



**AGREED MINUTES OF THE THIRTY-THIRD MEETING OF STFC COUNCIL
HELD BY VIDEOCONFERENCE
ON 16 NOVEMBER 2023**

Attendees	
Council Members:	Mark Thomson (chair) (MAT) Sheila Rowan (Senior Independent Member) (SR) Jon Butterworth (JB) Michele Dougherty (MKD) Mike Dunne (MD) – PM only Patricia Hodgson (PH) Angeli Moeller (AM) Hiranya Peiris (HP) Andy Schofield (AJS) Hitesh Thakrar (HT) Pam Thomas (PT) – am only Carsten Welsch (CPW)
Apologies:	Anu Ojha (AO)
In Attendance:	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
Invited Guests:	Item 3: Georgia Giatras, COO Item 5: Liz Fellman, Exec Director Strategy & Grahame Blair, Exec Director Programmes Item 6: Liz Fellman plus STFC Infrastructure Team (Ailidh Snook, Ashleigh Wilcox, & Nicole Ashman, Item 7: Ottoline Leyser, UKRI CEO, Liz Fellman & Georgia Giatras

Chair: Mark Thomson		
1. Welcome and opening comments		
	1.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) welcomed everyone to the thirty-fourth meeting of STFC Council, which was held by videoconference on 16 th November 2023.
	1.2	The following points regarding attendance were noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Apologies were received from Anu Ojha and Pam Thomas reported that she would leave the meeting early due to a scheduling conflict. ii. Council welcomed the new chairs of Science Board(PPAN) Keith Grainge & Science Board (Facilities and Labs) Jacqui Cole to the meeting.
	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"> i. The following Council members and attendees declared indirect/institutional conflicts with various projects being considered for the Infrastructure Fund: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tara Shears • Andy Schofield • Jonathan Butterworth • Hiranya Peiris • Keith Grainge • Sheila Rowan ii. These were not an impediment to the discussion.
2. Minutes, Actions and Matters Arising and Actions from the meeting held on 20-21 September 2023		
	2.1	<u>Minutes</u> Subject to some minor amendments which have now been actioned, Council approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meetings held on 20-21 September 2023.
	2.2	<u>Actions</u> The actions from previous meetings were reviewed and were either complete or in progress.
3. Finance and Governance Committee Update		
	3.1	Council welcomed Georgia Giatras (GG) to the meeting. GG and Sheila Rowan (SR) gave an update from the most recent meeting of the Finance and Governance Committee.
	3.2	<u>Risk and Assurance Update</u> The committee's report to Council highlighted that the STFC Corporate Risks for Achieving Net Zero and Data Centre Capacity at RAL both remain above appetite. In both cases, the operation of aging infrastructure is a major contributory factor. Council reviewed these, and other risks on STFC's Corporate Risk Register (CRR). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Aging Infrastructure: Council noted the significant investment required to meaningfully address this and supported the proposed plan to escalate the aging infrastructure risk to a black rating on STFC's Corporate Risk Register. ii. Data Centre Capacity (RAL): STFC's Executive Board has begun to give serious consideration to the best route for establishing the Research Computing Centre (RCC), considering the challenges of power supply at RAL.

		<p>The FGC will review the risk in more detail in early 2024 ahead of a discussion at Council.</p> <p>iii. Council noted the ongoing work around the strategy and expressed its willingness to advise on this matter, commenting that it would be regrettable if the UK was unable to realise its potential to be a global leader in this area, due to a lack of investment in key infrastructure. However, it was agreed that the issue needed to be better understood before Council could take a position on it.</p> <p>iv. Information Security Risk: Council noted that although this risk was scored in accordance with the controls currently in place and acknowledging the residual risks, the FGC felt strongly that the target risk level should be revised from medium to high. It was explained that STFC and UKRI are working closely together to address the concerns raised in the Digital Infrastructure audit, .</p> <p>v. Executive Chair recruitment: The FGC and Council have both previously expressed concern at the continued delays in recruiting to these high-profile roles. Council members particularly flagged that this had been noticed by the community. Council noted that the delays were not due to UKRI and was pleased to see that action had been taken to reduce delays.</p>
	3.3	<p><u>Governance Changes</u> The FGC approved revised Terms of Reference (TOR) for an updated Operations Board and National Laboratories Directors Board. Council understood that both groups already exist, these changes have been made to formalise the scope and remit and update membership.</p> <p>i. Council agreed with FGC's approval of these changes and supported the committee's recommendation to regularly review to ensure nothing falls between the cracks and avoiding duplication of efforts, and to hold regular joint meetings.</p>
	3.4	<p>Council members thanked the committee for the update, commenting that the FGC was working very well, particularly in providing oversight and insight to STFC and UKRI's risks.</p>
Chair: Sheila Rowan		
4.	Executive Chair's Update – presentation	
	4.1	<p>Sheila Rowan (SR) invited Mark Thomson (MAT) to give an update to Council on key issues since the last meeting.</p>
	4.2	<p><u>2022 and 2023 Pay Awards</u> MAT reported that since Council last met in September 2023, UKRI had agreed a change in approach for the 2023 pay case but remain committed to long term pay reform as previously discussed.</p> <p>i. Council members considered the potential impacts of this decision on recruitment and retention, which remains a key risk for STFC. Although formal data is not yet available, a decrease in the resignation rate is expected as a result of the 2022 pay award, the approach for the 2023 award is expected to have a positive impact within the organisation more widely.</p> <p>ii. Council asked whether STFC/UKRI are monitoring the evolution of the gender pay gap since the new pay scales were introduced. It was confirmed that this</p>

