complex and labour intensive. Council understood the reasons for wanting to change the algorithm, which overall is hoped will streamline and reduce bureaucracy. Council was not against a simplified process if the outcome was similar. Specific points are noted below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Council strongly advocated for departments to have control of landscape studentship allocations rather than the universities to ensure support for the STFC programme. However, some Council members held the view that having some students for interdisciplinary working was also beneficial.</li> <li>ii. Council agreed that three intakes of students for landscape awards provided a good balance between continuity and flexibility. Council felt a longer commitment is desirable for focal awards, provided there are periodic competitions and appropriate churn.</li> <li>iii. There were some concerns expressed about the potential loss of creative alternative approaches (such as CASE) but it was recognised that these schemes were resource intensive.</li> <li>iv. Council felt it was difficult to comment on the impact of the core award in the abstract without fully understanding the financial impacts, however it was agreed that keeping the ratio of studentships in balance with the rest of the programme was a good principle to retain.</li> <li>v. It was noted that collective talent was starting on a similar process for harmonising approaches to fellowships and that a future discussion on this might be needed</li> </ul>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Science Board (Facilities &amp; Laboratories) update</b>	
	7.1	Council welcomed Becky Lee (BL) to the meeting for this discussion. Jacqui Cole (JC) gave the update from the first meeting of Science Board (Facilities & Laboratories) (F&L) which took place in November 2023.
	7.2	<p>Council noted the update and was pleased that the first meeting had been so productive. The following points were noted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Council noted the advice and recommendations from Science Board (F&amp;L) to STFC regarding maintaining the operation of the Institut Laue Langevin (ILL) reactor at least until 2033.</li> <li>ii. Council asked some questions around governance, specifically when the sub-panels reporting to Science Board (F&amp;L) will be reviewed. It was confirmed this is scheduled for the next meeting.</li> </ul>

		iii. Council strongly encouraged the two Science Boards to work together as both found their feet and flagged the potential risk of co-development between the two Science Board slowing down the development of roadmaps and strategies.
<b>8.</b>	<b>Closed session of Council</b>	
	8.1	Following the joint discussion with Executive Board, Council had some further reflections on the challenges around budgets and headcount. These included considering a recruitment chill and providing better training for line management and working with Trade Unions to streamline the performance management process.
	8.2	<p>Council continued to discuss studentships, noting that if PhDs were harmonised in length, numbers would need to be reduced by around 10% or further resources would need to be found from elsewhere.</p> <p>i. Council expressed support for four year PhDs, and felt the fourth year often made a huge and lasting difference for the individual and their contribution.</p> <p>ii. Council felt it would be worth discussing how the pipeline of talent could be developed and supported for the future. This should include residential placements (such as at CERN) and other academics supported by STFC.</p>
	8.2	There was a brief discussion on issues around Compute at Harwell and Daresbury. Council will have the opportunity to discuss this later in the year
	<b>Any other business</b>	
	9.1	None noted.
<b>10.</b>	<b>Closing Remarks</b>	
	MAT thanked members and guests for their contribution. The next meeting will be held on 13 <sup>th</sup> March 2024 at Caxton House in London.	