

Consultation on STFC Programmatic Review 2007-08

Response by the Wellcome Trust

March 2008

1. The Wellcome Trust is the largest charity in the UK. It funds innovative biomedical research, in the UK and internationally, spending around £650 million each year to support the brightest scientists with the best ideas. The Wellcome Trust supports public debate about biomedical research and its impact on health and wellbeing.

Prioritisation of Light Sources

2. As a co-funder of **Diamond**, we welcome the high priority given to Diamond operations under the PALS category. However, we were concerned to see Diamond Phase II and III combined into one item and categorised as medium priority in the Programmatic Review 2008-09 consultation document. The document on "Prioritisation of PALS facilities", which has been subsequently released by STFC, suggests that Phases II and III are being considered separately from one another, as they should be. We also interpret the "Prioritisation of PALS facilities" document to indicate that the present review refers only to operational costs of both Phases II and III.
3. The Wellcome Trust has already committed with the Government to fund the construction of Phase II, and its timely completion is absolutely necessary to realise the scientific returns and research outputs envisioned in our combined investment in the facility. Without the Diamond Phase II beamlines, the UK would actually experience a marked decline in available beamlines relative to previous capacity. Diamond Phase I includes only 7 beamlines, whereas the Daresbury synchrotron radiation source, which will soon be taken out of service, had over 30 beamlines. Following completion of Diamond Phase II, 22 beamlines will be available at Diamond. Funding to operate the full capacity of Diamond Phase II must therefore be a high, not medium, priority. There is no use investing in world class scientific infrastructure if commitment to operating it cannot be maintained at a level that ensures it remains the best in the world.
4. We have serious doubts that the STFC suggestion of re-profiling or delaying the installation of Diamond Phase II instrumentation would bring significant savings on operational costs, in any case. Delaying parts of the Phase II construction would require re-scheduling capital costs that have already been approved, which could be very difficult and lead to new problems. Budgets and timelines for Phase II construction have been agreed and Diamond has made commitments to staff and external contractors. Thus, delaying the Phase II building programme may not bring any significant savings and if anything is likely to lead to increases in the construction costs of Phase II due to inflation.
5. We were surprised to see the Programmatic Review prioritise ESRF upgrades above the delivery of the full commitment to Diamond Phase II or Phase III, as Diamond will be a higher quality facility for UK users. STFC should reconsider this ordering.

6. Diamond Phase III offers significant potential to capitalise further on our initial combined investment in Diamond by adding an additional 10 beamlines. Unlike Phase II, funding for Phase III has not yet been committed and could conceivably be delayed until after Phase II has progressed further. Diamond Phase II must be a high priority, while Diamond Phase III could be categorised as a medium priority for the purpose of the STFC programmatic review. In fact, the rationale for including Diamond Phase III in this review is not clear, as it is the subject of a bid to the Large Facilities Capital Fund and operational costs for Phase III would not occur in the current spending review period.
7. In any case, STFC should bear in mind that a delay in Phase III construction would mean that Diamond will have to start laying off staff at the end of the year that they would otherwise employ on Phase III. This would therefore represent a short term savings but might in the longer term make Phase III more expensive or delay it further, as Diamond would have to recruit to replace these staff. The loss of experienced staff would be an additional cost to Diamond in terms of loss of valuable expertise.
8. While we agree that Diamond operational costs should be a high priority, we agree that the budget currently under consideration by Diamond Shareholders should be adequate for commissioning and operating the Phase I beamlines. Although there have been minor start up issues with some of the beamlines, Diamond should not have trouble dealing with them, assuming that the operating budgets are approved at the levels requested.

Engaging PALS user community

9. We appreciate that the STFC is engaging its user communities, through the recent Town Meeting and this consultation, as it decides where to invest over the next few years. It will be important for the STFC to proactively engage with the PALS user community. The PPAN user community appears to be highly energised and well organised to provide input into the STFC prioritisation exercise, as the impact of any cuts are direct and tangible to this group. The PALS users currently appear to be less aware of how the STFC prioritisation may affect their work, probably because PALS facilities users generally do not receive STFC funding directly. The short period allotted for responding to this consultation also makes it less likely that they will be able to learn about it and respond in time. We therefore urge STFC to actively ensure that it engages all stakeholders during this consultation process.