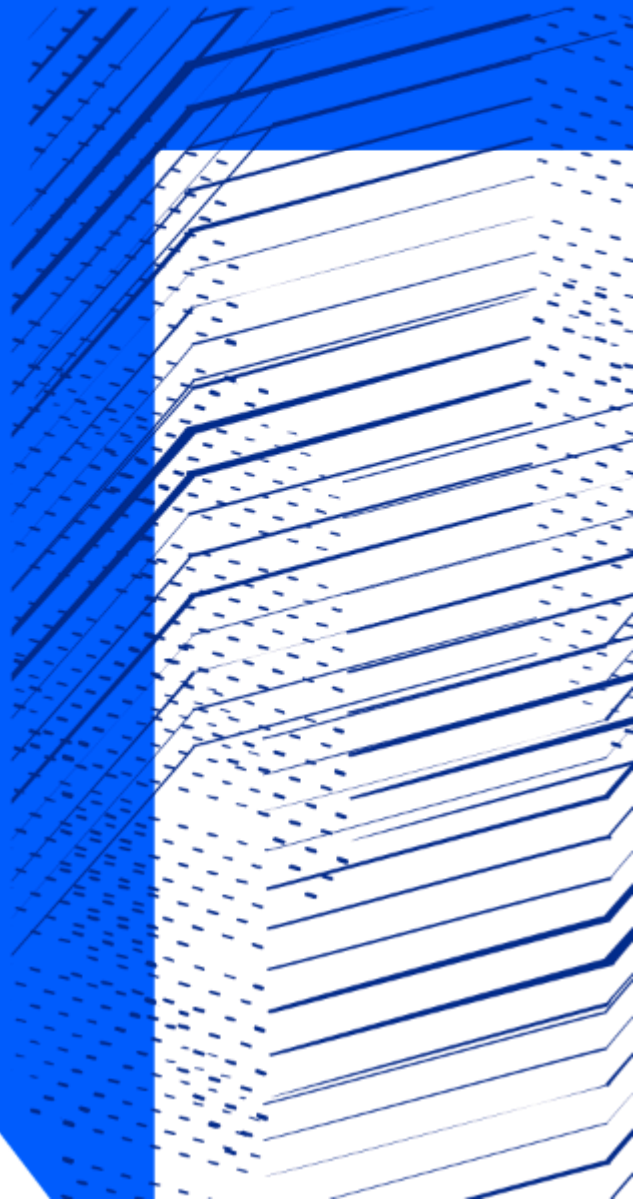
Science and Technology Facilities Council

