

16th June 2026

Dame Chi Onwurah MP,
Chair of the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee,
House of Commons,
London,
SW1A 0AA.

Subject: STFC reprioritisation and the PPAN early-career researcher pipeline

Dear Dame Chi and Members of the Committee,

We are writing to follow up on the response from Lord Vallance and Professor Sir Ian Chapman to the Committee on 9th April 2026 regarding the funding situation facing the UK particle physics, astronomy and nuclear (PPAN) physics community. We welcome the Committee's continued scrutiny of this issue.

In light of the response, we wish to draw attention to the discrepancy between the reassurances given to the Committee about maintaining the number of PPAN early-career researchers and the reductions being experienced by the community.

In particular, in their correspondence to the Committee, Lord Vallance and Sir Ian stated that, had new theoretical particle physics grants been issued in 2025, the number of fundable postdoctoral FTEs would have been 25. However, the relevant grants were not issued in 2025; they were issued in 2022. For the 2025/26 year, those grants supported 58 postdoctoral FTEs with the uplift, or 41 FTEs without the uplift. A comparison with a hypothetical 2025 grant round therefore obscures the reduction in posts supported by the grants actually in place for 2025/26. On the figures provided, theoretical particle physics is facing a reduction from 41 postdoctoral FTEs to 25, a 39% reduction even before comparison with the uplifted level. This is one concrete example of a wider PPAN problem. Across the community, an estimated 220-260 postdoctoral positions¹ are at risk if the cuts are not mitigated.

This is not a temporary disruption. Research groups are losing posts, the 2026 recruitment cycle for theoretical particle physics has been missed, and early-career researchers are already making career decisions on the basis that the UK pipeline is no longer reliable.

To assess the impact on early-career researchers, we surveyed 457 respondents across the PPAN community². The results show serious concerns about the stability of the UK PPAN career pipeline. Only 8% of respondents would now recommend a career in UK PPAN, compared with 74% before the January 2026 funding announcements. In addition, 89% report low or very low confidence in UK postdoctoral opportunities. Among the current UK postdocs surveyed, 74% said they are actively considering leaving the UK in search of jobs elsewhere.

Recent announcements have not reassured the community. In the survey, 79% of respondents said they felt less reassured by them, while only 4% said the announcements had largely addressed their concerns or left them with no major concerns.

¹<https://www.iop.org/physics-community/research-funding-changes/whats-happening>

²<https://ecr-openletter-stfc.github.io/survey.html>

We therefore ask the Committee to continue scrutinising DSIT, UKRI and STFC on the discrepancy between the reassurances given and the reductions now taking place. In particular, we ask the Committee to seek clarity on:

1. how the baseline for protected postdoctoral numbers has been chosen, including whether FY2025/26 is an appropriate reference point for protecting PPAN capacity in the UK;
2. what action will be taken to restore confidence among early-career researchers and prevent a break in the talent pipeline.

Without a genuine restoration plan based on the needs of the PPAN programme, rather than an already-reduced baseline, the UK risks losing a cohort of trained researchers whose expertise cannot simply be recovered later.

Yours sincerely,



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