



Science, Innovation  
and Technology  
Committee

Lord Vallance  
Minister for Science, Research, Innovation and Nuclear  
Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Professor Sir Ian Chapman  
Chief Executive  
UK Research and Innovation

cc. Professor Michele Dougherty, Executive Chair, Science and Technology Facilities  
Council

*By email only*

12 March 2026

**Subject: Scientific research funding**

Dear Patrick, Ian,

On 4 March my committee examined the ongoing situation at the Science and Technology Facilities Council, and in particular the financial pressures facing both its Particle Physics, Astronomy and Nuclear Physics (PPAN) programmes and its support for scientific facilities in the UK and abroad, including at CERN.

We were deeply concerned by what we heard, both from witnesses representing the PPAN community and those who contacted us in advance of the hearing.

It is not clear whether the current situation is the by-product of irresponsible financial management and inadequate governance; a conscious decision to set aside the 2009 'Drayson partitions' in order to deprioritise a particular area of scientific research in favour of research facilities; an unintended consequence of wholesale, rushed reforms to the way the UK funds scientific research; or a combination of all three.

What is clear is that, despite your assertions to the contrary in evidence to my committee and our counterparts in the House of Lords, widespread cuts have been proposed before adequate consultation with those affected was undertaken.



This is wholly unacceptable and represents a failure for which DSIT, UKRI and STFC leadership must bear responsibility, and act urgently to address. It is also damaging to the UK's international reputation: as Professor Jon Butterworth told us, "we have international meetings coming up at the end of the month where our name is going to be mud if this is not sorted out".

Acknowledging that communications have fallen short – as you have done – is a start, but no more than that.

What is needed now is swift and decisive action to win back the research community's trust, restore the UK's international reputation as a scientific research leader, and to prevent the next generation of research leaders from moving abroad. This would undermine not only our research base but inhibit growth in sectors including AI, quantum and advanced manufacturing, by cutting off the pipeline of talent available to innovative UK companies.

This committee has loudly and repeatedly pressed the case for greater transparency and data to facilitate comparisons between the previous and new approaches to research funding. We have also taken our duty to hold Ministers, UKRI and research council leadership to account for their decisions with the utmost seriousness.

Episodes such as this illustrate perfectly the need for such transparency, and willingness to be held to account.

I would therefore be grateful if you could confirm:

1. Whether the 2009 'Drayson partitions', intended to protect scientific researchers from cost pressures generated by facilities, infrastructure and international subscription costs, remain Government and UKRI policy?
2. What financial audit and scrutiny processes were in place at the time these cost pressures arose, and why they apparently failed to flag these pressures in a timely fashion?
3. Whether the future obligations were factored into STFC and UKRI accounts at the time, and if not, why not?
4. What specific examples there are of, to quote Professor Dougherty's evidence to the committee, "overambitious projects with high science value undertaken" by



STFC without “the understanding that they could be afforded” through agreed allocations?

5. What discussions are taking place between DSIT, HM Treasury and UKRI in relation to the STFC funding pressures, and when these will conclude?
6. Whether these discussions include the possibility of reclassifying the subscriptions STFC is responsible for, thereby separating them from the wider funding envelope?
7. Whether any consideration has been given to moving PPAN funding from STFC to another research council?
8. The detailed timetable and terms of reference for STFC’s consultation with the PPAN community.
9. What transition support will be put in place to support early career researchers impacted by cuts or pauses to funding programmes, or the reorganisation of research funding around the three ‘buckets’, and how you intend to prevent more of these researchers from leaving the UK?
10. Whether the decision to not fund the LHCb upgrade is final and what steps you are taking to mitigate the consequential damage to the UK’s international reputation ahead of CERN Council and resource review board meetings on March 26th and April 27th?
11. What new financial and governance mitigations have been put in place at STFC and across the research councils and UKRI to prevent similar pressures unexpectedly arising in the future?
12. Whether you will commission a full, independent audit of the circumstances and decision-making process that led to this episode, that identifies lessons learned and proposes reforms to avoid similar failings in future.

Given the urgency of this issue, I would be grateful if you could reply by 19 March 2026.



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I intend to place this letter, and your response, in the public domain.

With best wishes,

**Dame Chi Onwurah MP**

Chair – Science, Innovation and Technology Committee