STFC Townhall

IOP Joint APP and HEPP Annual Conference 2026

9 April 2026

John McIntyre Conference Centre, Edinburgh



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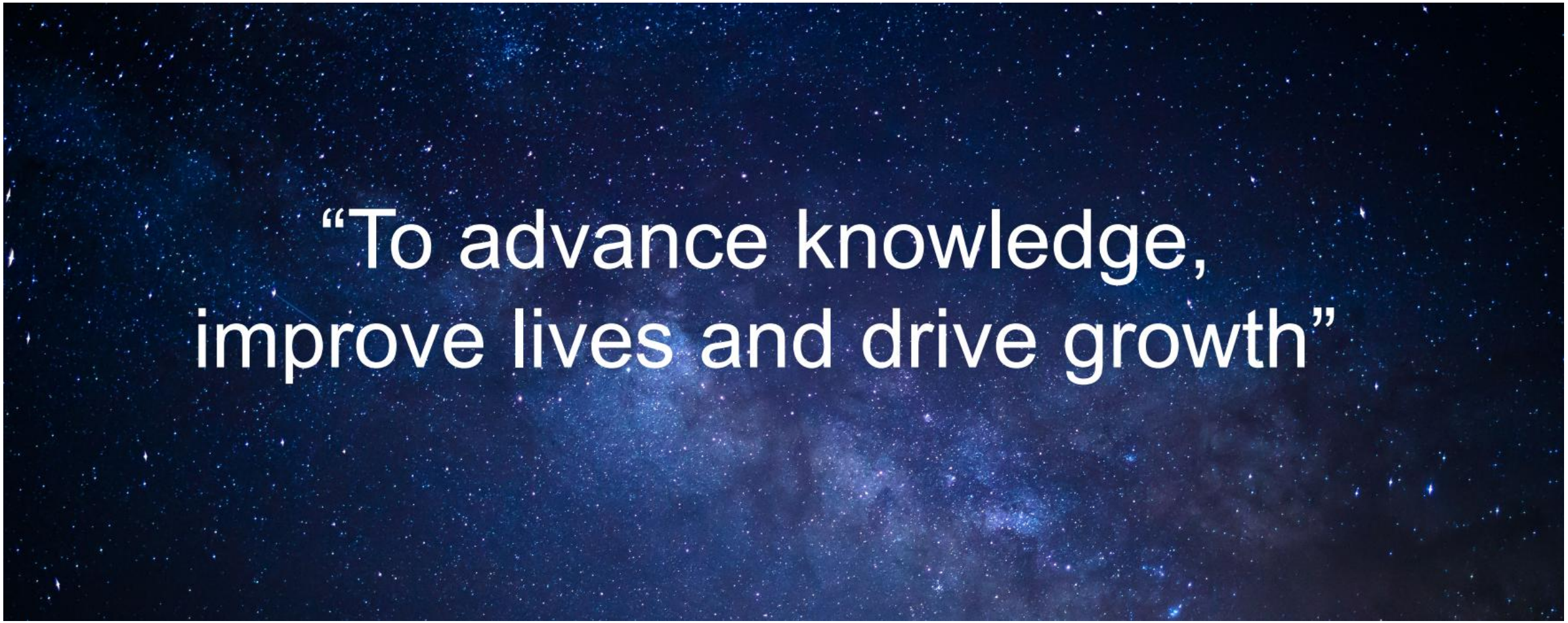
STFC update

Michele Dougherty (Executive Chair)

Revised UKRI Mission



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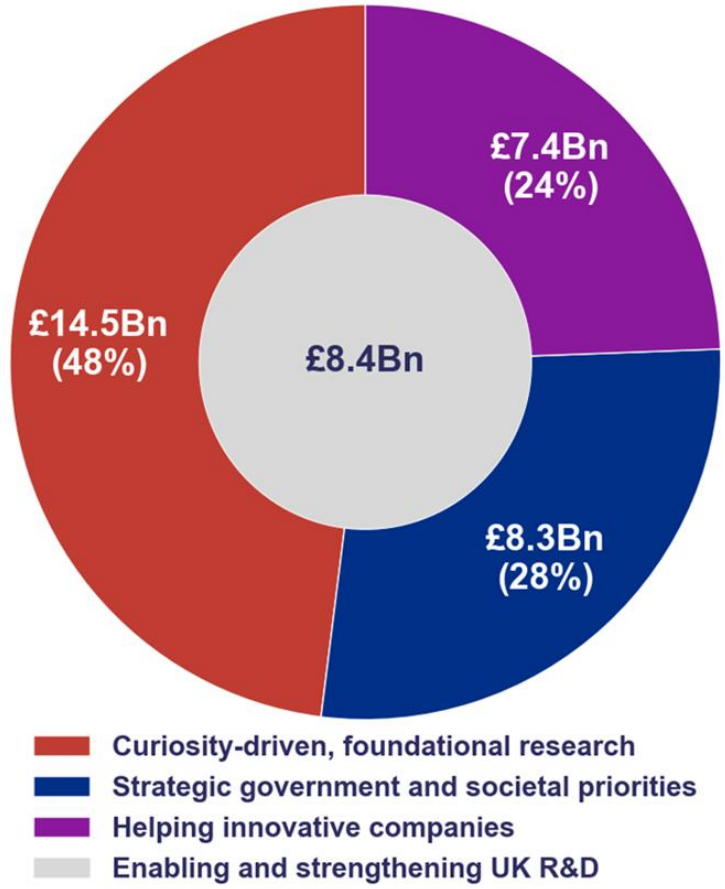
UKRI approach to funding allocations

