



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) Meeting

28 February 2025, 11.00 – 12.30
William Gates Building, Room SW00

Minutes

Attendance

Professor Alastair Beresford, Head of Department (Chair)
Celia Burns, Faculty Administrator (Secretary)
Dr Prakash Murali, Associate Professor
Aga Niewiadomska, Outreach Administrator
James Sharkey, Senior Research Software Engineer
Caroline Stewart, Departmental Secretary
Konrad Witaszczyk, Research Associate

Professor Thomas Sauerwald, Deputy Head of Department, joined the meeting as a guest to report on some of the agenda items.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Rachel Gardner and Komal Rathi.

2. Conflicts of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2024 (EDIC-2025-2-3) were approved.

4. Report on Actions from the Last Meeting

i) Committee Membership List

The Committee discussed the proposed membership list drafted by Alastair (EDIC-2025-02-4i) and agreed:

- it would be preferable to place the LGBTQ+ representative in the 'additional members' section, rather than in the 'member by virtue of their role' section;
- it would be useful to consider other categories to include under the 'additional members' section, who could be called on depending on agenda topic (carers, people with disability, for example);
- the membership list will be reviewed after one year.

It was agreed that Alastair would redraft the membership list for the Committee's approval.

Action: Alastair

ii) **Next Athena Swan Application**

(a) **Bronze or Silver Award**

The Committee noted that, in answer to a question about the Athena Swan action plan, Gina Warren (ED&I Consultant) had advised that the decision to go for a Silver Award should be based on the *impact* of the actions rather than simply completion of them. We should, therefore, consider whether we meet or surpass the success measures that we put in place, and whether there has been sustained progress when we prepare our next submission.

(b) **Sample Silver application under the new Athena Swan**

The Committee received the Silver Award application from the University of Bath (EDIC-2025-2-4ii), which Gina Warren (ED&I Consultant) considers to be a good example of a new Silver Award submission.

iii) **Athena Swan Action Plan**

1. **Bullying and harassment: improve student and staff understanding of bullying and harassment reporting and handling.**

Konrad had prepared a document with suggestions on steps for improving reporting of bullying and harassment (EDIC-25-2-4iii1). Alastair noted that the survey results suggested the Department had not done as well as the wider University in this area. The Committee discussed the issue and agreed that, to raise awareness of the bullying and harassment reporting procedure, it would be useful to create a public webpage linking from various Department intranet pages (HR, the different parts of the Tripos, and other relevant pages). The webpage should include, amongst other information:

- contact details for the first point of contact (the email address should be generic, but the contact's name and telephone number should be noted);
- some examples of cases that should be reported;
- information about resources available in Colleges.

It was agreed that the Directors of UG and PG Education should be asked to highlight this webpage in their induction talks, and that Caroline and Konrad would create the webpage.

Action: Caroline and Konrad

2. **Committee consideration of EDI: all departmental committees to consider EDI as part of their work.**

The Committee noted that Caroline had asked all department committees to include a standing item on EDI. It was agreed that Celia would review whether Committees were acting upon this request and report on this at the next meeting, including information about whether the agenda item was prompting discussion about EDI.

Action: Celia

3. Gender and other diversity in departmental events, such as seminars (regular monitoring of, and an increase in, diversity).

The Committee discussed some data provided by Ben Karniely, Senior Research Strategy Coordinator, on the gender of speakers for various department events (the Wednesday group meetings, the Wheeler Lecture, Tech Talks and Research Showcases) in 2023/24 (EDIC-2025-2-4iii3). Alastair noted that the numbers were not good, apart from the Wheeler Lecture—an annual event where there has been an even spread of male and female speakers (alternating each year). He noted that just under 25% of professors in the department are women so we should aim for that ratio in our speakers.

