



MINUTES OF THE TWENTY EIGHTH MEETING HELD ON 23 FEBRUARY 2010 AT RAL

Council Members present: Michael Sterling (Chairman)
Martin Barstow
Keith Burnett (*by phone*)
Marshall Davies
Philip Greenish
Philip Kaziewicz
Peter Knight
Keith Mason
James Stirling

Dept. Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) Paul Williams

In Attendance: Tony Ryan (*Deputy Chair, Science Board*)
Gordon Stewart (*Executive Secretary to Council*)
Richard Wade (*Chief Operating Officer*)
Colin Whitehouse (*Director, Campus Strategy*)
Jane Tirard (*Director, Finance*)
Terry O'Connor (*Director, Communications*)
John Womersley (*Dir. Science Programmes*)
Ruth Jeans (*Minute Secretary*)

Apologies: Mike Edmunds

1. WELCOME

- 1.1 The Chairman welcomed members and attendees to the meeting.
- 1.2 The Chairman reported that interviews to appoint three new Council members had been held on 10 February. Recommendations for two 'business' appointments and one 'finance' appointment had been submitted on 19 February to BIS for the Minister's approval, and the outcome was expected to be announced within the next three weeks.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 January 2010

- 2.1 The minutes were agreed to be a correct record of the meeting, and were signed by the Chairman.

3. ACTIONS AND MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 (Minute 5.1 – Diamond’s public engagement policy):** Richard Wade agreed to raise the issue at the next Diamond Board meeting to be held on 24 February, and report back to the next meeting.

Action: R

Wade

- 3.2 (Minute 4.13 – Estates risks):** The Executive Board had reviewed the list of outstanding maintenance issues and had decided to invite the manager responsible to make a presentation to the next EB meeting, to assure the Board that all items were under control, and that there were no issues of legal liability. A final report would be made to the March Council meeting.

- 3.3** Marshall Davies emphasised the need for this item to be signed off at the March Council, to avoid its inclusion in the Statement of Internal Control.

Action: R Wade

- 3.4 Gateway Centres:** The business cases for two Gateway Centres (Hartree Centre and Detector Systems) had now been approved by the RCUK Executive Group subject to certain conditions. Paul Williams agreed to check that BIS had received the submissions

Action: P Williams

- 3.5** The Gateway Review for the Hartree Centre had been scheduled for 9–12 March 2009. Following the Review, the paperwork would be circulated to Council for approval by correspondence.

Action: C

Whitehouse

- 3.6** Council also agreed that the Economic Impact Advisory Board should, as a matter of course, be included in the approval process for such business cases.

Action: C Whitehouse

- 3.7** Regarding the timing of Ministerial approval for funding of the Centres, Paul Williams reported that there were already a number of Large Facility Capital projects awaiting approval. Although challenging, BIS would be making every effort to get as many cases as possible, bearing in mind that STFC had already agreed that ISIS TS2 and Diamond Phase 3 were its highest priorities.

- 3.8 DSIC JV:** Colin Whitehouse reported that one of the three shortlisted bidders had now formally withdrawn from the process. The dialogue meetings would continue with the remaining bidders, and the paperwork from these meetings would be available by the end of March.

Action: C Whitehouse

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN UPDATE

Prioritisation update

- 4.1** John Womersley reported that the implementation of STFC’s prioritisation plan was on track. Considerable progress had been made and there had been no insurmountable challenges so far.

