

STFC Town Meeting. Cumberland Hotel, London. 3 March 2008

This is a **rough** transcript of the meeting, based on real-time notes taken by Norman McCubbin (and augmented with notes taken by Mark Lancaster). Since the slides shown by the main speakers are available: <http://www.stfc.ac.uk/STFCConsultation/sources/TM030308.pdf> I have not in general repeated information that can be found there. I believe I have captured reasonably accurately much, though certainly not all, of the Q+A sessions, but this transcript should NOT be interpreted as a **verbatim** account of what individuals actually said.

14h30 ~200 present. 'Panel' on the stage: Jordan Nash (Dep Chair PPAN), Tim Wess (Chair, PALS), Walter Gear (Chair, PPAN), Jenny Thomas (Dep Chair, Science Board), Sir Peter Knight (Chair, Science Board)

Keith Mason (Chief Exec STFC) and Peter Warry (Chair, STFC Council) were present.

Sir Peter Knight (PK): (see slides)

Welcome to all. This is a Town Meeting called by Science Board to engage with the community following the Programmatic Review (PR). Aim is to have an exchange of ideas on peer review in general and on the next steps on the implementation of the PR in particular.

PK emphasized that this meeting is called by Science Board, which is independent of the STFC Executive and Council.

PK's slides described the STFC advisory structure and the 'timeline' and process of the PR. He showed the results from PPAN and PALS in 4 (PPAN) and 3 (PALS) groups: High, Medium, split into Medium-High and Medium-Lower for PPAN, and Lower. Emphasised that there are no 'duds' among the projects; all are good science. The ordering (on the slides) of projects within each group is alphabetical and has no other significance.

He emphasized:

- the PR output at this stage is almost entirely based on the science impact (past and potential) and UK impact within the projects;
- Final decisions have not been taken yet;
- Final decisions will take into account certain 'caveats' (see slides) identified by Council, and, most importantly, input from the consultation process being launched today.

PK noted that there have been changes from the situation before Xmas, notably wrt Gemini.

14h50 Walter Gear (WG), Chair PPAN: (see slides)

WG began with the "outrage" statement (see slide) that PPAN agreed at its last meeting, and which had been communicated to SB and thence to Council. Despite its extreme unhappiness at having to engage in a process that would lead to the cutting of previously approved projects, PPAN had felt it had no choice other than to help create a financially balanced programme.

He commented that they'd been aware for some time of "over-heating" in the system due to the growth in the size of the communities, particularly astronomy. WG explained the PR process as carried out by PPAN. See slide 27 for comments about ILC and Gemini North and South. He commented that PPAN thought that ILC "was in the appropriate place" in the rankings.

PPAN is open to 'reasoned' input from the community from the consultation process and WG stated that PPAN "doesn't offer any [projects] up for sacrifice"

15h00 Jenny Thomas (JT), Deputy Chair SB: (see slides)

JT gave background to the particularly difficult decisions: ILC, Gemini, STP and Grants. She had a slide on each of these areas. She noted that SB had recommended that ILC activity be “suspended” and that this was not the formulation used in the Delivery Plan, which she described as a “precipitous statement”. JT also remarked that the complaints from the community had had some impact in DIUS shifting cash from capital to near-cash to help mitigate the impact of the deficit. Her slides include a useful table of the number of astronomy PDRAs over the last few years to help clarify the “25%” question.

15h15 Q+A on PPAN area:

Michael Rowan Robinson: (President, RAS)

MRR read out a prepared statement, on behalf of RAS I guess, which included the following:

- welcomes Council’s response to RAS statement of 14 Feb;
- welcomes renewed emphasis on consultation;
- notes and welcomes the fact that “new projects” are well placed in the prioritization from the PR;
- accepts Walter Gear’s statement about how the PPAN peer review was done;
- is pleased that UK is now in a much more sensible place wrt Gemini than it was;
- is concerned at the relatively low ranking of e-Merlin given that it is the only radio astronomy that is UK-based and has obvious links to SKA;
- notes that Stereo and Hinode both have relatively low rankings, but both are in the early stage of scientific exploitation;
- considers that the planned reduction in the number of PDRAs is unacceptable;
- affirms that RAS will continue to lobby DIUS that extra help for STFC should be a possibility post-Wakeham;
- continues to believe that there should be no irreversible actions taken pre-Wakeham.