UKRI's Allocation Priorities

- UKRI received a record settlement of £38Bn across the spending review (2026/7-2029/30)
- The UKRI Budget is now aligned to the new mission – 3 "buckets" model
- UKRI are custodians of curiosity driven research and this continues to be the largest fraction of UKRI's budget
- However, UKRI will need to be choiceful about its investments, which will means prioritising areas where the UK can be world-leading and by working closely with business



Figures cover the whole SR period

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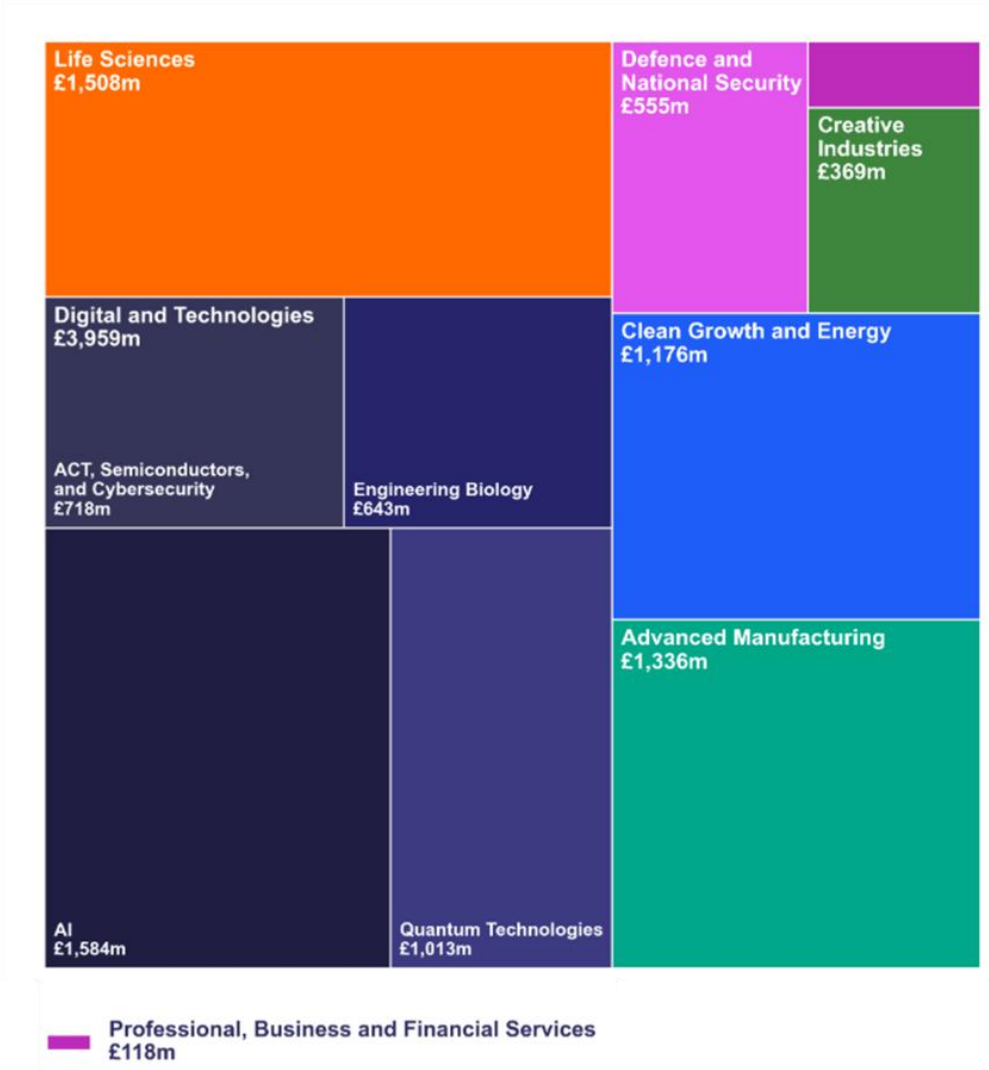
UKRI approach to funding allocations

