



Questions and Answers

1. Why does STFC need to reprioritise its science programme?

The 2007/08 Programmatic Review restructured the programme with the intention of repeating the exercise every two years.

To allow a balanced budget across the three years, the Programmatic Review required STFC to bring forward from the final year (2010-11) about £26m in 2008-09 capital and £20m in 2009-10 near-cash as a transition measure to maintain the majority of programmes. STFC must repay these “loans” before the end of 2010-11. The alternative would have been far greater reductions in 2008.

The 2009 prioritisation was completed in December by STFC Council on the advice of its advisory panels, committees (PPAN & PALS) and Science Board.

The 2009 prioritisation took into account:

- (i) That the majority of STFC’s funds are required for the existing international subscriptions and operations of large domestic facilities, leaving little flexibility. The necessary 2010-11 reductions therefore come primarily from the programmes and research grants across both PALS and PPAN.
- (ii) STFC’s new Vision “*to maximise the impact of our knowledge, skills, facilities and resources for the benefit of the United Kingdom and its people.*” The Vision contains a commitment to continuing support for both curiosity-driven and application-led research.
- (iii) The increase in pressure on the STFC’s programme as a result of the global financial crisis, including the fall in the value of the pound.
- (iv) The constraints on overall public sector expenditure, suggesting that the future budget situation in the medium to long-term to be extremely challenging with tough times for all during the years ahead.

The science prioritisation was undertaken to enable us to plan prudently for these difficult financial times and to develop, with the science community, a clear strategy and programme focusing on the highest priority projects and directions to ensure that we deliver the maximum scientific, social economic and international benefit to the UK. We need to act now to position ourselves with a sustainable programme for future years. This is good governance.

2. When did the prioritisation exercise take place?

It is important to ensure that STFC Council approved the best possible programme for the UK. Therefore, this exercise built upon the existing prioritisation and ranking from the 2007/08 Programmatic Review and the recommendations of PPAN and PALS, as endorsed by Science Board. It is on this basis that the prioritisation exercise itself took place between May and December 2009.

The outcomes of the prioritisation need to be implemented in time for the next financial year and we will be continuing to consult and work with Advisory Panels, PPAN and PALS and Science Board to manage the implementation of the programme.

This review exercise was comprehensive and that Council has approved a robust and sustainable programme.

3. Has STFC's science been reprioritised because of bad management?

No, this process demonstrates good management. STFC is planning for the future in a consultative manner with a robust process to ensure a financially sustainable programme delivering the best possible science, technology and societal, international and economic impact for the UK.

4. Who made the final decisions about STFC's programme?

To ensure that STFC makes the best possible decisions about its programme, its decision making process is based on consultation and involves an advisory system of scientists who provide input and make recommendations throughout the process.

The science prioritisation exercise went through the following process:

- (i) The Advisory Panels, which comprise leading academics from across the disciplines, carry out consultation on science and research priorities with their communities. The Advisory Panels then provided their findings to PPAN and PALS.
- (ii) PPAN and PALS undertook a detailed programme prioritisation exercise based on the Advisory Panel's inputs. PPAN and PALS then made their recommendations on the future programme to Science Board
- (iii) Science Board received input individually from PPAN and PALS and then finalised their recommendations on STFC's overall future programme for STFC Council.
- (iv) STFC Council received and considered the recommendations from Science Board and finalised STFC's future programme.

STFC's Executive and Programmes Boards received the recommendations to Council from Science Board and provided advice to Council on implementation

issues. Science Board's report is to Council and the Executive is not able to change its advice.

STFC Council approved the final programme based on the advice and recommendations of scientific experts - Science Board, PPAN and PALS, and Advisory Panels.

5. What was in and out of the scope of the prioritisation?

The full breadth of STFC's science programme was considered within the scope of the science prioritisation.

6. Why have you released the outcome of the prioritisation now?

STFC is committed to working with the science community to develop a programme for the next five years that is robust and sustainable. The science prioritisation started in May 2009 and it was important to ensure that the process was undertaken in detail with thorough consultation with the science community.

STFC is committed to open and timely communication with its scientific communities. The outcome of the prioritisation process has been announced quickly, to ensure that we can work in consultation with Advisory Panels, PPAN, PALS and Science Board on a managed implementation of the new programme in time for the 2010-11 financial year.

7. How does this prepare STFC for the future?

The science prioritisation enables us to plan prudently for this difficult financial climate and to develop, with the science community, a clear strategy and programme focusing on the highest priority projects and directions to ensure that we deliver the maximum scientific, social economic and international benefit to the UK. By acting now we can position ourselves so that we have a sustainable programme for future years.

8. How did the prioritisation process work? How were scientific priorities identified?

We relied upon the academic and research expertise of our Advisory Panels, Committees and Science Board. They looked at the whole of our science and technology programme including national and international facilities.

This exercise built upon the existing prioritisation and ranking from the 2007/8 programmatic review and the recommendations of PPAN and PALS, as endorsed by Science Board in May 2009.

Information about how process worked can be found in question 4.