		<p>is being monitored, especially pay differentials in similar roles in both STEM and non-STEM areas.</p> <p>iii. The HR team has given a strong performance in supporting the Executive through the implementation of the new pay scales and the subsequent work around organising and hearing appeals. Council joined MAT in extending grateful thanks to the team.</p>
4.3	<p><u>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion</u> MAT reported on the most recent developments relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in STFC and UKRI.</p> <p>i. Secretary of State Letter to UKRI: Council considered the recent public correspondence between the UKRI Chief Executive and Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology of the United Kingdom (SOS). This related to politically sensitive comments made on social media by two academics serving on Research England’s EDI panel and UKRI’s initial response to immediately suspend the panel.</p> <p>ii. Council members highlighted that this situation had caused disquiet in the community, particularly because the individuals had been publicly identified. There was also concern around how it might impact on the relationship between Councils and their advisory bodies- particularly on the ability of the latter to give independent advice.</p> <p>iii. Council was reassured to learn that the individuals involved had been offered support from UKRI and subsequent messaging has made it very clear that EDI remains at the forefront for UKRI in all its activities. UKRI has no plans to monitor social media activity past or present, though is considering issuing some updated guidance.</p> <p>iv. STFC EDI: STFC continues to take an action-focused approach to EDI, and it remains a central priority for the organisation. Council was very supportive of plans to recruit a dedicated resource to support STFC’s internal EDI efforts, including the EDI Advisory Board,</p>	
4.4	<p><u>Strategic Issues</u> MAT’s presentation included an overview of the key strategic issues currently occupying MAT and STFC’s Executive Board:</p> <p>i. Space Gateway: Council was pleased to hear that this proposal to scale up UK Space Capability at the Harwell Campus is beginning to gain traction within government.</p> <p>ii. Dark Matter Observatory: Timescales are driven by keeping up with international competition and are dependent on international politics. Council encouraged MAT to make the most of the wide range of opportunities that will be made possible for the UK as host of this facility.</p> <p>iii. Research Computing Centre (RCC): Council advised that the real issue for the future will be around who “owns” the compute capacity, rather than the location of that capacity. Council encouraged MAT and STFC’s leadership to think strategically about the location of this facility given the potential for the UK to be a global leader in this area.</p> <p>iv. Estates: STFC’s Executive Board had recently received a presentation from the Estates Team which highlighted in the starkest terms the need for</p>	

		<p>investment to update and replace aging infrastructure, address power supply issues, and ensure future resilience and sustainability. Council noted the scale of the investment needed and referred to the earlier discussion with the FGC, highlighting the increasing severity of this risk, and its impact on the UK's capability to build and host world class science facilities.</p> <p>v. Finances: Council noted the need to manage budgetary pressures in 2023/24. This will possibly form part of a joint discussion with Council in EB in early 2024.</p>
Chair: Mark Thomson		
5.	Science Board (PPAN) meeting update	
5.1	The chair invited Tara Shears (TS) and Keith Grainge (KG) to give an update from the first meeting of the newly formed Science Board (PPAN) which had taken place in late October. Liz Fellman (LF), Philip Amison (PA) and Grahame Blair (GB) were also present.	
5.2	<p>Discussion focussed on the issues raised by Science Board (PPAN) to Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Rising indirect costs and treatment of funded academic time: Science Board recommended that STFC and UKRI should take steps to address the impact these ongoing issues are having on the community (also noted by the Nuclear Physics Grants Panel). ii. Council members commented that this long-standing issue is widely recognised in the wider community/academic system and relates to broader question around the nature of cross subsidies which are insufficient to cover the cost of research. Inevitably, if government is not able to provide enough funding to resolve this issue, the net result will be reduced volume of research and fewer early career researchers in the UK. iii. Operational expenditure (OpEx) and resourcing: Science Board (PPAN) was gravely concerned about the continued reductions in OpEx which resulted in pressure on staff and brought into question how critically important activities such as the prioritisation exercise would be resourced. iv. It was well understood by Council that these pressures originate from Government seeking to have an effective and efficient civil/public service, which, whilst desirable, can lead to unintended consequences. STFC will need to take difficult decisions and some activities which are important to its community will need to stop in order to fit within a constrained budget. v. Council observed that operating under such constraints can impact on staff wellbeing and lead to recruitment and retention issues. This was a point which was well recognised by STFC's senior management who are doing all they can to address it. vi. Joint Induction Event: Science Board PPAN members wished to record its thanks to the STFC staff involved in organising the joint induction event. The event was very well organised and informative for new and existing members alike. 	
6.	Science Board (PPAN) deputy chair	
6.1	Liz Fellman (LF), Philip Amison (PA) and Grahame Blair (GB) remained present for this discussion.	