Addressing Government and Societal Priorities

- Programmes will be developed with DSIT and other government departments, universities, researchers, innovators, investors and businesses.
- These programmes provide significant investment in physics
- At portfolio level, investments will target an average leverage ratio of at least £3 of private investment for every £1 of public investment



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UKRI is investing its rising budget through a new, more outcome-focused approach

UK Research and Innovation

2025/26
£8.8 billion

2026/27
£9.2 billion

UKRI's previous funding model
Illustrated through 2025/26 budgets
(£ millions)

Responsive research: 737
Quality-related research funding: 2,227
Strategic research: 563
Cross-UKRI strategic programmes: 225
R&D Missions Programme: 25
Innovation: 906
Knowledge exchange, translation, and commercialisation: 403
Place-based programmes: 83
International subscriptions: 300
International partnerships: 48
Institutes, centres, and facilities: 976
World Class Labs: 436
Infrastructure Fund: 386
Digital Research Infrastructure: 81
Major infrastructure projects: 189
Collective talent: 832
Open access: 40
Public engagement: 14
Other investments: 177

Net increases in 2026/27

Applicant-led research: 815
Quality-related research funding: 2,258
Strategic programmes and targeted research: 885
R&D Missions Programme: 50
Innovation: 1,115
Knowledge exchange, translation, and commercialisation: 410
Place: 90
International subscriptions and partnerships: 330
Institutes, centres, and facilities: 1,103
Infrastructure: 1,082
Talent: 902
Other investments: 180

UKRI's new approach from 2026/27 onwards
Investing through outcome-focused buckets

1. Curiosity-driven research
£3.65 billion in 2026/27
50.6% in 2026/27

2. Strategic government and societal priorities
£1.92 billion in 2026/27
26.7% in 2026/27

3. Supporting innovative companies
£1.64 billion in 2026/27
22.7% in 2026/27

4. Enabling and strengthening UK R&D
£2.00 billion in 2026/27

Note 1: Total funding levels across the individual lines in the financial year 2025 to 2026 differs from UKRI's total published budget of £8,811 million, as the diagram excludes programmes not directly managed by UKRI, as well as a small proportion of quality-related research funding that has been rephased between financial years (around 3%). This has not been included in order to provide the figure on the same basis as the 2026 to 2027 financial year.

Note 2: 'Other investments' includes administrative support and investment in the transformation of UKRI's systems and processes.

What it means for STFC

Headlines are:

- Our budget will be broadly flat over the current Spending Review period.
- There continues to be significant pressures and calls on STFC's budget:
  - Inflation has been significant over recent years (over 10% p.a. at times), which has not been matched by increased funding for major projects/lab infrastructure
  - Salaries, University overheads and student stipends have all increased
  - Delays (including Covid) and technical challenges have led to increased costs in several major PPAN projects
  - Cost of international infrastructure has risen due to a combination of exchange rate and subscriptions increases
- Without action, our costs are estimated to exceed available funding by £162 million by 2030
  - We will take ~2/3 of these savings internal to STFC

UKRI Science and Technology Facilities Council

STFC Transformation Programme

To ensure a sustainable future for all of our research communities:

- We need to ensure we are as efficient and effective as possible, ensuring the long-term sustainability of our research communities and the facilities that sustain them
- We cannot continue with everything that we currently fund, but what we do fund must be at a viable level, delivering world class research and technology
- Last year, we launched a major transformation programme with the aim of:
  - Evolving in a leaner, more effective and agile organisation
  - Prioritising our investments
  - Diversify our funding sources
- To support the decision making, we launched a PPAN prioritisation process through Science Board PPAN, which Keith Grainge will cover in his presentation:
  - Recommendations to 9 June Council and 16 June Executive Board

Engaging with the PPAN community

Since my letter to the PPAN community on 28 Jan, engagements include:

- 3 Feb – meeting with Minister Vallance and representatives from the community
- 4 Feb – Particle Physics Advisory Panel community meeting
- 16 Feb – Astronomy Advisory Panel community meeting
- 17 Feb – RAS forum
- 18 Feb – meeting with Heads of Physics (hosted by IoP)
- 3 Mar – meeting with early career researchers
- 4 Mar – Science Innovation & Technology select committee and follow-up letters
- 9 Apr – Astro-particle Physics and high-energy Particle Physics town hall
- 14 Apr – Nuclear Physics Townhall & meeting with
- Apr (date tbc) – meeting with Chairs of Advisory Panels

