



A Plea from the Global Pulsar Timing Array Community

To

The Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC), UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the UK Government, and to whom it may concern,

We are writing on behalf of the International Pulsar Timing Array (IPTA) Steering Committee to express our profound concern regarding the recent STFC prioritisation outcomes for 2026–2030, and in particular the decision not to prioritise further funding for the e-MERLIN radio telescope network.

As you may be aware, the IPTA is an international collaboration that combines datasets from regional pulsar timing arrays across the globe to form the most sensitive experiment for inaugurating the era of nanohertz-frequency gravitational wave astronomy. This Committee, formally established in February 2011, administers its operations.

We write today to pledge our full solidarity with our colleagues at the Jodrell Bank Observatory (JBO) and the e-MERLIN facility, and to urge STFC, UKRI and the UK Government to reconsider this decision.

The Jodrell Bank Observatory is not merely a world-class radio astronomy facility; it is an indispensable pillar of the global effort to detect nanohertz gravitational waves. The Lovell Telescope and the wider e-MERLIN network provide state-of-the-art pulsar time-domain capabilities that are essential for precision pulsar timing.

The contribution of JBO to the IPTA and to nanohertz gravitational-wave science cannot be overstated. The Jodrell Bank timing database provides one of the most useful archives for studying pulsar timing irregularities, and the observatory plays a central role in the fast-maturing international effort to achieve the first direct detection of gravitational waves.

We understand that STFC is completely withdrawing from e-MERLIN and that this would have severe if not terminal consequences for scientific observations with the 76-m Lovell Telescope. We also note that the other e-MERLIN telescopes often stand in for critical observations when the Lovell Telescope cannot be available. The loss of this integrated facility would be devastating, not only for radio astronomy but for the entire gravitational-wave community.

Without continued input from JBO, the prospects for breakthrough discoveries in nanohertz gravitational-wave astronomy would be significantly diminished. The UK, which has been at the forefront of pulsar timing and gravitational-wave science for decades, would risk losing its leadership position in this rapidly advancing field.

Furthermore, we wish to emphasise the broader value of JBO as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a centre for public engagement with science and technology. Its role in inspiring the next generation of scientists and engineers is irreplaceable.

On behalf of the IPTA Steering Committee and the global pulsar timing community, we respectfully request that STFC, UKRI and the UK Government:

- i) *Reconsider the decision to withdraw funding from e-MERLIN*
- ii) *Ensure a viable and sustainable path for the continued operation of the Jodrell Bank Observatory and the Lovell Telescope*
- iii) *Recognise the essential contribution of JBO to international nanohertz gravitational-wave science and preserve the UK's leadership in this field*

The global scientific community stands with Jodrell Bank. We urge you to act now to prevent the closure of one of the world's most iconic and scientifically productive observatories.

Sincerely,



Prof. A. Gopakumar
Chair, IPTA Steering Committee