



---

## Outreach Committee Meeting

10:15 - 11:45, Monday 20 November 2023  
William Gates Building, Room GC22

### Minutes

#### Attendance

Tim Jones (Chair, TMJ)  
Aga Niewiadomska, Outreach Administrator (Secretary, AN)  
Celia Burns, Faculty Administrator (Note Taker, CB)  
Carl Henrik Ek (CHE)  
Laurie Gale (LPG)  
Rachel Gardner, Communications Manager (RG)  
Lise Gough, Graduate Education Manager (LMG)  
Neel Krishnaswami (NK) (to item 4 iv)  
Sue Sentence (SS)  
Becky Straw, Undergraduate Teaching Manager (RS)

Tim welcomed the members of the newly reformed Outreach Committee, noting its increased scope for strategic activities since Aga has joined the department as Outreach Administrator.

Introductions were made.

#### 1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Peter Ochieng.

#### 2. Conflicts of interest

There were no conflicts of interest.

#### 3. Terms of Reference

The Committee discussed possible terms of reference for the new committee, referring to the former committee's terms of reference (from 2017), the university's Access and Participation Plan, and the Engineering Department's outreach aims.

The distinction between public engagement and outreach was discussed, including overlap. The understanding was that public engagement emphasises mutual benefit, with events open to the public at large, and outreach is more focused on targeting potential students, with events solely for students. Outreach in the department would be about getting people interested in the subject of computer science generally, not just about coming to Cambridge; and creating positive perceptions about both the subject and applying to Cambridge.

The Committee agreed the following remit, adapted from the terms of reference from the 9 April 2018 Outreach Committee meeting, as a basis for Tim and Aga to work on and provide a draft for consideration at the next meeting:

- i to develop, co-ordinate and promote the Department's outreach activities
- ii to promote an equal gender balance of students
- iii to encourage a more diverse background of applicants
- iv to facilitate the recruitment of an excellent calibre of students.

Other issues discussed were:

- *Selections for admissions*: with 15 applicants per place, it is not possible to take a chance on people.
- *Volume of students vs. demographics of students*: the issue is more about admitting a different demographic of students than increasing the number of students. The department is unable to admit more students due to there being more assessing than teaching and an inability to find supervisors. A tripos review is planned which may address this issue in terms of changing the way we do teaching and assessing. Encouragement for PhD students and Research Assistants to do supervisions would also be required.
- *Foundation year*: this is a University scheme that accepts approximately 40 students with lower entry requirements and the stipulation that the student has gone through some education disruption. Students come for a year with the aim for them to make a competitive application and continue their education at Cambridge. Other faculties are doing this (eg the Cambridge Foundation Year in the Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences <https://www.foundationyear.cam.ac.uk/>) or talking about setting something up. That would be far bigger than what this committee could deliver; and it would not be possible to run a programme like this in the department without employing more people to run the programme.
- *Evaluation of student admissions*: a suggestion was made to evaluate the applicants who are admitted (rather than the applications received).

#### **4. Summary of current projects**

Aga outlined the current projects:

##### **i. Sutton Trust Summer School**

Aga is taking over the organisation of this established project from Tim. The summer school is a scheme for approximately 40 Year-12 students, who spend a taster week at Churchill College and participate in admissions talks from the University and other activities in our department. The Sutton Trust Summer School runs in a number of UK universities and several subjects are offered here at Cambridge. A condition for participation is that the student only ever attended a state school, and is studying Maths at A Level, IB, Scottish Highers or equivalent. The Central Admissions Office (CAO) selects participants using its widening participation criteria.

##### **ii. DeepMind Research Ready internships**

This is a new scheme, funded by DeepMind, who asked us to put in a bid from Cambridge University. The scheme will be running for the first time in summer 2024 (see <https://www.cst.cam.ac.uk/outreach/deepmind-research-ready>) and is for undergraduates and graduates from backgrounds under-represented in AI research. It aims to give participants an insight into postgraduate study. The participants will come to Cambridge for 8 weeks to do a research internship. Aga has asked supervisors to let her know if they would like to run a project. The only requirement from DeepMind is that the project should have some connection to AI.

**iii. STEM SMART**

This scheme has been running at the University for a few years but has not involved computer science until this year. It is a long-term scheme, involving tutoring, mentoring, and preparing students to make applications to competitive universities. Depending on the level of engagement from each student, they may also receive smaller supervisions, and be invited to a residential week. The scheme is connected to Ada Computer Science, with the Raspberry Pi Foundation helping to both write content for the program and run tutorial sessions. There are three phases to the programme, with the invitation to each next phase dependent on the student's engagement with the programme.

