

# STFC Town Hall Feedback

Peter Millington (University of Manchester)

Online PPAP Town Hall, 29 April 2026

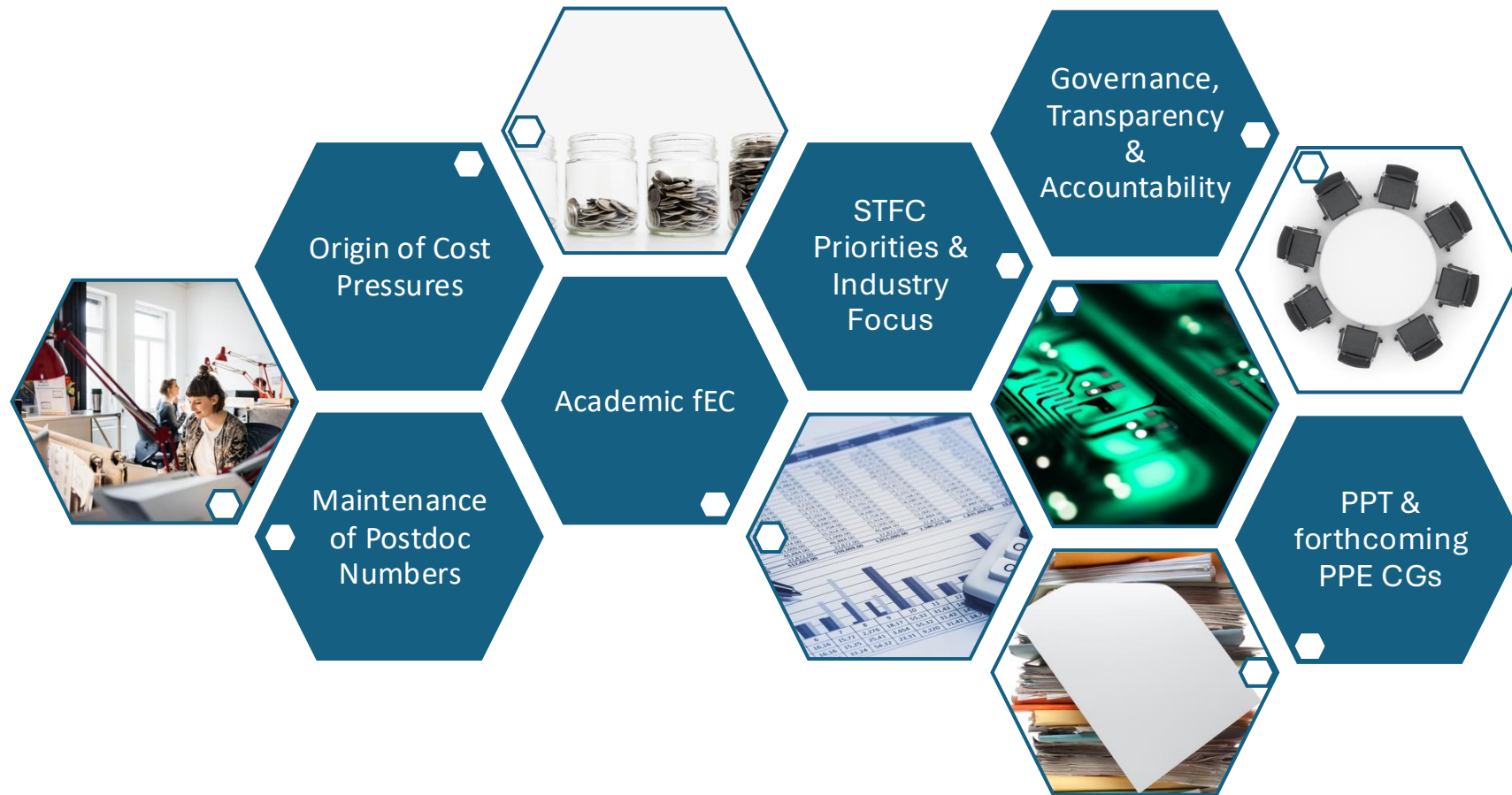
# Context

- STFC Town Hall, took place Thursday 9 April at the IOP APP and HEPP Joint Conference in Edinburgh.
- Large attendance both in person and online.
- More questions than could be asked in the time.
- STFC have collated the outstanding questions (see PPAP Town Hall Indico).
- A follow-up request for additional questions was sent by me.

