

## **Science council still not giving the full picture, say scientists**

### **Research Fortnight : Mar 11**

Scientists have been angered to find that the Science and Technology Facilities Council will not release vital information on how it evaluates science projects to the community while it decides which are to be dropped from its programme.

During its programmatic review, the STFC science board asked its two advisory bodies, the Particle Physics, Astronomy and Nuclear Physics Science Committee (PPAN) and the Physical and Life Sciences Committee (PALS), to rate STFC funded projects according to certain criteria. Projects were given up to three points in each of seven categories: how well it delivers on STFC objectives; its potential to make a major scientific impact; whether or not other facilities or projects are available in the same area; whether it offers scientists the opportunity to compete on a global scale; the size of its user base; the potential for spin out ventures; and its capacity to provide training and inform the public.

Projects that scored the lowest during the review have been rated as a “lower priority” and are at risk of having their funding cut.

The STFC science board has opened a three-week consultation on the review, during which time the scientists involved will have the opportunity to make their case for renewed support.

At a town meeting on 27 February, Peter Knight agreed that it would be a good idea for the science community to be given a breakdown of the marks their projects received during the programmatic review so that they can defend them accordingly.

But a senior astronomer has told Research Day that the STFC no longer intends to give anything more than general feedback on the projects. He is concerned that some of the criteria, especially the impact of a project and its alignment with STFC priorities, are highly subjective and that the community would feel more comfortable accepting evaluations from the advisory boards if they knew exactly how they had been scored.

“There is still no transparency whatsoever from the STFC despite repeated assurances to the contrary,” he says.

An STFC spokesperson has also confirmed that principal investigators will receive overall feedback on their projects and will then be asked if they wish this information to be made public. She says that this information is unlikely to include a breakdown of the points allocated to each project during evaluation.