



**AGREED MINUTES OF THE THIRTY-FIFTH MEETING OF STFC COUNCIL  
HELD AT UKRI OFFICES, CAXTON HOUSE, LONDON AND VIDEOCONFERENCE  
ON 13<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2024**

<b>Attendees</b>	
<b>Council Members:</b>	Mark Thomson (chair) (MAT) Sheila Rowan (SR) – am only Michele Dougherty (MKD)* Mike Dunne (MD)* pm only Patricia Hodgson (PH) Anu Ojha (AO) Angeli Moeller (AM)* Hiranya Peiris (HP) Andy Schofield (AJS) Hitesh Thakrar (HT) Carsten Welsch (CPW)*
	<b>Observers and Secretariat:</b> Paul Monks (PM), DESNZ CSA Keith Grainge (KG), Chair of Science Board (PPAN)* Jacqui Cole (JC), Chair of Science Board (F&L) JT Jassen (JTJ) Maya Riddle (MR), Private Secretary Janice Masone (JM), Minutes Secretary
<b>Invited Guests:</b>	Item 4: Dave Newbold (DN), Exec Director National Labs, Katharine Hollinshead (KH) lead for Quantum Strategy, Michael Cuthbert*, Director NQCC & Jason Green* (JG) Programmes Lead Item 5: Dave Newbold, Valerie Farr (VF)* leads for AI strategy Item 6: Susanna Mitolo & Amber Vater* leads for SR, Liz Fellman*, Exec Director Strategy, Georgia Giatras, COO Item 7: Georgia Giatras, COO
<b>Apologies:</b>	Jon Butterworth (JMB) Pam Thomas (PT)

<b>Chair: Mark Thomson</b>		
<b>1. Welcome and opening comments</b>		
	1.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) welcomed everyone to the thirty-fifth meeting of STFC Council, which was held at UKRI's offices in Caxton House, London. Some members and invited guests joined the meeting by videoconference.
	1.2	The following points regarding attendance were noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Apologies from Jon Butterworth and Pam Thomas were noted for the whole meeting.</li> <li>ii. Sheila Rowan gave apologies for the afternoon</li> <li>iii. Mike Dunne gave apologies for the morning</li> <li>iv. 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.</li> </ul>
	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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Professor Andy Schofield reported that he is now on the Board of UCEA (Universities and Colleges Employee Association. This is not a conflict for any of the agenda items at this meeting.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Minutes, Actions and Matters Arising from the meeting held on 24th January 2024</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 13 <sup>th</sup> March 2024.
	2.2	<b><u>Actions</u></b> The actions from previous meetings were reviewed and were either complete or in progress.
<b>Chair: Andy Schofield</b>		
<b>3. Executive Chair Update- presentation</b>		
	3.1	Andy Schofield (AJS) invited Mark Thomson (MAT) to give an update to Council on key issues since the last meeting.
	3.2	<b><u>People and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Update</u></b> MAT's presentation included an update on various key appointments and equality, diversity, inclusion (EDI). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>New Council Members:</b> Council was delighted to hear that following another successful recruitment round, three new members have been appointed. JT Jansen (Chief Scientist, NPL), Jana Kolar (Executive Director of CERIC-ERIC), Lucy Edge (COO, Satellite Applications Catapult, Vice Chair Royal Mencap Society and Chair of Atheras Analytics). Council members are looking forward to meeting them when they take up their roles in April 2024.</li> <li>ii. <b>New PPD Director:</b> MAT extended grateful thanks to Carsten Welsch (CPW) and Jon Butterworth (JB) for serving on the search committee which led to the successful recruitment of Professor Sinead Farrington as STFC's new PPD</li> </ul>

