



**AGREED MINUTES OF THE THIRTY-FIRST MEETING OF STFC COUNCIL  
HELD AT RUTHERFORD APPLETON LABORATORY  
ON 18<sup>th</sup> MAY 2023**

<b>Attendees</b>	
<b>Council Members:</b>	Mark Thomson (chair) (MAT) Sheila Rowan (Co-chair) (SR) Jon Butterworth (JB) Mike Dunne (MD) Patricia Hodgson (PH) Anu Ojha (AO) Angeli Moeller (AM)* Hiranya Peiris (HP) Pam Thomas (PT) Hitesh Thakrar (HT)
<b>Apologies:</b>	Andy Schofield (AJS)
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Paul Monks (PM), DESNZ CSA Tara Shears (TS), Chair of Science Board Maya Riddle (MR), Private Secretary Janice Masone (JM), Minutes Secretary
<b>Invited Guests:</b>	Liz Fellman (LF), Exec Director Strategy, Planning & Comms - item 3/4 Grahame Blair, Exec Director Prog – item 3 Beth House (BH), Associate Director International – item 4

<b>Chair, Mark Thomson</b>		
<b>1. Welcome and opening comments</b>		
1.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) welcomed everyone to the thirty-first meeting of STFC Council, which was held at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory.	
1.2	The following points regarding attendance were noted: i. Apologies were received from Andy Schofield (AJS).	
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. Although not a conflict, Anu Ojha (AO) reported that he'd recently been appointed as a member of the UK Space Agency Board. Council members congratulated him on this appointment.	
1.4	MAT and Council members reflected on the dinner held at The Cosener's House on the evening of 17 <sup>th</sup> May 2023. The event, which had been in the planning since before the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, brought together Council members, senior officials from STFC and key stakeholders from academia and industry. It had been useful for building and strengthening networks and increasing understanding of what STFC's campuses have to offer.	
<b>2. Minutes, Actions and Matters Arising from the meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> March 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 meeting held on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2023.	
2.2	<b><u>Actions</u></b> The actions from previous meetings were reviewed and were either complete or in progress.	
<b>3. Science Board Update- Presentation</b>		
3.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) invited Tara Shears (TS), Chair of Science Board, to give her update from the most recent meeting of Science Board. She was joined by Liz Fellman (LF) and Grahame Blair (GB).	
3.2	Science Board received updates from the Facility User Advisory Panels, Quantum, QTFP and Innovation Schemes, Evidence and Impact Team and changes to management of the Particle Astrophysics Programme. The main points arising from the discussion at Council are noted below.	
3.3	<b><u>Particle Astrophysics Programme</u></b> i. Council members were interested to note that although Science Board had previously ranked the Cherenkov Telescope Array (CTA) as a lower priority, Science Board recommended that STFC consider it as part of the programme tensioning exercise to be conducted by Science Board (PPAN).  ii. Council noted the complexities of the Gravitational Wave (GW) research landscape and advised that the planned changes to funding need to be made early to allow communities time to prepare. Council asked STFC to provide information on how GW will be funded, including grants, operations, R&D, for discussion at the July Council meeting. This can either be in the form of a discussion paper or through the Executive Chair's update.	