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PPAN Programme Update

Grahame Blair (Executive Director Programmes)

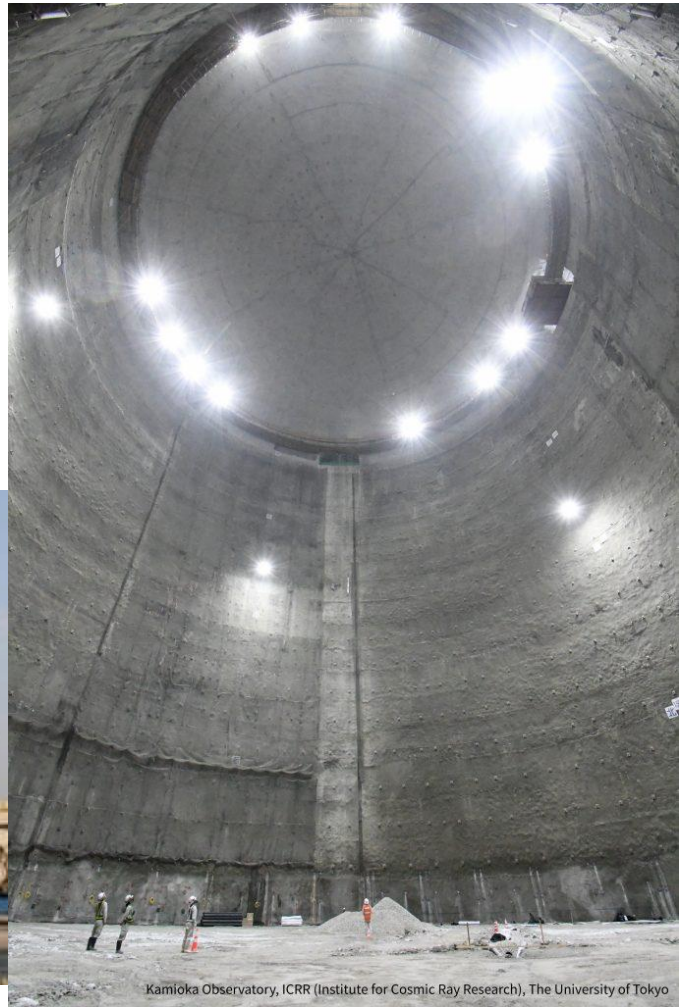
Particle physics programme

Highlights 2025/26

- **Hyper-Kamiokande** – awarded grants for final two years of construction
- **ATLAS Phase II upgrade construction** – awarded next tranche of funding
- **IPPP core programme** – reviewed & awarded 2 years of funding
- **Particle Physics consolidated grants** – awarded for PPE and PPT
- **DUNE APA** – successful shipping of first frames to US

Coming up 2026/27

- **Particle Physics Experiment consolidated grant** – open from 27 April
- **Impact** – engaging the community to gather evidence on research outcomes, technologies, talent and more to show the strength of the programme

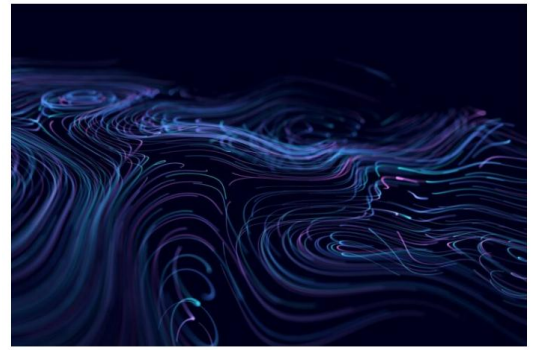


Particle astrophysics

Gravitational Waves

- 2024 Particle Astrophysics GW Consolidated Grant round concluded, with £7m of awards Oct 2025 – Sept 2028
- UKRI IF Preliminary Activity (PA): Next Generation Gravitational Wave detector £8m total (ends Sept 2026)
- STFC review of the GW will shortly be published on the STFC website

UKRI Infrastructure Fund supports next-gen gravitational wave detectors



13 December 2023

Seven UK universities supported by the UKRI Infrastructure Fund have launched a new consortium to advance gravitational wave research.

