

Press Release from the Particle Physics Action Group in response to the IUS Select Committee Report

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We very much welcome the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee report into the science budget allocations and the handling of the allocation by the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC).

The report vindicates the strong and near-unanimous criticism by the UK scientific community of both the government's initial budget allocation to STFC and the mismanagement of the ensuing crisis by STFC senior management.

The challenge now is to move forward to repair the damage done to the UK's international reputation and to the image of our science nationally, particularly in the eyes of the young scientists and school children who are the future of our field.

It is also essential that further cuts in staffing levels at the Rutherford Appleton and Daresbury Laboratories are halted immediately, as the report recommends, to prevent further loss of the highly skilled personnel who will play a vital role in the recovery from the current crisis. The unprecedented withdrawal of already issued university grants should stop.

To this end, we call on the government to demonstrate its stated commitment to fundamental science and take the Committee's recommendations seriously, reform the senior management structure of STFC and address the serious funding shortfall explicitly recognised in the report.

Professor James Stirling, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research at Durham University said:

"The Select Committee's report reserves particularly strong criticism for the way in which STFC has handled communications: with its own staff, with members of the research community and with international partners. It has been left to researchers themselves to reassure young people that fundamental science is still important and to rebuild the bridges with our international collaborators. Both the Government and the research community have been badly let down by the research council - what is needed now is a fresh start."

Professor Brian Foster, head of Particle Physics at Oxford University, said:

"I am immensely impressed that the Select Committee has put its finger on the four main factors that have contributed to the current problems: the hasty and ill-conceived formation of STFC; Government overcommitment to full economic cost of research and cross-council programmes at the expense of world-class science; poor advice to Ministers from within DIUS; and mistakes and weakness in STFC management. This report is a bombshell."

Professor Brian Cox, University of Manchester, said:

“It should now be clear to everyone that the STFC crisis has caused immense damage to fundamental science in this country. We now have a golden opportunity to work with government and a reformed STFC to put UK Particle Physics and Astronomy back where they belong as the envy of the world scientific community and as shining beacons attracting a new generation of young people into science and engineering.”

Dr Mark Lancaster, University College London, said:

"The Select Committee has done an excellent job - it has very eloquently stated the concerns that we've held for some time now on all the pertinent issues: CCLRC liabilities, communication and consultation - and we hope the committee's recommendations will be acted upon".

Professor Phil Allport, Head of Particle Physics at the University of Liverpool, said:

“I am pleased to see the Select Committee acknowledging that ‘in merging two Research Councils, one research community has been saddled with the debt of another, despite assurances from the Government that STFC would be formed without any legacy issues.’ I further hope the opportunity will now be taken by the Government to follow the Select Committee recommendation to ‘ensure that its original commitment to leave no legacy funding issues from the previous Councils is honoured’ and correspondingly reimburse STFC.”

Professor Mike Green, Royal Holloway University of London, said:

“The Select Committee has done a thorough job and has reached the same conclusions as the particle physicists. I believe that the Chief Executive's position is now untenable.”

Notes for editors.

The particle physics action group was formed by the particle physics community in December of last year when the extent of the STFC crisis became clear. It has coordinated the community response in the press and acted as a bridge between the community and STFC during the crisis.

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