STP person: STP has ALWAYS suffered from being on the PPARC/NERC boundary. Everyone says it’s important science. Some ‘joined-up’ thinking is necessary.

PK: Agreed. PK has already talked to Alan Thorpe, CE of NERC.

(PK: Surprised not have heard from particle physicists yet....)

Dave Evans (B’ham): It would be helpful for the consultation stage if we could have the details of the PPAN assessment, eg scores and any comments. Is that possible?

PK: Positively inclined towards this request, but needs thinking about...

Themis Bowcock (Liverpool): LHCb decision is shocking. It is probably significant that there is no expert on flavour physics on the panels.

Val Gibson (Cambridge): What is the actual consultation process?

PK+John Womersley (WJW): Via web page. Link exists.

Val Gibson: And can input be on behalf of a collaboration, rather than just from individuals?

PK+WJW: Yes

Mark Lancaster (UCL): How will the dialogue work (in the consultation process)?

PK: Dialogue with community is between community and ‘mini-panels’. Mini-panels also communicate with PPAN/PALS and thence to SB and Executive. (Showed slide).

Mike Thompson (Sheffield): lack of "solar physics" or "theory" in mini-panels

Several question and comments at this point about how the mini-panels will be appointed (Chair by STFC, other members with input from Chair, SB will oversee), and can community see all of the input? (WJW: Yes.)

Andrew Fabian (Cambridge) : How many astronomers on PPAN, and how was ‘impact’ assessed?

WG: 4 astronomers on PPAN; 2 on SB. Impact: for running budgets impact is based on publications; for future projects a judgement has to be made.

Nuclear physicist: There are several ongoing nuclear projects that don’t appear at all in the lists!

WG: These are projects where the cost is so small that it wasn’t felt necessary to list them. However, PPAN did rank them, and these rankings have been provided to the Nuclear Grants Panel.

Mike Thompson(Sheffield) : Which mini-panel covers solar theory?

PK: Hmmm. Yes, probably need a panel for that.

Melvin Hoare (Leeds) : How can e-Merlin possibly come out so low when it has only just been completed??

PK: Note that e-merlin is one of the projects picked out by Council for special consideration (‘caveat’).

Rob Kennicutt (Cambridge): The composition of the mini-panels and their empowerment are crucial.

Astronomer (also Cambridge?): Why are we in this mess? A major reason is that Govt sees only short-term, economic impact, and we co-operate! We should not accept the premiss that only short-term economic impact matters.

PK: Sympathetic to this comment, but we (STFC and its communities) do have (part of the) responsibility for the training and development of a scientifically literate community.

Franz Muheim (Edinburgh): As an ‘immigrant’ to the UK system, scarcely able to believe that there is a threat to LHCb, an experiment that is about to take data.

PK: Understands the frustration.

Todd Huffmann (Oxford): The emphasis in our message should be about the scientific excitement of the era that’s about to begin.

PK: Time to move on to PALS.

15h45 Tim Wess (TW), Chair, PALS: (See slides)

I didn’t take detailed notes here. TW pointed out that, unlike the PPAN projects, this type of Programmatic Review was a first-time experience for Diamond, ESRF, ILL, ISIS, etc.

15h55 **PK:** To emphasise again: ordering on lists is alphabetical, with no other significance. Also, projects/programmes in the lower priority groups are more vulnerable, but not necessarily cut.

PK added that on the Accelerator side discussions have started (John Wom, Adams, Cockcroft, and ASTeC) with the goal of retaining “core competencies” despite cut in ILC-specific work.

Steve Miller (UCL): PP and A programmes are cutting staff now: ie staff are being sacked. What is happening on the PALS side?

PK: The funding of project grants that use these STFC facilities comes from EPSRC. However, there certainly are staff cuts in the STFC establishments on the PALS side.

Diamond physicist: What does it mean (for Diamond Phase II and III) to be on PALS medium priority list?

TW: This should be seen as relative to Diamond Phase I, which is 'high', and which the panel felt is of paramount importance.

Mike Green (RHUL): Still a bit confused: does 'funding' mean 'fully funded'? Can projects in the 'Lower' group be funded at all (ie partially)?

PK: Final lines will be set only after the consultation, and hard to know precisely where these lines will fall. PK expect to see some cuts start in the 'medium-lower' group, with increasing vulnerability in the 'lower' group.