3.4	<b><u>Advisory Panel Concerns</u></b>	<p>TS's presentation highlighted a number of concerns raised by the Facility User Advisory Panels. These included plans to mitigate the impact of shutdowns/dark periods on the community, STFC's strategic plans for neutron provision if ILL closes in the early 2030s, STFC's strategy for industrial use of its facilities and the need to improve Early Career Researcher (ECR) support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Noting the role of ISIS in the event of ILL's closure, Council asked about STFC's strategic plans for neutrons and plans for communicating with the neutron community. Council asked about the neutron strategy (noting the role of ISIS when ILL closes) and comms routes with the neutron community. LF and GB will take this forward and ensure it is covered in Town Meetings and other community engagement opportunities.</li> <li>ii. Council felt it was important for STFC to have a strategy in place regarding the management of dark periods for the planned shutdowns of CLF and Diamond. A brief strategy paper should be drafted for discussion at Science Board (Facilities) before being reported to Council.</li> <li>iii. Early Career Research (ECR) support was also discussed, and it was noted that paying for student accommodation was a major blocker for many. Council felt that STFC and UKRI should prioritise removing these blockers where possible.</li> <li>iv. The Advisory Panels highlighted retention and morale issues among facility staff which was noted with some concern by Council. Council flagged the importance of creating viable career pathways and pay scales as part of addressing these serious issues, advisory panels are working with facility boards on putting some of these ideas into action.</li> </ul>
<b>4.</b>	<b>International Strategic Priorities Fund (ISPF)</b>	
4.1		Beth House (BH) attended the meeting for this discussion, she was joined by Liz Fellman (LF).
4.2		BH gave some background to the creation and development of the International Strategic Priorities Fund (ISPF) and how UKRI and STFC have organised to maximise their chances of successful outcomes. Details of the scope and strategic themes of the fund can be found in the paper. Due to delays in funding decisions and commissioning of some of the tranche 1 programmes, an underspend is now predicted. The UKRI International committee is discussing how to allocate this.
4.3		In March, STFC's Executive Board (EB) reviewed and prioritised nine programme ideas for tranche 3 which were aligned to the four strategic themes of the ISPF. Following this, final recommendations of the programmes to be funded in tranche 3 were agreed by the UKRI international committee in May. Council noted the outcome of funding for new STFC programmes within ISPF which are detailed in the paper.
4.4		STFC's International team plans to continue to develop new potential international programme areas and activities in anticipation of future opportunities for funding, as they develop. They will work across STFC, bringing in the national labs, programmes directorate and wider STFC stakeholder communities. The team want to ensure that this future work on international investment development is aligned appropriately with the STFC visions process.

4.4		<p>Council was invited to discuss and advise how STFC should seek to continue to expand and develop its pipeline of international programmes areas/ideas. Key points arising from this discussion are noted below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Council was impressed with the paper and the strategic approach being taken by STFC. Council especially wished to commend BH and her team for achieving a great amount of progress in a short space of time.</li> <li>ii. Council advised emphasising STFC's strengths, publicising its unique facilities and how these can answer the challenges described in the scope of the fund. Council felt the campuses and facilities are a key factor in attracting political attention along with international and industrial investment.</li> <li>iii. Discussion turned to producing a short, outwardly focused document to promote the Harwell Campus to ministers, business leaders and international stakeholders. Council welcomed the news that STFC colleagues are working on producing a suite of glossy brochures with this aim, Pam Thomas (PT) offered the assistance of the Faraday Institute's strategy director to take this forward. (Secretary's note- introductions were arranged by the Council secretariat team)</li> <li>iv. The campus brochure will be prepared first and will be shared with Council members when it is complete.</li> </ul>
<b>5. Update from Council sub-committees</b>		
5.1		<p><b><u>Technology Accelerator Advisory Board (TAAB)</u></b>  Mike Dunne (MD) and Jon Butterworth (JB), co-chairs of TAAB, gave Council an update from the most recent TAAB meeting. The main business for this meeting was to review and prioritise outline proposals for the Accelerator Science Research Call for Consortia and recommend which should be invited to submit a full proposal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. The co-chairs of TAAB highlighted concerns regarding the submissions to this Accelerator call, particularly the lack of diversity and innovation. Council shared these concerns and advised that the Programmes Directorate should bring the outcomes of the accelerator call to Council for ratification prior to any outcomes being communicated to applicants.</li> <li>ii. A broader discussion took place around how effective the current, complex accelerator landscape is in supporting the generation of new and/or novel ideas. Council felt that changes in leadership within the accelerator community alongside the changes to STFC's governance structure may address this.</li> </ul>
5.2		<p><b><u>Innovation Advisory Board (IAB)</u></b>  Council wished to thank Dick Elsy, Ben Olivier, and Patricia Hodgson for serving on the IAB.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. The Terms of Reference are being reviewed and new membership is now being sought for the new Innovation and Business Board (IBB). The BID Executive Director is working on a forward plan for the first year of the new board's operation.</li> <li>ii. Council noted that members of the new board will have interest in science and innovation and every effort is being made to have an appropriate EDI balance. Council will ratify the new proposed membership before appointments are confirmed.</li> </ul>