	6.2	A new Deputy Chair is needed for Science Board (PPAN). Professor Tara Shears will step down as the current Chair and will rotate off the Board at the end of 2023. Professor Keith Grainge, the current Deputy Chair, will become Chair from January 2024. This means it is necessary to appoint a new Deputy Chair.
	6.3	Applications were sought internally from non-astronomy board members. The successful candidate, Dr Martin Bauer, was selected by the interview panel which was chaired by Council member Professor Hiranya Peiris. i. Council members agreed that Dr Bauer was an excellent candidate, a great science communicator and very highly regarded in the community. Council was delighted to approve Dr Martin Bauer as Deputy Chair of Science Board PPAN.
	6.4	Council members extended their sincere thanks to Professor Tara Shears for her hard work and dedication during her time on Science Board, including most recently as Chair.
7.	Infrastructure Wave 4 Preliminary Cases- STFC (UKRI) 23/34	
	7.1	Council welcomed the Infrastructure Team, Ailidh Snook (AS), Ashleigh Wilcox (AW) and Nicole Ashman (NA), to the meeting.
	7.2	The team presented feedback from and Science Board regarding the preliminary proposals being considered for submission to Wave 4 of the Infrastructure Fund. i. Council agreed that XLZD should be submitted for Wave 4 as STFC's highest priority, and it was clearly in-line with our strategy for Boulby. However, the case should be amended to conform with the IAC financial guidelines. ii. After some deliberation, Council agreed that AION should be put forward, but Council advised that STFC should reserve the option to withdraw. Several members advised that while the technology was novel & interesting, this should be proven on the 10m prototype before diverting funding & effort on to the 100m version. iii. Council felt that the MOSTel case had potential and that they should be strongly encouraged to resubmit when the community had aligned behind of the two competing projects in this area. iv. Council agreed that ITRF should be deferred. Further work was needed, particularly to progress initial phase and adapting to the new process. Council similarly supported Science Board's recommendations to defer ULT Underground and TRITON. v. Council agreed with Science Board's recommendation that the other seven proposals should not be submitted to the Infrastructure Fund. However, it should be made clear that this is not a reflection on the quality of the science, which was generally high quality. Council strongly advised keeping these on the Visions list and considering other possible routes to funding
	7.3	Council thanked the Infrastructure Team for implementing and overseeing the process and providing excellent quality paperwork which had been invaluable in assessing and prioritising the preliminary cases.
Chair: Sheila Rowan		

8.	Q&A with UKRI CEO- discussion	
	8.1	Council members welcomed Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser (OL), (UKRI CEO) to the meeting.
	8.2	<p>A wide range of topics were covered during this informal conversation. Key points are captured below:</p> <p>i. New Science Minister: OL had the opportunity to meet with the newly appointed Science Minister Andrew Griffith. OL reported that he is very interested in constructive private sector investment. Council members advised STFC to invite him to RAL, potentially to the NSTF opening.</p> <p>ii. Executive Chair Recruitment: Council members highlighted the concerns from the community which were discussed earlier in this meeting. OL explained that the delays were due to inertia in the public appointment system but that things were now progressing at pace. UKRI was very grateful for the interim Executive Chairs for stepping in.</p> <p>iii. Other topics raised during the course of the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big data- balancing need to provide adequate compute for our research & businesses with desire to deliver net zero, • Commercialisation and opportunities for a more joined up UKRI approach- the government was about to publish a report on university spin outs & lack of later stage development, • Place agenda and focusing investments on where we can push the dial on local economic landscapes; • Supporting multi-disciplinary & multi-council initiatives such as the recently launched pan-UKRI Responsive Mode grant call. • SoS letter – OL confirmed that this challenging situation had highlighted the need for space for high quality debate. OL further confirmed that EDI was fundamental to the R&I system and UKRI remained committed to EDI. <p>iv. When asked what STFC Council can do to help UKRI, OL highlighted the importance of continuing to communicate the vital role of research & innovation in helping to rebuild the economy and, within UKRI, encouraging collaborative endeavours with other research councils.</p> <p>v. Council thanked OL for her honesty in discussing the challenges she has faced and was pleased to support her, understanding that if UKRI succeeds, STFC and all of UK science benefits from that success.</p>
9.	Any other business	
	9.1	None noted.
10.	Closing Remarks	
	MAT thanked members and guests for their contribution. The next meeting will be held on 24-25 January 2024 at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory.	