		<p>Director. She will take up post in July.</p> <p>iii. <b>EDI Update:</b> At the previous meeting, Council had discussed how the government's current stance on EDI might impact STFC, MAT confirmed that STFC remains action focused and the recruitment campaign for STFC's EDI manager role is now live. Council felt that this role will do much to revitalise STFC's EDI Advisory Board and bring much needed coordination to STFC's strong efforts in this important area.</p> <p>iv. Council was very interested in the second phase of STFC's Reverse Mentoring scheme which was opened to all under-represented groups. Council asked for further information on the scope of the scheme and indicators of success. MAT explained that personal stories from both mentors and mentees reflected the positive impact of the scheme, participation had certainly resulted in a better understanding of different viewpoints and experiences. More detailed information, including statistics on mentors and mentees will be supplied at a future meeting.</p>
	3.3	<p><b><u>Financial Update</u></b> Discussion of MAT's financial update focused mostly on the challenges facing STFC in setting budgets for 2024/25.</p> <p>i. STFC's Executive (EB) are considering several options to manage significant pressures in line with wider UKRI challenges. Council considered the options, and recognised the complexity and depth of the challenge, particularly in managing headcount. Council cautioned that natural attrition may not deliver the required reduction in headcount for 2024/25</p> <p>ii. Council particularly noted severe pressure for the PPAN budgets, contributory factors are major project cost and schedule overruns Council advised that STFC should ensure a strong, strategic engagement with all its communities, including Astronomy and Particle Astrophysics. The advisory panels will require support and clear guidance to this effectively.</p>
	3.4	<p><b><u>PPAN Prioritisation</u></b> Linking to the discussion of the PPAN budgets, MAT reported that EB and Science Board (PPAN) recently held a joint session on PPAN prioritisation. Science Board will work closely with STFC to help develop a strategic framework for prioritisation.</p> <p>i. MAT shared key messages from Science Board about this exercise, which included the importance of engaging with the community in a transparent and clear manner, Council strongly agreed with this view and advised that STFC ensure this is a key output of this exercise</p> <p>ii. MAT emphasised that this not a refreshed "Balance of Programmes" or a Programmatic Review, the strategic framework will aid prioritisation and provide clarity for the advisory panels. The aim is to have an initial view of scientific themes and priorities by September</p> <p><b>Secretary's note: A series of town hall meetings were held in April which began community engagement on this matter.</b></p>
	3.3	<p><b><u>Process for Statements of Interest</u></b> Council received an overview of the proposed process of for Science Board to identify new opportunities and assess them against the baseline programme. MAT highlighted that the Statement of Interest (SOI) route will be retained but modified to</p>

		<p>ensure the strategic case is clear, the benefit of the investment is well understood and there are clear estimates of future commitments.</p> <p>i. Whilst Council welcomed the new process, some members flagged the Visions process which had been a useful outlet for the community to develop new ideas and concepts from both the PPAN and Labs side and asked how the proposed changes would ensure this important route is not lost.</p> <p>ii. MAT assured Council that STFC appreciated the value of the Visions process and explained that it has been paused due to resource constraints. Council encouraged STFC to consider routes to keep the Visions process alive alongside the new SOI process.</p>
	3.5	<p><b><u>UKRI facilities hosted by STFC</u></b></p> <p>MAT apprised Council of the latest developments with both NQCC and RUEDI, which are delivered in partnership with EPSRC. NQCC is under construction and will enter operations in 2025/26, RUEDI is in business/design phase. The academic lead is Liverpool. STFC is working to ensure strong governance is in place, particularly for RUEDI.</p> <p>i. Council strongly endorsed STFC's approach and noted there is evidence to support the necessity and benefit of clear accountability and responsibilities.</p>
	3.6	<p><b><u>Live Issues</u></b></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.</p> <p>i. Discussion at the meeting focused on the current pay remit and the plans to introduce competency-based pay. It was understood that implementing the new pay scales and pay increases has been a major contributory factor to STFC's budget pressures for 2024/25 which were discussed in more detail earlier in MAT's presentation.</p> <p>ii. Some Council members had been made aware that for some staff, there is a perception that UKRI pay more for similar roles and offered to discuss in more detail outside of the meeting.</p>
<b>Chair: Mark Thomson</b>		
<b>4.</b>	<b>Draft Quantum Strategy</b>	
	4.1	Council welcomed Dave Newbold (DN), Katharine Hollingshead (KH), Jason Green (JG) and Michael Cuthbert (MC) joined the meeting for this discussion.
	4.2	The draft STFC Quantum Strategy has been developed over the last seven months by an internal working group. There have been a wide range of inputs included a situation and landscape analysis and feedback from a Council-EB session, Science Board an EPSRC.

4.3		<p>Noting that this was a work-in-progress, Council members had varying views over the right level of ambition, but all agreed that STFC and its communities had an important role to play. Council made the following recommendations and observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Council recognised that the development of a draft strategy is a significant step forward for STFC and praised the measurable goals and clear timeline to 2033.</li> <li>ii. The UK has been very successful 10 years into the national programme, NQCC being a good example of this success. STFC needs to clarify its own position and its unique offering through the campuses, and how these can tap into and support the national programme.</li> <li>iii. The strategy would benefit from a shorter companion document that can be used for external engagement. This document should outline STFC’s position and USP.</li> <li>iv. It was agreed that the updated strategy would come back to Council for further input.</li> </ul>
<b>5.</b>		<b>AI research landscape &amp; approach to developing an STFC AI strategy</b>
5.1		Council welcomed Valerie Farr (VF) who joined Dave Newbold (DN) in presenting this item for discussion.
5.2		STFC is developing its strategic position on its Artificial Intelligence (AI) ambitions and capabilities. This will enable STFC to establish an approach to developing and deploying AI for its own science goals, identify top science priorities ensure its interests are represented at UKRI level; and ensure its role in the R&I landscape is reflected appropriately across the AI ecosystem.
5.3		<p>Noting that this strategy is at an earlier stage of development than the previously discussed Quantum Strategy, VF and DN sought the views of Council on whether the landscape assessment reflects the current picture, what the level of STFC’s ambition should be and what good governance looks like in this fast-moving area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. In the first instance, Council felt that the problem statement should be more outwardly focused and clearly define STFC’s level of ambition for AI.</li> <li>ii. Council advised reviewing STFC’s partnering model to better understand the barriers and bottlenecks in the current model. Digital twinning could be a useful route to introduce AI into many sectors of the economy.</li> <li>iii. Council encouraged STFC to consider how to tap into government investment in AI and consider how to work with other organisations to maximise opportunities to share resources and further develop the skills agenda including data intensive CDTs. This will ensure that the community develop the skills to make best use of the tools.</li> <li>iv. Council advised that the strategy should address the risks ethical issues surrounding AI, particularly as the technology develops and becomes more commonly used.</li> <li>v. Council will look forward to reviewing the draft strategy when it is more developed.</li> </ul>

