



**AGREED MINUTES OF THE EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF STFC COUNCIL
HELD BY VIDEOCONFERENCE
18th March 2021**

Attendees	
Council Members:	Mark Thomson (chair) (MAT) Richard Kenway (Co-chair) (RK) Maggie Aderin-Pocock (MAP) Isabelle Baraffe (IB) Dick Elsy (DE) Ben Olivier (BO) Hiranya Peiris (HP) Sheila Rowan (SR) David Rugg (DR) Tony Ryan (TR) Frances Saunders (FS) Mike Dunne (MD) Anupam Ojha (AO) Maya Riddle (MR), Private Secretary Janice Masone (JM), Minutes Secretary
Apologies:	
In Attendance:	Ruth Elliot (RE), UKRI Finance Director & observer Tara Shears (TS), Chair of Science Board Patricia Hodgson (PH), Observer and future member of Council Jonathan Butterworth (JB) Observer and future member of Council
Invited Guests:	Ottoline Leyser (OL), CEO of UKRI, Items 5 Liz Kitchener (LK), Head of Estates – Item 3 Jo Colwell (JC), Head of Environmental Sustainability – Item 3 Paul Vernon (PV), Exec Director of Business & Innovation – Item 3 Liz Fellman (LF), Exec Director of Strategy, Planning & Comms - Item 6, 7, 9 Philip Amison (PA), Associate Director Strategy - Item 6 & 7 Amber Vater (AV), Head of Strategy - Item 6 & 7 Rain Irshad (RI), Division Head in RAL Space – Item 8 Alan Partridge (AP), Exec Director National Labs – Item 8 Chris Mutlow (CM), Director of RAL Space – Item 8

Chair, Mark Thomson		
1. Welcome and opening comments		
1.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) welcomed everyone to the eighteenth meeting of STFC Council, which was held by videoconference to comply with government guidance regarding travel and social contact during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic.	
1.2	Apologies and other information regarding attendance were noted as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Mike Dunne (MD) gave his apologies for the morning sessions of Council. ii. Tony Ryan (TR) gave his apologies for the sessions immediately before and following the lunch break iii. Ottoline Leyser (OL), Chief Executive Officer for UKRI, attended for items 4 and 5 on the agenda iv. Council welcomed Patricia Hodgson and Jon Butterworth (afternoon only) who were invited to attend this meeting as observers before officially beginning their term as Council members on 1st April 2021. 	
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. Hiranya Peiris (HP), Dick Elsy (DE) and Sheila Rowan (SR) declared a conflict for the Grants Round discussion under the Science Board Update. They did not take part in the discussion ii. Ben Olivier (BO) declared an interest for the LARES item given his past association with Thales Alenia. 	
2. Minutes, Matters Arising and Actions from 28th January 2021		
2.1	Council approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting held on 28 th January 2021.	
2.2	The actions from previous meetings were reviewed and were either complete or in progress	
3. Environmental Sustainability Survey and Action Plan		
3.1	Mark Thomson (MAT) invited Paul Vernon (PV) and Johanna Colwell (JC) to talk to Council members about STFC's Environmental Sustainability Survey and Action Plan.	
3.2	Paul Vernon (PV) began by praising the huge amount of work undertaken by STFC's Estates team to design a practical and pragmatic action plan for the organisation to meet the challenge set by UKRI to meet 'net zero' by 2040. PV introduced Johanne Colwell (JC), STFC's newly appointed Head of Environmental Sustainability. JC brings a wealth of experience to the role and will be leading the implementation of the action plan and providing advice and leadership to the Environmental Sustainability Working Group and working with colleagues on developing methodology and gathering evidence to draft an impact statement.	
3.2	Because of STFC's energy consumption it has a major role to play in realising UKRI's net-zero target. JC explained that whilst STFC is at a relatively early stage of its journey to understand the scale and complexity of the challenge there is a clear understanding that it is vital to meet this target. A comprehensive	

