Update from PI Forum*

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*Exp. & Theory Group Heads + Experiment PIs

Background: UKRI spending allocation from 2026/27 - 2029/30

- 3 “buckets”
  - Curiosity driven research
  - Strategic government and societal priorities
  - Supporting innovative companies

  - 4th bucket across all the above: Enabling and strengthening UK R&D
  - Details here: https://www.ukri.org/publications/explainer-ukri-budget-allocations/budget-allocations-for-uk-research-and-innovation/

- Ian Chapman (UKRI Chief Exec):
  - “The situation at STFC is unique among the UKRI councils because its cost base has increased significantly due to the type of facilities and services it manages, the research it funds and some projects with higher costs than foreseen.”
  - “Over the previous SR period, rising energy costs and unfavourable movements in foreign exchange rates increased STFC’s annual costs by over £50 million a year.”
  - https://www.ukri.org/news/open-letter-from-ian-chapman-to-research-and-innovation-community/

- Problem for us:
  - STFC singled out for savings, pain only on us (PPAN specifically), gains shared equally across RCs
  - Energy costs driving up operation of Facilities. Main users are in EPRSC and NERC science areas, but PPAN to pay the price
  - More difficult to get support if other science areas & overall university income not affected

Making the case for PPAN Science: Things already happening…

- Statement from IoP
  - https://www.iop.org/about/news/vital-science-cut-in-devastating-blow
- Royal Society
  - FRSs making the case

- Great if we make the case for our Science but even better if someone else makes it, in particular industry
  - Track careers of alumni
  - Get them to support/speak up in favour of PPAN science
  - Open letter with support from private sector?

Wider impact beyond PPAN

- Reduction in PPAN spending will have consequences for Physics Departments at Universities
  - For some Departments PPAN science is ~2/3 of size/budget
  - Physics Matters report Sep 2025:
    - https://www.iop.org/sites/default/files/2025-09/physics-matters-funding-the-foundations-of-growth.pdf
  - “UK is "walking towards a cliff edge" regarding its national physics capability”
  - one in four UK university physics departments fear they may have to close within the next two years due to severe financial pressures.
  - Against a backdrop of (steadily) increasing A-level student numbers in Physics

- PPAN projects often long term (i.e. decades) – longer than typical research grant
  - Hard/impossible to recover from once projects have been stopped
  - Can’t be filled/compensated for by short term opportunities

- New opportunities promised (e.g. around AI) but mechanism on how to access these not yet set up

- UKRI restructuring also resulting in temporary limit/pausing on grant applications in MRC & BBSRC science areas, changes to ESRC applicant led proposals

Questions we might want to bring up

- What is UK's commitment to international projects?
  - UK reliability as an international partner / reputational damage
  - What assessment has been done on the consequences of deprioritisation decisions?
  - Loss of international leadership in direct conflict with UK's ambition to be "Science Superpower"

- Are the already implemented deprioritisations compatible with Haldane principles?
  - decision which projects to fund should be made by experts through peer review rather than government ministers/politicians

- Is UKRI focus on higher TRLs (Technology Readiness Levels) the right end goal?
  - People/talent pipeline is an important aspect of our work
  - Physics graduates are wealth creating

- What lessons were (not) learned (at RC level or above) from 2008 when our field was in a similar situation?

Looking ahead

- Develop a coordinated community response
  - Make sure our messaging is aligned and consistent
  - How do we reach the decision makers in UKRI/DSIT/government?
  - More on this in the “Response Strategy” session later on

- Build the evidence that PPAN is “pro growth” and aligned with government priorities

- More long term for our field:
- What can we do to access funds from "bucket 2": Strategic government and societal priorities
  - Advanced Manufacturing
  - Clean Growth & Energy
  - Defence and National Security
  - Digital & Technologies: AI – Quantum Technologies – Advanced Connectivity Technologies (ACT), Semiconductors, and Cybersecurity