- The first phase starts with lots of students getting support through mentoring and large group online tutorials.
- The second phase helps students to put in a competitive application for competitive universities including Cambridge. This phase involves a 4-day residential.
- The third phase gives students as much support as possible to help them achieve the grades they need.

**iv. Women in CS**

This is a new programme, run in partnership with Corpus Christi College and for the first time this year. The programme spans five months, with women and non-binary students participating in discussion groups led by Women@CL and doing a small research project in an area they are interested in, supervised by Women@CL. The programme is mainly online but if the student submits the write-up of their project, they are invited to a one-night residential. The aim of the programme is to help students make an application and give them an experience that can grow their confidence. <https://www.cst.cam.ac.uk/outreach/women-in-cs-programme>

**v. Cambridge Festival**

The Cambridge Festival is a public engagement event organised by the University, which runs mid- to end-March, featuring mostly free events. Open Days in the departments on the West Cambridge site are held on a Saturday. This Department's involvement started with a pilot Open Day in 2022 that attracted about 200 visitors. At the 2023 event, there were over 1200 visitors and a wide range of activities linked to our research areas. Rachel and Aga are currently planning the 2024 Open Day which takes place on 16 March. Although it is a public engagement event, there

is an overlap with outreach (as a number of the visitors are prospective applicants, who enjoy tours of the department).

The University Festival team handles the notifications to teachers about the Festival, and Aga intends to use the CAO's newsletters for her own marketing in addition to contact with the Faculty of Education. Sue noted her interest to be included in any notifications about the Festival.

**vi. Physics at Work**

Physics at Work is a three-day event run by the Physics Department, which we took part in for the first time in 2023. Across the whole event over 1500 students got to experience a number of 20-minute activities provided by various University departments and companies. As Physics will be moving buildings next year, we might be hosting some of the 2024 event in the William Gates Building.

**5. Strategic directions**

Rachel noted that Claudia Antolini, University Public Engagement Manager, had suggested that we regard this year as a pilot year and use our experience to set strategy for the future. Tim noted that in general, we should be mindful of what we want to achieve and to measure outcomes, building as many ways as possible to evaluate what we do and bearing in mind that it might take a couple of years to see the outcome for some activities.

The Committee discussed admissions, noting that the Sutton Trust Summer School was very good for getting people to apply to Cambridge (more than half) but only a small fraction of those applying get a place. Therefore, one strategy could be to consider what we could do to help students with their application.

Another issue around admissions was the question about whether those students who do not get into Cambridge do get into *other* universities. It was noted that some students are funded by the Sutton Trust to do computer science in the U.S., and it would be useful to have that data (which should be accessible via the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)).

The Committee also discussed ambassador programmes, for instance Sutton Trust Summer School students doing outreach visits to their former school. This is something that would be very easy to measure.

With regard to postgraduate outreach, it was noted that the PhD gender balance has improved (30% women). Contributing factors for this might be higher-profile role models, a better attitude towards women in the department, and a much more diverse group coming through via Part III. The latter point was discussed further, noting that the fact that these students feel comfortable is both good and bad—good because they feel comfortable here but bad because of the implication that they do not feel comfortable *elsewhere*.

The timing of our offer decisions (later than most other universities) was also mentioned, noting that only applicants who are very confident about their Cambridge application would be prepared to wait for the decision on it rather than take up an earlier, alternative offer.

The funding process was also discussed, noting that it would be useful to advertise how the system works since not all students are aware of this. While noting that it would be useful to run our own longer and more comprehensive workshops (in lieu of the very short University-run workshops), it was acknowledged that this would require some organisation.

The difference between outreach for MPhil and PhD students was noted, with students for PhDs usually aware that the MPhil is the route to get here. MPhil students on the other hand may be using the MPhil to see if they want to stay in academia.

The issue of topic availability was also mentioned, noting the heavy weighting to certain areas of research in the MPhil modules and PhD topics.

Tim said that he and Aga would draft an outreach strategy and provide a draft for review by the Committee at the next meeting.

**Action: TJM and AN**

**6. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

**7. Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the Committee would meet termly, with the next meeting to be held in the Lent term. *Post-meeting note:* the next meeting has been scheduled for 10.00 on Monday, 4 March 2024.