- 4.2 John also reported that constructive discussions with Principal Investigators and grant holders were underway, and the Astronomy grants were in the process of being announced to grant holders and Heads of Departments this week.
- 4.3 Concern was expressed by some members of Council that there were PIs in university particle physics groups who had not been directly contacted by the Office since the prioritisation announcement had been made on 16 December 2009, apart from an email from the Head of Particle and Nuclear Physics (STFC's Science Programmes Office), to all such PIs dated 12 February 2010.
- 4.4 However, Council was assured by Richard Wade (*who had checked with the Office during the meeting*), that those who had been unsuccessful had already been notified, and Principal Investigators of approved astronomy grants, and heads of the relevant departments would be issued with their grant details by the 26 February.
- 4.5 Paul Williams asked for the BIS press office to be provided with details of the announcements. **Action: T O'Connor**
- 4.6 A question was raised relating to the status of the Chilbolton site for the LOFAR project. Richard Wade confirmed that NERC funding for the site would continue at least in the short term. However STFC's financial involvement was limited in LOFAR to £200K to support the installation and initial operation of a university-owned LOFAR station on the site.
- 4.7 John Womersley also confirmed that formal negotiations were underway with the ESA Director (*Space and Robotic Exploration*), with the aim of ESA taking over the mission-critical activities for Cassini, Cluster and XMM, which were currently under the UK's control.
- 4.8 Discussions were also taking place with ESO regarding the UK's future involvement in the E-ELT project. John confirmed that planning provision has been made for the E-ELT in STFC's long-term plans. However, he stressed that this did not commit the UK to the project. So far no complete science or technical case had been produced, or a viable project management plan to review. The UK would insist on both being in place and approved before committing to the project.
- 4.9 In addition, it was pointed out that in order to support this project, difficult decisions would be required on the re-prioritisation of resources and both Council and BIS would be required to approve the proposal. It was also agreed that Council should be fully involved in the shaping of the proposal, not just in the approval process.
- 4.10 John went on to report that a Service Level Agreement between STFC and BNSC had been prepared, as a first step towards creating a Space Agency.
- 4.11 The intention to transfer the outreach, education and KE element had been questioned. John assured Council that these elements related to the BNSC's UK space activities, and a dedicated team would be required to perform these roles effectively. He also assured Council

that effective interfaces between the BNSC activities and the other parts of STFC's programme would be in place, to ensure that fragmentation did not occur.

- 4.12 A consequence of the prioritisation exercise had been a 25 % reduction in the studentships and fellowships budget. The Training Committee had made the decision to implement the cuts by reducing its funding for fellowships, in order to limit the reduction in the number of studentships to just 10%. A new algorithm had also been used for the first time this year, in order to determine where the studentships should be awarded.
- 4.13 Council noted the new process, but requested that regular reviews to be carried out to ensure that the quality of the studentships was maintained. **Action: J Womersley**

Particle Physics Grants

- 4.14 Following discussion on the timetable for announcing the particle physics grants, and the effect of a potential 2–3 year delay in the LHC upgrade programme (*confirmed by the CERN Director General*), Council agreed the following course of action:
- it would be premature to announce grants associated with the LHC detector upgrades given the news from CERN. The Science Board would be asked to advise on the impact of the delays and, taking advice from PPAN, to advise the Executive & Council as to how the LHC detector upgrade programme should be taken forward.
 - The executive to write to all the relevant Particle Physics project leaders within 24 hours, asking them to forward within 7 days the information required to announce the level of remaining grants.
 - The communication should emphasise that if the data was not received by close of play on Wednesday 3 March, the decision on grant funding would be taken by the executive based on previous advice from PPAN and Science Board, and communicated to universities within a further week.
 - Keith agreed to write to the relevant Vice Chancellors, informing them of this development and the steps being taken. **Action: K Mason**
 - The Chairman also asked for position statements on the 'LHC' situation and the number of grants affected, timescales etc to be circulated to Council members for guidance, within the next few days. **Action: J Womersley**
- 4.15 Council **noted** the progress made so far in implementing the prioritisation plan.

5 SPACE AGENCY UPDATE

- 5.1 The Space Board had originally proposed that the only practical option for the new Space Agency would be a ‘hybrid’ option. However Keith Mason reported that recent information indicated that the Minister was anticipating a ‘fully fledged’ model to be established.
- 5.2 Paul Williams confirmed that it was the Minister’s view that a credible set of resources should be identified by the ‘BIS family’ (STFC, NERC, TSB) to be transferred to the new Space Agency by 1 April. The Minister would be meeting with the CEOs shortly, but in the meantime Council had been asked to provide a view on the resources that could readily be transferred.
- 5.3 Following discussion, Council re-iterated that it would be in the national interest to create a national Space Agency. However there was a concern that to create a ‘full’ Agency in the timescale proposed could impose serious risks for STFC and its science programme, as well as there being significant practical and procedural implications.
- 5.4 Jane Tirard reminded Council that funding for space activities was set to fall over future years and that a transfer of space funding fixed at current levels would have material implications for STFC going forward
- 5.5 Council agreed that these risks needed to be defined as a matter of urgency. Keith Mason agreed to discuss a joint response with the Chief Executives of NERC and TSB within the next week, and circulate a draft position for Council’s comments, before the response was submitted to the Minister. **Action: K Mason**

6 DRAYSON REVIEW

- 6.1 The Minister had recognised in his December announcement that there were serious budgetary tensions between STFC’s international science projects; large facilities and grant giving responsibilities, and he had commissioned the Chairman to consult with STFC and the wider community, and to propose a more workable solution for Ministerial decision.
- 6.2 The Chairman presented Council with his analysis and recommendations which had been submitted to Lord Drayson on 15 February. He reported that he was due to meet with the Minister on 24 February, and understood that the Minister would be announcing his decision during the first week in March.
- 6.3 Council **noted** and **endorsed** the recommendations in the Chairman’s submission. However it was agreed that the report should remain confidential until the Ministerial announcement had been made, but then published.