		consultation with STFC staff highlighted that this is an important issue for them and there was genuine enthusiasm to lead the way in finding a solution, enhance our knowledge and embed a culture of environmental sustainability within STFC and UKRI. People very much want to be part of the solution to this critical global issue.
	3.3	Council members considered the draft STFC Environmental Sustainability Action Plan (detailed in the paper STFC (UKRI) 21/06). A discussion followed in which everyone agreed this was a critical issue to which a solution must be found. Affordability of green/renewably sourced energy, procurement limitations, transportation links and the challenges of finding environmentally sustainable options for meeting the future energy needs of the campuses were all explored.
	3.4	Council welcomed the news that STFC is working with local authorities at all sites for transportation and planning and JC highlighted exciting opportunities provided by the Living Lab concept. Council identified a further opportunity for STFC and UKRI to be world leaders in making use of ground-breaking technologies such as small modular reactors on its campuses which JC will feed back to the appropriate colleagues.
	3.5	JC outlined next steps for the Environmental Sustainability Action Plan. Initial work is focused on gaining a detailed understanding of the challenge, identifying opportunities and risks which will then inform a medium-term action plan which will be ready by the end of the 2021/22 financial year. The action plan provides detailed and measurable actions for the next 12 months and a travel direction to 2025. Council was pleased to endorse the direction of travel for this action plan.
Chair: Richard Kenway		
4. Executive Chair's Report – Presentation		
	4.2	<p><u>Corporate Update</u> MAT gave an update on the latest corporate level issues and news for STFC. Main points were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Trusted Research: Recent press activity has highlighted concerns about Chinese engagement with UK universities and academics and identified a member of STFC staff with links to a Chinese institute with strong links to the Chinese military. MAT assured Council that STFC was not taking a passive approach to this issue. Prior to the media interest, MAT had initiated a review of STFC's collaborations with China and assess the risks. Council will have the opportunity to review this at a future meeting. ii. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI): Council members were pleased to learn that UKRI is launching networks to support racial inclusion, disability, LGBTQ+, parenting and women. MAT was proud to report that STFC already has active, well established networks to support many of these groups. STFC EDI champions are in place to assist with developing, monitoring and implementing STFC's EDI action plan and ensure it is aligned with UKRI's activities.
	4.3	<p><u>Funding Update</u> Council received an update from MAT on developments and challenges relating to funding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Official Development Assistance (ODA): Due to the economic impact of Covid-19 the UK Government has significantly reduced the annual ODA

		<p>commitment. To fit the reduced funding envelope, UKRI plan to reprofile, reduce and unfortunately terminate some Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF), Newton Fund and other ODA programmes.</p> <p>ii. Council members were extremely concerned by this situation and strongly urged UKRI to find a balanced solution that would protect the critically important work enabled by ODA. Some Council members gave examples from their own working lives of how any cuts or stops could severely impact already vulnerable groups such as refugees. Council welcomed the news that UKRI is this treating as a major incident and has set up a Silver Business Continuity team.</p> <p>iii. STFC Spending Review Allocations: STFC is currently planning for a sub-optimal level of funding and STFC’s Executive Board (EB) has elected to prioritise the Core R&D budget and staff retention. MAT emphasised that STFC is not planning any redundancies or reduction to its current headcount. Council voiced its full support for these priorities, particularly STFC’s stance on preserving the jobs of its existing staff.</p> <p>iv. ARIA: Council members discussed the creation the Advanced Research & Invention Agency (ARIA). The agency was formed to overcome bureaucratic barriers and enable a nimble, direct way to support high risk, high reward science. It was agreed that it would be interesting to watch developments and how this agency would relate to UKRI.</p> <p>v. Despite the challenges, there were also opportunities for STFC. The UK government sees Space as a key priority and is developing the UK’s first Space Strategy and the Build Back Better: plan for growth initiative which reaffirms the commitment to 2.4% GDP for UK R&D.</p>
4.4		<p><u>Live Issues</u> Council received an update on the “live issues” facing MAT and senior colleagues in the organisation. Key points are as follows:</p> <p>i. Diamond Light Source: Council strongly supported the move toward greater integration between Diamond and STFC and felt that this would have avoided many of the current issues around the Diamond II project. Council strongly advised revisiting the original agreement between Wellcome and Diamond with a view to updating and/or renegotiating some aspects of the agreement. Council requested the opportunity to review and discuss the Wellcome agreement at a future Council meeting.</p> <p>ii. ESS: MAT reminded Council of the UK’s Prime Ministerial level (2015) commitment to ESS and subsequent cost increases and schedule slippage and additional funding already supplied by the UK before outlining the next ‘ask’ from ESS. Council members understood the reasons for continuing UK support for ESS but questioned whether the facility represented good value for money for UK science. Council strongly advised ensuring a clear audit trail for decision making related to ESS.</p> <p>iii.</p> <p>iv. MAT reminded Council of the UK’s Prime Ministerial level (2015) commitment to ESS and subsequent cost increases and schedule slippage and additional funding already supplied by the UK before outlining the next ‘ask’ from ESS. Council members understood the reasons for continuing UK support for ESS but remained unconvinced that the facility represented good value for money for UK science. Council strongly advised ensuring a clear audit trail for</p>