You can also find out more information about the process at <http://www.stfc.ac.uk/resources/pdf/STFCProgPri.pdf>

9. How were programmes rated?

The programmes were rated against the five criteria listed in question 10). All projects were given a priority rating of Alpha 1 to 5 (highest).

10. What were the decision making criteria?

In order to prioritise the programme, the advisory committees have used decision making criteria that were developed following the STFC strategy consultation to allow comparison across the whole STFC programme.

The criteria they used contains five areas:

- (i) Excellence
- (ii) Economic impact
- (iii) Societal impact
- (iv) Leadership, and
- (v) Synergies.

Although each criterion was considered during the prioritisation process, scientific excellence was considered to be the most important factor.

Full details about the decision making criteria can be found at:
<http://www.stfc.ac.uk/About/Stats/Rev/Criteria.aspx>

11. Is this the Government's impact agenda?

The prioritisation exercise was undertaken to ensure that STFC's programme is in the best possible shape and position to deliver world-class science during these tough financial times.

All of the Research Councils are committed to delivering impact through their science, research and technology for the benefit of the UK and its people. Impact was considered as one of the criteria in this process. However, it was not the only criteria and the decisions taken by Council were based on recommendations made by the scientific advisory system. STFC is committed to continuing to support both curiosity-driven and application-led research. We recognise that 'economic and societal impact' is a result of underlying scientific achievement, and that scientific achievement is a result of the underlying academic and research community without whose ideas and drive no innovation would emerge.

12. Was the science community and other stakeholders consulted in making these decisions?

There has been extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including the science community, throughout this process. There were hundreds of responses throughout the consultation. The science community had opportunities to comment on their priorities through the Advisory Panels, which comprise leading academics from across the disciplines supported by STFC, who then reported their findings to PPAN and PALS. The recommendations made to Council were based on consultation with the community and other stakeholders and on the views of the advisory scientists on PPAN and PALS and Science Board.

In astronomy, the process was additionally informed by Ground Based Facilities Review.

13. Have you released the recommendations of the Advisory Panels?

Reports have been available in both draft and final form since they were completed in September 2009 at <http://www.stfc.ac.uk/About/Stats/Rev/intro.aspx>

14. When will you release the recommendations of PPAN/PALS?

Reports from PPAN and PALS are available at <http://www.stfc.ac.uk/About/Stats/Rev/intro.aspx> from Wednesday 16 December 2009.

15. When will you publish the recommendations of the Science Board?

The report from Science Board will be released on Wednesday 16 December 2009. This will be available at <http://www.stfc.ac.uk/About/Stats/Rev/intro.aspx>. This report was to STFC Council, so was held in confidence until Council met on 15 December.

16. Will the science community have opportunities to have a say in the coming months?

STFC will ensure appropriate discussion and consultation with our scientific communities on the implementation of the programme, commencing with a meeting of our Advisory Panel chairs on Friday 18 December and continuing through January and February.

17. Did you consult the other Research Councils?

Yes. The other Research Councils have been kept informed about the prioritisation throughout this process and we will be working with them and other stakeholders in the coming months to implement the new programme.

Specifically, Research Councils were invited to send representatives to the PALS committee and input was solicited on the New Light Source Project.

18. Are the other Research Councils prioritising their research?

In the difficult times currently facing the country, it is essential that all Research Councils deliver the most efficient use of public funds and support the long-term sustainability of the research base for the UK's future. Research Councils are all examining their forward budgets.

19. Has the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills been involved in the prioritisation exercise?

The review of STFC's science programme was undertaken by an advisory system of scientists (see question 4). As STFC is a publicly funded body, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has been kept apprised of the prioritisation throughout the process.

20. What happens next?

Now that the programme has been determined by STFC Council, STFC will work in coming months with national and international partners, including universities, departments and project teams, on implementation of the 2010-11 budget and future programme.

The managed withdrawal from identified projects will allow members of our scientific communities to redirect their efforts, or, where appropriate, to seek other sources of funding for their projects.

21. Will you have to repeat this process?

We have a list of priorities that enable us to plan for a variety of budget outcomes, so we will not need to repeat this exercise to accommodate the outcome of the next Spending Review.

However, good programme management and governance mean that we will undertake ongoing reviews of our programme on a regular basis, to ensure it takes account of new or emerging areas of scientific interest. This will enable us to monitor the effectiveness of our strategy, ensuring that projects are on schedule and still delivering value for money. We will then tune the programme as necessary to ensure that it continues to deliver maximum scientific, societal, international and economic benefit for the United Kingdom and its people.

22. What steps is STFC taking to ensure this doesn't happen again?

The unexpected global financial crisis has had a negative impact on nearly all industries and sectors of the economy including science and technology research.

The current financial environment required tough decisions on grants and projects in 2010-11 and beyond. We have also prudently planned on the basis that the pound will continue at current lower levels against other major currencies.

It is essential that we live within our budget allocation and therefore it is good management to continually review programmes to ensure we are maximising the impact of our science, technology and skills for the benefit of the UK.