Dark Matter

- UKRI Infrastructure Fund Preliminary Activity: XLZD@Boulby (£8m), ends Dec 2027
- Silicon Detector Development for the Low Background Frontier (£1.8m) ends Dec 2026

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Accelerator science programme

- **Accelerator Institute Grants**: The Cockcroft and John Adams accelerator institute grants run to September 2028
  - STFC (with advice from SB PPAN) have prioritised the accelerator institutes to maintain the university involvement in the field in a highly constrained financial environment
- **Accelerator Projects**: It has not been possible to fund further phases of the existing **HL-LHC** or **AWAKE** projects. A minimum viable HL-LHC project around integration and commissioning is being considered as part of the Science Board (PPAN) prioritisation process

We recognise that funding opportunities are limited in the short term

- STFC's **International Review of Accelerator Science** is complete, the details of which will be communicated in due course
  - The high-level outcome of the review found that STFC should continue to invest, and identified strengths for a world class programme and what it would likely to take to fund it
- **Future aspiration:** This is subject to the outcome of the prioritisation process and will be viewed in the light of the wider organisation's transformation workstreams.

Digital Research Infrastructure

Future Compute Ecosystem - The UK Compute Roadmap was published in July 2025. Sets out the requirement for the future compute ecosystem:

- **AIRR** - £250m AI Compute infrastructure – systems at Bristol and Cambridge are now running and processes are bedding in.
- **The Next National Supercomputing Service (NNSS)** – up to £750m for a new national service at Edinburgh. Will focus on ambitious 'grand challenges' and is a change from previous services. Procurement expected in 2026
- **National Compute Resources (NCRs)** - The UKRI DRI Programme is supporting six new NCRs. The NCRs are expected to launch a full service for users in 2026/27. They are smaller scale, diverse, user-centred, coherent and serving the needs of the UK's research and innovation communities.
- **Centres of Excellence (CCEs)** - Proposed communities that would act as a structured access and coordination layer for the national compute landscape. They would secure and distribute compute allocations, provide user support, and offer training.
- **EuroHPC** - UK is a full member of the EuroHPC. UK-based applicants can access all existing and planned EuroHPC systems, including the JUPITER exascale system. **We encourage the community to apply** https://eurohpc-ju.europa.eu/access-our-supercomputers/eurohpc-access-calls_en

Quantum Technologies for Fundamental Physics (QTFP)

- A programme funded by the UKRI Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF), run jointly with EPSRC, for which UKRI funding ended on 31 March '26.
- Applies the latest advances in quantum science and technology to explore and answer long-standing research questions about the universe and its evolution. The first programme entailed:
  - £32m for 7 large consortia over 5 years
  - £6.3m for 17 small projects over 2 years
- Any phase II of the programme would have an increased focus on knowledge exchange, working internationally and technology applications to address global challenges.
- Potential funding from IS8 for a further phase is being explored.
- If no dedicated funding from IS8 then, like all other programme areas, QTFP is under consideration within the prioritisation exercise.

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Fellowships and studentships

Ernest Rutherford Fellowship

- Interviews for the **2025 Ernest Rutherford Fellowship Call** are scheduled for the end of April
- 186 high calibre applications submitted to the call
- Sift meetings took place w/c 16 March to identify 28 candidates for interview
- Anticipate to award 7 to 10 fellowships
- 2026 ERF call will go live in June

Future Leaders Fellowship

- Interviews for **Round 10 Future Leaders Fellowship Call** scheduled for early May
- 410 high calibre applications submitted (academic call)
- Round 9 FLF awarded 4 fellowships within STFC's remit – reflects a high success rate compared to other councils
- Round 11 FLF closes on 16 June

Studentships

- The 2026 Studentship Allocations have been announced.
- Award of 220 studentships starting in October 2026.
- Follows extensive work to refresh the algorithm following changes to UKRI's grant funding service

PPE CG guidance review

Why have a review?