7 STFC PRIORITIES

- 7.1 Keith Mason presented a set of proposed priorities for 2010/11 which had been developed to aid the implementation of the Vision and Strategic Plan.
- 7.2 Council noted the priorities, but asked for more emphasis to be placed on industrial participation, as it was essential for STFC to be seen to be collaborating with industry, as well as academia.
- 7.3 Keith assured Council that industrial involvement was a high priority for STFC. In particular, it was a major element of the plans for the Gateway Centres and Campuses, including the development plan for the International Space Innovation Centre (ISIC), and other similar initiatives.
- 7.4 Keith agreed to make a presentation to Council on the ISIC initiative if the bid to the BIS Strategic Innovation Fund for funding was successful.
Action: K Mason

8 FINANCE

Internal Savings 2010–11

- 8.1 Jane Tirard reported that following meetings with the Directors to secure internal savings of £11M for 2010/11, only £5.7M had been identified. The Executive Board had therefore decided to allocate the shortfall based on direct vote head count. This was still a work in progress, and a full finance report would be made to the next Council meeting.
Action: J Tirard
- 8.2 Council **noted** the report.

Vulcan 10PW Facility upgrade

- 8.3 Jane invited Council to note progress so far in the preparation of a formal bid for the Vulcan upgrade. She reported that the finances were currently under review to ensure that they were complete, realistic, and that the contingency arrangements were robust.
- 8.4 Although the project costs were currently £23.9M, (*close to the delegated level of £25M*), the Executive had been concerned to ensure that the costs were accurate, and that appropriate contingencies were included. This may increase the costs over the BIS approval threshold.
- 8.5 Council expressed its concern at the delay in submitting the bid. It was pointed out that there could be a real danger of losing key staff resulting in serious implications for the project. However Richard Wade pointed out that this was possibly the largest project that Council had been asked to approve, where funding was not provided from non-STFC sources, (e.g. the Large Facilities Capital Fund). Experience had shown that when projects had been ill-defined, there could be serious consequences. It was therefore imperative that due diligence was carried out as quickly as possible to provide assurance to the executive and Council.

- 8.6 Following discussion, Council was minded to approve the proposal at a maximum ceiling of £23.9M, providing the finances were well understood and on the basis that a clear de-scoping contingency was included. The business case should demonstrate how the project could be de-scoped, with clear milestones. Council asked that this be conveyed to the project team. **Action: R Wade**
- 8.7 Council would need to review the de-scope options and the relevant milestones as well as the full business case, before making a formal decision at the next meeting of Council. **Action: J Tirard**

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Future meetings

- 9.1 Council members had recently been canvassed for dates for the 2011 Council meetings. Although it was the Chairman's aim to reduce the frequency of meetings to 4 or 5 per year, (*i.e. March; June; September, October, December*), members were requested to hold all the agreed dates for the time being. The Chairman would make a decision on the 'interim' dates on a case by case basis, and would advise Council well in advance if a meeting was required.

Longitudinal studies

- 9.2 Marshall Davies – referring to the earlier discussion on training – asked whether EPSRC had undertaken a longitudinal cohort study of physicists, as he suggested that it would be helpful to have some knowledge of the career paths of physicists.
- 9.3 Paul Williams mentioned that ESRC operates a Longitudinal Studies Centre based at Essex University. <http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/>
- 9.4 Martin Barstow also understood that there was an ongoing IoP longitudinal survey of physicists and agreed to contact Peter May (IoP) for more information, and report back to Council. **Action: M Barstow**

EPSRC/STFC Bi-lateral

- 9.5 Peter Knight reported on a recent productive meeting between representatives of the STFC facilities and EPSRC, to discuss proposals for improving alignment between the facilities development plans, and the strategies of the other Research Councils.

The meeting ended at 17.00