		decision making related to ESS.
		v. Gravitational Waves Grants Round: MAT highlighted some serious concerns regarding the approach taken for this round which will be discussed in depth later in the agenda of this meeting.
Chair, Mark Thomson		
5.	Vision for UKRI/Update from UKRI CEO- presentation	
	5.1	Council welcomed Ottoline Leyser (OL), Chief Executive of UKRI to the meeting. OL gave an informative presentation on UKRI's role as stewards of the UK's research and innovation system. The presentation highlighted how STFC and each of the Research Councils has a vital role in UKRI's mission to convene, catalyse and invest through collaboration and partnership with academia, industry, international partners and across government for the benefit of the UK and beyond.
	5.2	Council engaged in a lively discussion which covered a range of subjects including developing UKRI's relationship with government, UKRI's role in the development of the Digital Research Infrastructure Strategy, international partnerships, and the UK Strategy for Space. UKRI's commitment to strengthen and expand public engagement was also discussed and Council welcomed OL's confirmation that this was a high priority for the organisation.
	5.3	OL thanked Council members for an interesting discussion and for their commitment and encouragement to assist UKRI as it continues to develop into a trusted partner in the UK R&D system both within government and the wider community.
6.	STFC Strategy Update-Presentation	
	6.1	Council welcomed Liz Fellman (LF), Philip Amison (PA) and Amber Vater (AV) who attended the meeting to give a presentation outlining progress on STFC's strategic planning activities since the last discussion at Council.
	6.2	Council was reminded that STFC's Strategy Map was published in early 2020, this was followed by a refresh of the Delivery Plan later in 2020. The refresh was published internally and mainly focused on aligning near-term actions to the Strategy Map. This update highlighted the benefits and success of this work and provided Council with an insight into ongoing strategic planning activities in STFC.
	6.3	One of the key benefits to result from the development of the Strategy Map had been in the setting of objectives, both at personal and organisational level. Council members recognised that having the Strategy Map as a framework had resulted in staff setting relevant objectives and having a better understanding of how their work contributed to the success of the organisation. Council members recognised the value of this.
	6.4	The Strategy Map had also driven improved commitment to Operational Excellence throughout the organisation. There are stronger channels for feedback and input from across STFC to the high-level strategy. Council particularly welcomed the improved processes in place to recognise "red flags" for major projects before significant issues arise.
	6.5	Council thanked the team for the update and agreed that STFC's strategic planning activities had begun to drive real improvements in the organisation.

7	Spending Review Update - Presentation	
	7.1	Liz Fellman (LF), Philip Amison (PA) and Amber Vater (AV) remained present for this agenda item which expanded on the Spending Review update that featured in the Executive Chair's update earlier in the meeting.
	7.2	<p>LF, PA and AV outlined the key 'unknowns'/issues that have driven STFC's thinking and decision making for the current Spending Review round:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. No confirmed outcomes for all streams of funding (institute sustainability), infrastructure, NPIF, ODA, inflation ii. Years 2 and 3 not confirmed under existing settlement, nor for those areas to be covered by the next Spending Review round (expected later this year) so not able to form a longer-term view on the possible impact to budgets
	7.3	Although these uncertainties did present some risk to the organisation, EB agreed to prioritise preserving the core PPAN science budget at flat cash levels, protecting existing staff and operating the facilities in any settlement scenario. Council was asked for their views on these principles.
	7.4	Council was strongly supportive of the decision taken by EB to protect staff and core science in its planning for the coming financial year. Council advised emphasising the fact that this protection was to be afforded to all staff not just those with technical skills/scientific roles. Council further advised ensuring STFC maximised any opportunity for European funding.
8.	LARES and Curation Facility for extra-terrestrial samples	
	8.1	Council welcomed Rain Irshad (RI), Chris Mutlow (CM) and Alan Partridge (AP) to the meeting. RI, CIM and AP presented Council with an overview of LARES (Laboratory Analysis of Returned Extra-terrestrial Samples) and the Curation Facility
	8.2	The Curation Facility is being proposed by UK Space Agency (UKSA) and is intended to house extra-terrestrial samples at Harwell. This is timely given the increasing number of extra-terrestrial samples available. The Natural History Museum has offered to house the Curation Facility in its new Harwell Facility which will reduce costs. The Natural History Museum offer does require a decision by UKSA and STFC before the end of 2021.
	8.3	Executive Board recently agreed to develop a business case for the Curation facility and pause the work on the LARES viability case until the Curation business case is completed and the interdependencies between the facilities are better understood.
	8.4	Council members recognised that establishing a Curation facility in the UK offered the opportunity for some exciting and unique science, particularly given the relatively few facilities of this type in the world, and the expected availability of Mars samples from the early 2030s. It was clear that there is both the expertise and appetite within the UK space science community to take this forward in the long term.
	8.5	However, it was also recognised that whilst this facility was outside of STFC's core science area, there was no other Council as well placed to support the development of this proposal. Council members advised that operating a facility that is compliant with relevant biosafety standards is no small undertaking and