- Pressures following the 2024 CG including: R&D, number of PDRAs, support for national capability through the core, and maintaining M&O commitments.
- Future budgets are likely to be challenging and feel more so as research costs continue to increase.
- The review was initiated by STFC to provide strategic guidance and recommendations on the assessment of future CG.
- Conducted by an expert panel:

Gavin Davies	SB PPAN, previous PPGP member (panel chair)
Ruben Saakyan	chair PPAP
Matthew Needham	previous chair PPAP
Sergey Burdin	chair PAAP
Adrian Bevan	deputy chair SB F&L
Helen O'Keeffe	previous chair of PPGP(E)
Alison Bruce	SB PPAN, previous chair NPGP
Nick Evans	previous chair PPGP(T)
Dave Charlton	Council, previous chair PPGP(E)

- Report presented to Science Board PPAN in March.
- Report has been shared with PPGP (Experiment) members.

PPE CG guidance review

Key messages for 2026 CG and beyond

- **Maintain current balance** where there is scientific excellence, modulo a target R&D value of 5%.
- Recognise the **breadth of the programme** → coverage of scientific capability and physics areas, not necessarily the number of projects.
- Leadership in R&D develops into subsequent construction leadership, turns into physics yield and impact.
- The programme must be **sustainable** → maintain a reduced sustainable programme instead of “salami-slicing”, ensuring a critical mass for each activity, science area, group etc. But not all groups may be recommended for funding and no hibernation mode funding.
- Prioritise **M&O requests** where STFC has invested in construction projects.
- **Retain core** capability → the core is vital to protect future capability and to address government priorities through long-term expertise and skills. In the case of temporary or reduced funding, prioritising core over non-core preserves long-term capability and enables effective build-back.
- **Academic funding** maintained at minimum level (4%) → award academic time if their activity deemed scientifically excellent and above critical mass
- Allow group CG PIs as much **flexibility** as possible in administering the award

SB PPAN recognises that 2026 will be a difficult review and will support the PPGP recommendations. This may include stopping funding for unsustainable activities resulting from ranking scientific excellence.

PPE CG guidance review

Looking ahead to the 2029 CG

1) SB PPAN, with input from the community, should provide strategic guidance to shape future CG reviews. Such guidance should be cognisant of, and hence consistent with, relevant wider national and international strategies. Guidance should be renewed in advance of each CG call, and the community and PPGP be made aware.
2) Guidance should include a suggested breakdown of resources by area e.g. energy frontier and type e.g. R&D to ensure a balanced programme as well as guidance to help ensure the programme is sustainable (tension with decisions on individual posts that are required is noted).
3) The CG should continue to support a large academic community where the science output is ranked highly.
4) M&O and physics analysis can be reduced is if the field is construction heavy. It may be necessary to balance supplying mission critical components and future physics potential against current exploitation.
5) M&O responsibilities should be carefully defined, and efforts should be made to fully utilise in-kind contributions. In terms of cash payments, these are usually dependent on the number of authors and so the UK community should actively consider if thresholds of research fractions devoted to an experiment should be used to define who signs papers.

Funding and award administration

- Research Council funding opportunities are now launched and managed in The Funding Service (TFS).
  - The goal was for UKRI to operate a single, consistent user-centred service that reduces the burden of finding, applying for and managing research funding.
  - STFC has adapted its processes to align with TFS, but you will see further refinement over time.
- UKRI continues to harmonise policy across the Research Councils.
- This includes **changes to no-cost extension policy**
  - Extensions are no longer no cost to STFC if they fall beyond the end of the financial year, so please discuss with your programme manager as usual.
  - Extensions are approved for delays out of the control of the team (i.e., no bridging of funding)
  - Policy changes affect no-cost extensions requested from 1 April 2026.
  - Maximum duration is now dependent on extension reason:
    - for **people related** reason up for the **duration of the actual delay** incurred
    - for **non-people related** reasons limited to a **maximum of 6 months**

  Further information: UKRI guidance on FEC grant terms and conditions – UKRI

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Questions?