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**KAVLI INSTITUTE FOR COSMOLOGY**  
**UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE**  
**Professor George Efstathiou FRS, Director KICC**

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July 19, 2010

Dear Professor Smith,

Earlier this month a group of senior academics, including myself, submitted a petition to Professor Michael Sterling signed by nearly 1000 scientists expressing a loss of confidence in the CEO of STFC. In fact, there was widespread loss of confidence in STFC in 2008. However, the academic community did not express this in the form of a petition in the hope that the Wakeham Review and the RCUK Structural Review of STFC would lead to changes that might help to restore some confidence.

Our group has met with Professor Sterling twice and we have had some constructive discussions. However, we have reached an impasse on aspects of the governance of STFC, particularly on the composition of STFC Council, which I believe is a critical issue.

The composition of STFC Council is radically different to the composition of the other Research Councils. The composition of STFC Council was flagged as a major issue in the 2008 Science and Technology Select Committee Report and by the Wakeham Review. I quote from the Wakeham review:

‘The Panel was immediately drawn to the different governance structure that exists in STFC in comparison with other Research Councils, notably a reduced Council membership of 10 individuals, four of whom are not university-based academics, and a further three of whom are from the STFC executive. The Panel was told by STFC that this different structure was deliberately selected to deal with the multiple purposes assigned to STFC. The provision and maintenance of large scale facilities for science in the UK and elsewhere, the provision of grant funding for three sub-disciplines of physics and the planning, operation and development of a (sic) Science and Innovation campuses at Daresbury and Harwell. Its small size

was designed by DIUS to make it dynamic and to facilitate regular meetings. However, when compared to other Research Councils, which have Councils made up of approximately 11 to 17 members representing broad scientific interests from the community operating at the highest level, STFC does stand out for the relative lack of members of the scientific community at the highest level. The structure has not best served the community in several branches of science whose input is one level below Council. The Panel therefore recommends that the DIUS should broaden the membership of STFC Council to include more stakeholders in the science activity, and that the balance between executive presence and non-executive oversight should be redressed. It is argued that this adjustment can be made without detracting from the executive activity in developing the Science and Innovation Campuses.

The Panel recommends to DIUS that the membership of STFC's Council be broadened to include more of the stakeholders in the science activity at the highest level, and to redress the balance between executive presence and non-executive oversight.'

and the RCUK response to this recommendation (October 2008):

'DIUS accepts this recommendation. Details of an open competition to recruit two additional scientists as non-executive members of Council (the maximum permitted by STFC's Royal Charter) will be published shortly.'

And from the 2008 Grant/Hazell Organisational Review of STFC:

'22. Governance issues within the Executive seem to be further compounded by evidence of a lack of shared understanding within the top team concerning the role of Council. In our discussions with senior staff from the STFC Executive the perceived role of Council was articulated to the Panel in terms that ranged from the probity and oversight role of a 'board of trustees' to the strategic leadership role of a 'board of directors'. It is the Panel's view that the role of Council is closest to the latter.'

'23. The Panel also considered the composition of Council, noting that RCUK recently announced that DIUS intends to recruit two additional scientific members to the Council, in response to a recommendation by the RCUK Review of Physics chaired by Professor Bill Wakeham. Notwithstanding this change, the Panel notes that the Council of STFC differs from that of the other Research Councils in having three members of the Executive on Council. The norm for the other Councils is that the Chief Executive is the only member of Council from the Executive. It is the Panel's view that the case for this distinction has not been convincingly made.

There is also clear evidence that the composition of Council has created a negative perception outside of STFC that the Executive has excessive influence within Council.'

As a result of these recommendations, two members of the Executive resigned from Council and three University based academics (Professor Martin Barstow, Sir Peter Knight and Professor James Stirling) were appointed to Council in April 2009.