		would require considerable funding commitment from ESA, UKRI and government
	8.6	In summary, Council concurred with EB's decision to develop a viability case for the Curation facility and advised ensuring all costs and health and safety considerations were fully understood. It was expected that the viability case would be discussed at Council after it had been reviewed by EB (in June or July).
9.	<u>Science Board Update</u>	
	9.1	MAT invited Tara Shears (TS) to give the update from the most recent Science Board meeting. Liz Fellman (LF) was present for this agenda item.
	9.2	<p><u>Gravitational Waves Grants Round</u> Council discussed the recent review of Gravitational Waves grants. SR and HP declared a conflict of interest and left the videoconference.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council noted the recent successes and resulting high-priority of Gravitational Wave research in providing a new window on massive objects in the Universe – the field has moved from exploration to astrophysical observation. ii. Council expressed concern over the statement 4.1 in the Science Board report “In the Gravitational Waves (GW) consolidated grants round an active choice was taken to broaden the GW programme. This was achieved, within a tight funding envelope, by not always funding the most excellent science. Science Board recognised the challenges and constraints faced by the grants round although disquiet was expressed, and accordingly, endorsed the report” iii. In discussion with the Chair of Science Board, Council recognised the value of broadening the programme. However, Council noted the consequence on the two larger existing groups, where the impact is a reduction of approximately 40%. It became clear that the current situation could be viewed as an unintended consequence of moving all GW related grants into the highly-constrained Particle Astrophysics partition, without transferring the related budget from the Astronomy budget line, where two of the five groups were previously funded. iv. Council also noted that the situation had been exacerbated by increases in indirect and estates costs. Council concluded that broadening the programme in the context of an effective reduction in total funding for Gravitational Waves, due to moving all costs to the PA line and increased overheads, had resulted in a highly non-optimal outcome. v. Council did not wish to revisit the GW grants panel conclusions – the issue that has arisen was a consequence of the recommendation of the Particle Astrophysics programme evaluation to broaden the programme and the lack of an increase in availability of funding in the PA funding partition. With the transfer of funding for two groups from the Astronomy grants line to GW, there is an effective decrease in the funding for GW research. vi. Council requested that STFC Programmes and Science Board find a way to mitigate the current non-optimal funding, potentially by moving the budget that previously funded two groups in the AP line to provide additional funding to the two strong GW groups most negatively impacted.

		<p>vii. Council also discussed the longer-term funding of GW research and concluded that it should be considered as astronomy and should be included in the astronomy grants round. This will require a transfer of budget from PA to AP and inclusion of GW expertise on the AP grants panel.</p> <p>viii. Several members of Council also questioned the need for a specific Particle Astrophysics partition, given that GW should sit in astronomy and Dark Matter searches are particle physics.</p>
	9.3	<p><u>Technician's Commitment</u></p> <p>i. Science Board received a presentation on the Technician's Commitment. This technician-led initiative seeks to showcase and recognise the important role of technicians in supporting world-leading science and provides a framework for career development and skills sustainability</p> <p>ii. Science Board see this activity as critical to reinforcing a career pipeline against the backdrop of low public service pay scales and securing much needed technical expertise. Council was very interested to learn more about this and invited STFC's Technician's Commitment team to present at a future Council meeting</p>
10.	Any other business	
	10.1	Council briefly revisited the discussion on Grants Panels and some members asked whether Panels consider ED&I aspects of their decisions and if so, to what granularity.
	10.2	MAT extended sincere thanks and best wishes on behalf of everyone at STFC to Richard Kenway, Frances Saunders, Tony Ryan and Isabelle Baraffe who were all stepping down from Council at the end of March 2021. Their hard work, advice and commitment to the success of STFC had been greatly appreciated. When pandemic related restrictions are lifted the intention is to hold an in-person celebration for them.
11.	Closing Remarks	
	MAT thanked members and guests for their contribution. The next meeting will take place by videoconference on 27 th May 2021.	