Discussion about this issue included:

- the risk that the requirement for more female speakers could place an unfair burden of work on women in the department;
- the acknowledgement that most of the seminars shown in the data are not given by members of the department (for example, speakers for the Wednesday seminars are generally visiting academics);
- the fact that the Women@CL talklets (where all speakers are women) had not been included in the data;
- the risk that requiring female speakers could result in talks by HR or recruitment rather than technical talks;
- the acknowledgement that the expectation for female speakers from very small start-up companies would be much lower.

Alastair said that in his summary at the beginning of next term, he would encourage people to think about the gender balance of visitors and speakers. Aga agreed to talk with Ben Karniely about ideas to encourage more women to give talks in the department.

Action: Aga and Alastair

4. Surveys: continuation of regular student and staff surveys annually.

Results from the 2024 surveys were discussed later in the agenda (see the Staff and Student Surveys main agenda item 6 below).

5. Career trajectories: exit interviews and career trajectory monitoring.

This item was discussed later in the agenda (see agenda item 9 below).

6. Review of the gender awards gap. This was discussed as part of the analysis of gender balance in exam performance (see agenda item 5 below).

iv) Disability Access Audit/Survey of the Building

Professor Sauerwald had looked at the audit for the William Gates Building (EDIC-2025-2-4iii8) and highlighted a few main issues, which were discussed:

- **The doors to the Lecture Theatres and to the three staff corridors on each of the three floors are very heavy and difficult to open.** It was also noted that the doors do not always close properly, which was a security issue. Apparently, the difficulty in getting a mechanism to open the doors is because of the weight of the doors. It was agreed that it should be a priority to get this issue fixed (at least for the doors on the central corridor of each floor), with the

preference being for finding a new opening mechanism over replacement of the doors (due to noise and aesthetic reasons associated with lighter doors).

- **The second-floor shower is not step-free.** Committee members were not aware of any steps to the shower room itself so it was agreed that this should be clarified and if the shower cubicle itself was not step-free, then this would require conversion. Alastair noted that there were two further showers on the ground floor adjacent to the disabled toilet. [Post meeting update: Unfortunately, there is a step into the shower tray for the ground floor showers]
- **There is a lack of space in some corridors for wheelchairs and some of the hand towel dispensers are not accessible for wheelchair users.** It was noted that it would be useful to canvas comments from a wheelchair user about this issue.
- **The survey appears to be quite out of date.** There was no date to indicate when the audit had been carried out and some items were out of date (such as the café, the library, and the parking layout).

It was noted that the current Building Services Manager (BSM) would be leaving in May and applications for their replacement would be closing on 19 March. It was agreed that the new BSM should review Professor Sauerwald's comments on the audit, address the issues above (with the doors issue as a priority) and arrange for another audit to be carried out on the building once the doors issue had been resolved.

Action: Caroline to advise the new BSM

- v) **Engagement with Frank Dobbin, co-author of 'Getting to Diversity'**
Alastair reported that Frank is scheduled to give a talk at 14:00 on 19 March in Lecture Theatre 1. He encouraged people to come along.
- vi) **Tracking Gender Balance in Part II and Part III Examinations.**
This item was discussed in item 5 below.

5. Tracking Gender Balance in Exam Performance

Professor Sauerwald presented a preliminary analysis of performance at the TMUA, and Parts IA, IB and II, noting that the data was very preliminary and that there were no firm conclusions. The data included Part II gender discrepancy of average marks, Part II number of firsts, Part II medians, Part II marks standard deviation, Part II distribution of gender in percentiles, marks by different cohorts, TMUA "first percentage" by entry year, TMUA medians and averages by entry year, and Part II performance by school type.

Discussion of the data included:

- how to work out if there is a bias or difference between cohorts (bearing in mind that 2019/20 was an outlier due to COVID, and results were excluded from the statistics for around 30 students who took CST 50%);
- whether differences relate to supervisions, and if so, what role the Department might play in making adjustments. Aga suggested asking students about this directly;
- the possibility of running a mock test to look at the presentation and framing of Tripos questions (related to this, James shared a [study](#) carried out by his colleagues in Physics about the impact of exam question structure);

- whether course selection affects results;
- whether choice of College makes a difference.