However, following Professor Sterling's appointment as Chair of STFC, three new members of Council were appointed from the business community. These appointments have again skewed STFC Council so that it looks highly anomalous compared to other Research Councils (see the annex attached to this letter). Most of the other Research Councils are dominated by 'heavyweight' research scientists with strong international reputations. In my conversations with Michael Sterling, he has seemed to be under the mistaken impression that most other Research Councils are dominated by 'lay' members, and is particularly concerned that academics in receipt of grants from STFC have a 'conflict of interest'. I quote verbatim from an email exchange (15th July 2010)

'Thank you for setting down your views about the membership of STFC Council. We have discussed it a number of times in detail but I regret that I do not share your view. The need for scientific understanding is not limited to active researchers who are funded by the Council, who have an inevitable conflict of interest. The challenge for recruiting future Council members is to persuade those who have that knowledge but are not in receipt of our funding, to accept the challenge that Council membership entails in these difficult times. Your suggestions would be welcome but as you know the process is controlled by BIS.'

I accept that STFC Council needs a range of expertise, but I do not accept this oversensitivity to potential conflicts of interest of research scientists on Council. It does not seem to be a significant concern for the other Research Councils. In the case of MRC, they seem happy to have members from MRC Institutes (for whom they presumably pay salaries) as members of Council. Research scientists are regularly asked to sit on panels where we must make cross-disciplinary decisions. In my experience top scientists are highly capable of making objective decisions. This is evidently expected from members of STFC Science Board.

Academic members of Council are necessary: (a) to provide technical and scientific expertise; (b) to develop a coherent scientific strategy for STFC; (c) to advise Council on the impact of decisions on these subjects; (d) to retain the confidence of the academic communities in these subjects (particularly in difficult economic times).

No other Research Council relegates its academic heavyweights to lower level committees.

It is clear to me that the loss of confidence with STFC Executive is in large part due to governance issues, including the under-representation of senior scientists on Council. STFC seemed to take a step in the right direction following the Wakeham Review (with DIUS/BIS approval), but has now taken a step backwards.

I would therefore like answers to the following questions:

[A] The Organisational Review of STFC stated clearly that a Research Council should provide 'strategic leadership'. How can this be achieved if the best research scientists are excluded from Council?

[B] The Wakeham Review explicitly called for the inclusion of *'more of the stakeholders in the science activity at the highest level'*. DIUS accepted this recommendation and appointed three University based academics to Council. Why is BIS now ignoring the Wakeham Review and skewing Council towards a lay membership?

[C] Why is the composition of STFC Council so different to that of the other Research Councils?

[D] Do you agree with Professor Sterling that University academics in receipt of STFC funds have a conflict of interest and should not sit on Council? If so, why does this restriction not apply to other Research Councils?

[E] If one follows strictly the logic that recipients of STFC funds cannot serve on Council, then why does this not also apply to people from STFC funded industry (e.g. Astrium, e2v, etc)?

[F] Are you confident, based on your recent experience, that Council members with the scientific expertise to provide 'strategic leadership' can be found from the business community?

Finally, you will of course have seen the Royal Academy of Engineering response to your Science and Research Budget review request calling publically for a reduction of funding to fundamental physics and particle physics in particular. Yet Mr Philip Greenish, CEO of the Royal Academy of Engineering is a member of STFC Council and is surely aware of the savage reductions of 35% to science exploitation funding in particle physics, astronomy and nuclear physics since 2008. These reductions go well beyond the 'slash and burn' scenario envisaged by the Royal Society and leave these subjects particularly vulnerable going in to a difficult CSR.

So my final question is:

[G] Do you believe that Mr Greenish's continued membership of Council is credible, particularly given the loss of confidence in STFC by the academic community?

Yours sincerely,

George Efstathiou

Membership of Research Councils

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## NERC

Chairman	Ed Wallis	Chairman WS Atkins
CEO	Prof. Alan Thorpe	(Former Director NEC Centres for Atmospheric Sciences)
Members	Prof Paul Curran	Professor of Physical Geography, Bournemouth
	Prof Huw Davies	Professor of Physics, Institute for Atmospheric Climate Change ETH Zurich.
	Mr Rowan Douglas	Managing Director Wills Analytics
	Prof Alastair Fitter	Pro-VC for Research, Univ. York
	Prof Anne Glover	Chief Scientific Advisor, Scotland
	Prof Charles Godfray	Prof of Zoology, Univ. Oxford
	Prof Alex Halliday	Prof of Geochemistry, Univ. Oxford
	Mr Peter Hazell	Chairman Argent Group etc.
	Prof Michael Lockwood	Prof Space Plasma Physics, Energy and Environment, Univ. Southampton
	Prof Thomas Meagher	Prof Plant Biology, Univ. St Andrews
	Prof Julia Slingo	Met Office Chief Scientist
	Prof Andrew Watson	Prof Environmental Sciences, Univ. East Anglia
	Prof Rob Watson	Prof Environmental Sciences, Univ. East Anglia
	Prof Marjorie Wilson,	Prof of Igneous Petrogenesis, Univ. Leeds.