Mike Green: Could Executive comment?

PK: This is a Science Board meeting. Executive can comment at end of meeting, or later.

Neutron physicists (similar comment made by two people): PALS list does not seem very future-looking. No mention of ESS or future technology needs.

TW/PK: PALS discussion was limited to approved projects, and therefore omits several long-term, future projects. (PPAN was the same.) Within this constraint TW feels PALS list is quite forward-looking.

Paul Crowther (Sheffield): Trouble with project-based approach is that it tends to ignore scientific 'linkage', eg between JCMT/SCUBA-2 and Gemini North.

There were then some further exchanges about the **Mini-panels**, composition: who makes appointments, transparency of processes etc. It was during these exchanges that PK commented at one point: "I'm speechless. Don't you trust us?" PK gave an assurance that the mini-panels would not be "stitched-up".

Question: What exactly is the state of the £40M 'headroom'? Has it been spent already?

PK: Wants to get input from consultation before spending. At this point PK allowed a comment from the Executive:

Keith Mason (CE, STFC): Important to stress that there is only one pot of £40M, and funding for items on the priority lists that are not already funded has to come from this pot.

Roger Evans (Imperial): All of the Laser physics programme is lumped together in PALS:Medium. This is a very coarse-grained approach.

PK: Well, not really: VULCAN upgrade is in 'high'.

Comments on ISIS:

Chair Engineering User Group ISIS: The loss of one ISIS cycle would have a major impact on the work of other RCs.

ISIS(?) user 1: The PALS user community is basically not represented at this meeting.

ISIS(?) user2: Has EPSRC been informed?

WJW: Yes, dialogue with EPSRC has started.

PK: Surely no one wants to go back to the 'ticket' system for paying for facilities like ISIS?

Chair Engineering User Group ISIS: Engineers liked it!

ISIS user3: Losing ISIS cycle also loses cycle for Target Station 2. Is there a 'mini-panel' for neutron community?

PK: Chairs of mini-panels will have to liaise appropriately.

ISIS user4: Is the loss of an ISIS cycle actually decided?

PK: Not decided, but books have to be balanced.

WJW: There is time pressure to get things decided because eg some grants run out on 31 March!
On looking to the future: things like ESS are on the UK Large Facilities Road Map.

Des McMorrow (UCL): ILL upgrades are in PALS:Lower, but were in Delivery Plan.

TW: ILL upgrades are subject to agreement with ILL, some upgrades are higher priority than others.

Steve Worm (RAL): Wrt the ILC decision, what precisely was the nature of the concern about LHC upgrades and the ILC work?

JT: Timescales were a moving target. LHC upgrades and ILC could be competing for the same resources at about the same time.

Steve Worm: So it's fundamentally an issue of timing?

JT/Jordan Nash: Timing considerations were indeed part of the decision.

Steve Worm: Surprised to see ALL ILC-related detector work in PPAN:Lower.

User 1: Can community provide input on membership of Mini-panels?

WJW (I think): Yes.

Jonathan Tedds (Leicester): STFC budget covers many aspects. Is eg the budget share used for Knowledge Exchange open for peer-review?

PK: SB would be happy to receive input on this point.

KM: Note that funding for Campus development is not part of the core vote.

Zarnecki (OU): Don't believe that this CSR is a 'blip' and everything will be OK next time! Last three 'PPARC' CSR settlements have all been relatively poor.

PK: Yes, we have to persuade our paymasters. Note that there is a danger that too much 'doom and gloom' from the community might even trigger a move to give up on this area! We have to start NOW (this summer) developing the case for the next CSR.

Ken Long (Imperial): What is the process for developing the overall 'vision' for STFC?

PK: Programmatic Review is only part of that process.

Question: Diamond priorities – both phase II and III share the same ranking, yet III depends on II and III is not approved so how can they be ranked the same. I missed the specific answer.

Question: Who's writing the Strategy Document?

WJW/PK: There's a draft circulating inside STFC. Community will get a chance to comment.

WG: exPPARC Advisory Panels will be replaced by some structure.

Steve Schwartz (Imperial) : strategy should come up from the community, not be imposed from above.

16h50

PK: We are out of time. Please send email. Please use the consultation process. Thank you for coming.