<b>Chair: Sheila Rowan</b>		
<b>6.</b>	<b>Executive Chair Update</b>	
6.1	Sheila Rowan (SR) invited Mark Thomson (MAT) to give his update to Council. The main points arising from the discussion of MAT's presentation are noted below:	
6.2	<p><b><u>People Update</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>Executive Director, National Laboratories:</b> Council welcomed the news that Dave Newbold, current director of STFC's Particle Physics Department (PPD), has been appointed to this role and felt it was a positive development.</li> <li>ii. MAT outlined the process for recruiting a new <b>PPD Director</b>, Council expressed some concern at the process and felt it was counter to public policy.</li> <li>iii. <b>Cockcroft Institute Director:</b> Professor Stewart Boogert has accepted this role, Council felt this was a strong appointment, although it won't resolve the complexity of the landscape as discussed during the TAAB update.</li> <li>iv. <b>STFC Council recruitment:</b> Council was pleased to hear that two new members have been recruited and will start in the summer. The campaign for 2024 will also begin in the summer, three new members with backgrounds in Space, Quantum and Facilities/Labs will be sought.</li> <li>v. <b>Researcher Development:</b> Council was interested to learn that a programme is being developed internally to enhance the careers of STFC researchers and will feature a conference to be held in the autumn. It is hoped the programme will free up time for researchers and create opportunities for cross-departmental collaboration.</li> </ul>	
6.3	<p><b><u>Future of Compute Review</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Through the DRI Forum STFC, UKRI and the other Councils had strong and direct engagement with this DCMS review. The review resulted in ten recommendations, including taking a phased approach to the implementation of Exascale. Council felt these recommendations were largely sensible.</li> <li>ii. DSIT has formally written to UKRI to set out the pace and ambition of the UK's approach to the rapid implementation of large-scale AI computing resource and a programme of skills and software to exploit Exascale. There are some differing views from the community on implementation but strong support for hosting a phase 1 machine in the UK.</li> <li>iii. Council understood this was an area where the UK is lagging behind the rest of the world and welcomed the news of this commitment, though recognised there were no funds for this in the current Spending Review period.</li> </ul>	
6.4	<p><b><u>DSIT Priorities</u></b></p> <p>Council discussed a number of DSIT priorities and agreed it would be useful to have a more in-depth discussion of how STFC contributes to government's "Ten Big Things" at a future meeting.</p>	
6.5	<p><b><u>UKRI Carbon Budgets</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Council shared MAT's concerns regarding the UKRI paper on Carbon budgets. Researchers and scientists from across UKRI, universities and industry use STFC facilities and International Subscriptions to work toward meeting government priorities.</li> </ul>	

		<p>ii. Council advised that a sensible discussion on this issue was required, which included an analysis of the costs in terms of resources, time and impact on access. At a high level, there is a need for balance between sustainability and scientific activity. At a UKRI level, the ToR should be focused on the elements which are under STFC/UKRI's control and that there should be a defined scope and timeline for delivery.</p> <p>iii. Connected to this, Council noted the significant investment in Harwell by Moderna and asked about the long-term sustainability of STFC's sites in terms of land usage and power supply. Council requested a broader discussion of development plans for Harwell and Daresbury campuses at a future meeting.</p>
	6.6	<p><b>Live Issues</b></p> <p>i. <b>Facilities users by funding source:</b> MAT reported back on a question recently raised at Council about use of STFC facilities by other UKRI Councils. It was confirmed that EPSRC fund the majority of users (around 63%) through grant funding, mostly in the area of scientific computing.</p> <p>ii. <b>UKRI observer at Council:</b> Since the departure of Ruth Elliot, UKRI has not confirmed a new observer to attend STFC Council. MR will follow up with UKRI.</p> <p>iii. <b>Operational Expenditure (OpEx) challenge:</b> MAT outlined some of the challenges faced by STFC in meeting UKRI OpEx reduction targets. This is particularly felt in STFC's Programmes Directorate (PD) and Strategy Planning and Communications Directorate (SPC).</p> <p>iv. STFC believes headcount reduction targets can be met through recruitment pauses and holding vacancies, but there will be some reorganisation required which will have significant implications across many STFC activities, and this will be visible to the community.</p> <p>v. Council members highlighted that STFC generally has good relationships with its community, particularly on an individual level and encouraged MAT to be open about the pressure faced by the organisation and UKRI more broadly.</p>
<b>7.</b>		<b>Any Other Business</b>
	7.1	Members of Council highlighted a recent ESA brief about security concerns with China. It was confirmed that when traveling to China, STFC issue staff with blank laptops and phones;
	7.2	Council members are reminded to update or create their UKRI Declaration of Interest form. <a href="https://www.sharepoint.com">UKRI Declaration of Interest - Home (sharepoint.com)</a>
<b>8.</b>		<b>Closing Remarks</b> MAT thanked members and guests for their contribution. The next meeting will be a virtual one, held on 19 <sup>th</sup> July 2023.