13 University + 3 'Lay'

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EPSRC

Chairman	John Armit	CEO Network Rail
CEO	Prof David Delpy	Former Vice Provost Research UCL
	Prof Anne Anderson	Professor of Human Computer Interaction, Univ. Dundee
	Mike Carr	Former Chief Scientific Officer BT
	Prof Brian Collins	Chief Scientific Advisor SfT, Prof of Information Systems Cranfield
	Prof Lynn Gladden	Shell Professor, Univ. Cambridge
	Dr Andrew Herbert	Managing Director, Microsof Cambridge
	Prof Tim Pedley	Prof. Fluid Mechanics, Univ. Cambridge
	Dr Malcolm Roberts	Managing Director Guidance Ltd.
	Prof Roy Sambles	Prof of Experimental Physics, Exeter
	Prof Christopher Snowden	Vice-Chancellor Univ. of Surrey
	Prof Pierre-Louis Viollet	Vice-President R&D Labs.
	Prof Bill Wakeham	Vice Chancellor Univ. Southampton
	Dr Dave Watson	Director IBM Hursley Lab.
	Prof Mark Welland	Prof of Nanotechnology Cambridge and Chief Scientific Advisor MoD
	Prof Robert Winston	Prof of Science and Society Imperial
	Dr Tony Wood	Head of Medicinal Chemistry, Pfizer

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MRC

Chair	Sir John Chisholm	Chair QinetiQ
CEO	Sir Leszek Borysiewicz	Former Deputy Rector Imperial, Principal Faculty of Medicine

Members	Prof Jeffrey Almond	Vice-President Research and Development (Former Head of School of Animal and Microbial Science, University of Reading)
	Prof Michael Arthur	VC Univ. of Leeds (Former Dean of Faculty of Medicine, Southampton)
	Prof Dame Sally Davies	DG Research Dept of Health
	Prof Chris Day	Prof of Liver Medicine Univ. of Newcastle
	Dr Annette Doherty	Pfizer Global Research and Development
	Dr Richard Henderson	MRC Lab of Molecular Biology
	Prof Sir Andrew McMichael	Prof of Molecular Medicine, University of Oxford
	Prof Sally Macintyre	Prof Faculty of Medicine Univ of Glasgow. Hon Director MRC Social and Public Health Unit, Glasgow.
	Ms Vivienne Parry	Writer and broadcaster
	Lord Naren Patel	Former consultant obstetrician Ninewells Hospital Dundee, Former President Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.
	Prof Michael Schneider	Head of Cardiovascular Science, Imperial College
	Prof Herb Sewell	Prof of immunology, University of Nottingham

10 academics (including CEO) + 4 'Lay'

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STFC

Chair	Prof Mike Sterling	Former VC Birmingham
CEO	Prof Keith Mason	Former Head MSSL

Members	Mrs Gill Ball	Former Finance Director, Birmingham
	Prof Martin Barstow	Head of College of Science Engineering, Leicester
	Prof Keith Burnett	Vice Chancellor, Sheffield
	Mr Marshall Davies	Retired Director Boots
	Mr Philip Greenish	CEO Royal Academy of Engineering
	Dr Michael Healy	Director Navigation Business Division Astrium
	Dr Philip Kaziewicz	Managing Director GI Partners
	Prof Peter Knight	Senior Principal Imperial
	Prof James Sterling	Jacksonian Professor of Physics, Cambridge
	Mr Will Whitehorn	President Virgin Galactic

6 University (including CEO& Chair) + 5 'Lay'