It was agreed that Alastair and Aga would brainstorm some topics to talk about when presenting the data to students in order to encourage discussion.

Action: Alastair and Aga

6. Staff and Student Annual Surveys

The Committee discussed a document (EDIC-2025-2-6) showing the Department's survey results, including a comparison against the wider University. Although the response rate for the department was low (31 respondents), the results were reasonably positive—many of them better than those of the University.

After discussion of the results, it was agreed that Alastair and Konrad would draft some information about the results and actions to be taken, which could then be emailed to department members and posted on a website.

Action: Alastair and Konrad

7. Being LGBTQ+ in Cambridge: A Review of the Experiences and Support of Staff at the University of Cambridge

The Committee received a summary of the report findings, together with a high-level action plan (EDIC-2025-2-7 i). The Committee noted that the report had also been seen by the department's LGBTQ+ group, but no comments had been raised. There was a brief discussion about the LGBTQ+ group, noting that although there didn't seem to be high attendance at the meetings, there was a larger email group, where views could potentially be canvassed about issues such as gender-neutral toilets. It was agreed that Alastair would talk with the LGBTQ+ lead about the review.

Action: Alastair

8. Gender Neutral Bathrooms

Professor Robert Watson had made a request (EDIC-2025-2-8) for the department to develop specific plans to introduce gender neutral bathrooms. After some discussion, the Committee agreed that James would speak to Professor Watson to find out what encouragement he had received for these plans as it would be important for there to be strong evidence and further detail is likely required from the community before any potentially expensive works are undertaken.

Action: James

9. Career Trajectories: Exit Interviews and Career Trajectory Monitoring

This item originates from the Athena Swan action plan. James introduced the document he had prepared (EDIC-2025-2-9) which commented on the current exit interview questions and included some thoughts about the associated Athena Swan action point. James noted that the current interview format cannot scale to what could easily result in 2 interviews/hours per week and which would produce unstructured data that would need to be analysed. He felt that a survey would gain greater coverage than interviews and, depending on the leaver's responses, could offer the option for a follow-up interview.

It was agreed that the HR Manager would construct the survey with reference to James' comments on the current exit interview questions and with input from Prof Andreas Vlachos in order to support our REF environment statement.

Action: Caroline to liaise with the HR Manager

10. MPhil Applications: No Research Opportunities

At its meeting on 28 January 2025, the People and Operations Committee (POC) discussed some suggestions around recruitment that could be flagged to the University, one of which was the suggestion to add a box on the MPhil application form for applicants to indicate that there are no research opportunities in their country. The POC had asked the Postgraduate Education Committee (PEC) and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee to consider this.

The Committee discussed this issue, noting that while it was supportive of applicants being able to state that there are no research opportunities in their country, an option to include some text about this in the application covering material might be better than a tick box. It was agreed that PEC should carry this issue forward.

Action: Caroline to liaise with PEC

11. Outreach Committee Strategy

The Outreach Committee had outlined its data collection strategy to EDIC and asked whether there were any particular statistics that should be collected and whether the Committee had any other views on this aspect of the proposed outreach strategy. Aga (Secretary of the Outreach Committee) noted that the Outreach Committee was keen to collect data to evaluate how outreach schemes are working and how students that we are targeting progress through their degree.

The Committee discussed this issue, noting that it would be very useful to keep such data for longitudinal analysis. The data should be in a plain csv format with an unchanging identifier and should be associated with the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) data.

It was agreed that Aga would think about the data sets that it would be useful to gather. Alastair and Caroline would think about (i) how to patch up the existing data and (ii) the annual process of data collection and retention.

Action: Aga, Alastair and Caroline

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held in the Easter Term, date to be arranged via meeting poll.