# Notes

- There were a total of 18 responses to the request for feedback, primarily from members of our community in leadership positions.
- Similar themes across questions raised at the Town Hall, in the collated Zoom questions, in the above feedback, and recently posed by IOP.
- This is my interpretation and paraphrasing of these themes and will, no doubt, reflect my own biases.
- I will focus only the themes related to the current funding challenges.

# Summary of themes



# Changing landscape

Since the 9 April STFC Town Hall:

- **14 April:** [Community update from STFC Executive Chair, Michele Dougherty](#)
- **21 April:** Release of 9 April [letter from Lord Vallance and Sir Ian Chapman to Dame Chi Onwurah MP.](#)
- **27 April:** [IOP response to STFC update on funding changes](#)

# Questions in IOP response

“The update from STFC commits to ‘maintaining postdoctoral researchers across PPAN at least at the same level as last year’, and this is welcome.

- “Whether the commitment covers grant- and project-funded roles.
- “Whether the commitment includes roles lost or at risk due to funding reductions since 1 April 2025.
- “Whether this commitment will be met with additional STFC funding, and if not, where funding will come from.”

# Questions in IOP response

“The update reiterates commitments made previously by government that curiosity research, which drives breakthroughs seen sometimes decades down the line, will be protected. This is welcome.

- “How will curiosity research within STFC, which funds foundational particle physics, astronomy and nuclear research, be protected?”
- “If curiosity funding for research in these areas will come from elsewhere, where will this be?”

Post-STFC Town Hall feedback ...

# Maintenance of Postdoc Numbers

- Which projects, grant processes (inc. PPGP(E)) and reference period does the commitment refer?
- What are the indirect impacts on numbers due to cuts to projects?
- To what extent does the uplift in Particle Theory postdoc positions from 19.5 awarded to 25 align with this commitment? (The previous award was 41 without the uplift and 58 with the uplift. More on the next slide.)
- What is the source of funding for this maintenance of postdocs?

# From Vallance–Chapman letter, 9 April

“Grant rounds for the other disciplines within PPAN come later but overall, across the PPAN grants programme, we will fully and immediately **restore the funding level for postdocs** that was in place before the current SR period (i.e. in the last financial year 2025/26 as determined by the previous SR settlement and UKRI allocation).

STFC will be revising the funding levels of its post-doc grants across PPAN to match those of FY2025/26. It is the FY 2025/26 that we have used across UKRI (and indeed across Government) as our reference case for the spending review covering FYs 2026/27 – 2029/30. A 15% reduction in the total cash level of all new STFC grants was imposed that year as part of the agreed single-year spending review and this reduction is unrelated to the present change in approach that UKRI is making. **A 15% reduction results in a greater reduction in fundable FTEs due to fixed cost elements, such as funding for the Institute for Particle Physics Phenomenology within the theoretical particle physics grants. This, combined with inflation in the university costs for each post-doc over the previous SR period, means that had new theoretical particle physics grants been issued in 2025, the fundable FTEs would have been 25, down from 41 in 2022.”**

# Academic fEC

- Why was the minimum 4% fEC level chosen over not funding 90 academics, most noted to be excellent by the PPGP(T) panel?
- Concerns about the criteria used when deciding which academics and areas were funded, and requests for transparency.

# Cost pressures

- Lack of clarity on the breakdown of cost pressures, inc. from international subscriptions, and which facilities will see costs rise unsustainably.
- Need for publication of impact assessments.

# Governance, transparency and accountability

- Lack of clarity of information or willingness to provide it, also in relation to how decisions have and will be made and in relation to particular sub-disciplines.
- Need for additional PPAN representation in STFC executive and additional support for the Executive Chair.
- Concerns about how the community's interests have or have not been represented by the STFC executive upwards to UKRI and its CEO.
- Damage to the community's trust and confidence in STFC decision making.

# Final remarks

- It is clear the community is willing to work constructively with STFC, also in terms of its advisory structures.
- Many of the questions point to the need for the community now to look ahead and to work with STFC to ensure future sustainability.
- Answers to the questions collated by STFC expected in the next week. These will be posted on the [9 April STFC Town Hall Indico](#).