<b>6.</b>	<b>Spending Review Update</b>	
	6.1	Council welcomed Susana Mitolo (SM), Liz Fellman (LF) and Georgia Giatras (GG) to the meeting for this discussion.
	6.2	<p>The timeline for the next spending review (SR) is yet to be confirmed but, preparations across UKRI are ramping up, with a Strategy Committee away day focused on SR preparation on 21 March, and the collective goal to provide Executive Committee with advice on shaping UKRI's bid by July. There have been some initial discussions with STFC's Executive which has been developed into a series of overarching categories. The team sought Council feedback on this work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Council considered the list of ideas and priorities and was generally supportive of the portfolio approach.</li> <li>ii. It was noted that the UKRI submission is likely to be fairly generic, flagging opportunities for investment in compute, estates, new facilities, Council agreed that it was useful for STFC to work on more detail for these priorities in the background and to appeal to government interests by tensioning exciting new science against estates sustainability.</li> <li>iii. Council discussed the considerable investment needed in STFC's estates infrastructure, and supported the news relayed by Georgia Giatras (GG) that STFC will be working with other UKRI Councils to develop a case for investment in UKRI science estates.</li> <li>iv. Noting that if an election is not called by the end of March, the SR is likely to be a one-year roll over with a potentially short lead-in time for submission, Council agreed to resurrect the SR Working Group to advise STFC's Executive throughout the process as soon as possible.</li> </ul>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Finance and Governance Committee Update STFC (UKRI) 24/08</b>	
	7.1	Andy Schofield (AJS) and Georgia Giatras (GG) gave the update from the most recent meeting of the Finance and Governance Committee (FGC) which took place on 7 <sup>th</sup> March 2024.
	7.2	<p>The FGC meeting included an update from the COO area, finance update and a risk and assurance update including a closer look at risks for Information Security, Estates and Datacentre capacity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Council considered the Estates risk, which called out aging infrastructure and failure to meet net zero targets. This will be escalated to UKRI's Corporate Risk Register. Council members highlighted that the condition of the science estate had been highlighted in the Nurse Review and as part of the national capability argument. Council advised addressing this problem in phases or tranches, but noted plans to work with other Councils create a case for investment in UKRI science estates.</li> <li>ii. Noting that Sheila Rowan will be stepping down from Council in April 2024, it was suggested that new Council member Lucy Edge could be approached to join the FGC.</li> </ul> <p><b>Secretary's note- Lucy Edge has kindly agreed to join FGC.</b></p>

<b>8.</b>	<b>Innovation and Business Board Update</b>	
	8.1	Hitesh Thakrar (HT) and Angeli Moeller (AM) gave an update from the most recent meeting of the Innovation and Business Board (IBB).
	8.2	<p>The IBB discussed recruiting new members, its workplan for 2024-26 and the intention to establish two sub groups focused on Partnership and Investors.</p> <p>i. Council approved the Innovation &amp; Business Board work plan for 2024 -2026.</p> <p>ii. Council noted the intention to recruit new members and that 2 sub-groups were being set up:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership group led by Angeli Moeller which aims to raise the profile of STFC in some target sectors</li> <li>• Investors group led by Hitesh Thakrar which aims to introduce potential investors to STFC/sites</li> </ul>
<b>9.</b>	<b>Any other business</b>	
	9.1	MAT and Council members expressed sincere thanks to Sheila Rowan, Mike Dunne and Anu Ojha for their extremely valuable contributions during their time as Council members and wished them well for the future.
	9.2	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. <a href="#">About us   WMG   University of Warwick</a>
<b>10.</b>	<b>Closing Remarks</b>	
	MAT thanked members and guests for their contribution. The next meeting will be at RAL on Tuesday 14 <sup>th</sup> May with a Council only session with EPSRC Council on Wednesday 15 May.	