



Outreach Committee Meeting

13:30 - 15:00, Monday 24 February 2025
William Gates Building, Room GC22

Minutes

Attendance:

Jeremy Yallop (Chair)
Aga Niewiadomska, Outreach Administrator (Secretary)
Celia Burns, Faculty Administrator (Notetaker)
Laurie Gale
Rachel Gardner, Communications Manager
Jamie Vicary

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Lise Gough, Neel Krishnaswami, Peter Ochieng, Sue Sentence and Becky Straw.

2. Conflicts of interest

There were no conflicts of interest.

3. Updates on current outreach projects

a. Women in CS

Aga noted that the applications process had changed this year. Last year there was an applications round where 20 students had been selected for the programme on widening participation criteria. This year, there were no criteria for joining the seminars but, once they have concluded, selections will be made based on applicants' engagement as well as on widening participation criteria.

The first seminar had taken place last week with 139 unique viewers (vs. 20 last year). The seminars are being run in a similar way to last year's, with a current student giving a presentation and answering questions. One seminar this year about LLMs was very popular, generating 230 insightful questions. Questions about applying to Cambridge have been discouraged as Aga plans to run a separate session dedicated to this topic.

Aga provided a programme evaluation report of the first seminar and noted that she had received 70 responses (half of the people who attended) to the evaluation survey. There had been very constructive feedback (such as moving the seminar questions to the end), which they will address as the seminars continue.

b. DeepMind internships

Aga noted that the deadline for applications was last week and over 250 applications had been received, significantly more than last year (100). One of the reasons for this increase was a change in eligibility criteria: interns have to be employed and the Department has to follow employment law, so applicants cannot be excluded because of their residency status. Applications were therefore received from overseas, which had necessitated right-to-work checks with those applicants.

Aga is currently combing through the applications. She has had to check references (the day before the applications deadline, over 100 references were missing) and do the widening participation scoring (which central admissions did last year). As it is not feasible for the selection committee to look at the very large number of applications received, Aga will exclude those applications with the lowest widening participation scores. The shortlisting meeting will take place next week, interviews are planned for mid- to late-March, and application outcome letters will be sent out mid-April. 10 internships are available.

Aga noted that RAEng plans to conduct an independent review of all the programmes and wants to meet with Aga to discuss our aims and how we run the scheme. As a condition of the funding, there is also someone from RAEng on the selection panel.

c. Sutton Trust summer school

The Department has been involved with this scheme for years, with Prof Tim Jones having coordinated the project before Aga took over. Aga heard in November 2024 that the team who runs the scheme is downsizing and have suggested that the Department takes only 20 students this year. This proposed reduction is disappointing, as we had over 30 students last year and over 40 the year before. The scheme runs for a whole week and requires a lot of work, and Prof Jones and Aga have managed to negotiate to hopefully 30 students for this year's programme. The Department will participate in the scheme this year but if it continues to be downsized, we will need to consider how many students we would need to take on for the scheme to be worthwhile. Aga considered 30 to be the lower limit and 50 or 60 to be the upper limit (based on the number of monitors in the Intel Lab).

Aga explained that the issue is about money: Sutton Trust provides 25% of the funding and the University must provide the rest. A huge factor is the fact that the College accommodation is charged at top rate (due to the demand for College accommodation from summer schools).

d. Cambridge Festival

Rachel reported that they were gearing up for the Open Day on Saturday, 22 March. There will be 19 different activities across the building, from a lecture by Simon Peyton Jones to hands-on activities (including an 'evil hacker escape room' led by Aga and Sonic Pi workshops). A state school from Essex will be attending the event.

e. Physics at Work

Aga reported that she had attended a meeting about this recently. This year is the 40th anniversary of the annual event, which takes place mid-September and offers three days of activities. Presenters interact with 600 students for 20 minutes, presenting an activity to 15 students (aged 14-16) at a time. The Department took part in this event in 2023 and received a runner-up prize in the student vote. Aga is currently asking PIs if they have

students or RAs who would like to take part. The event is over three days, but volunteers don't have to do all three days.

4. Outreach strategy

Jeremy introduced the new strategy document which had been circulated to the Committee before the meeting, noting that much of it was borrowed from Prof Tim Jones' earlier strategy, with additional material added following discussion at recent Outreach Committee meetings. Jeremy had also added a proposal to collect longitudinal data (a task he is willing to take on). This would help us to understand our student body better, for example to see whether an increase in widening participation (WP) diversity of the student body shows some of those students succeeding less well or not completing the degree. It is important to make sure we help those students.

The Committee discussed the strategy, including the following issues:

- *What could be learnt from the Colleges*, in terms of supporting our WP students, for example King's offers 30 additional supervisions in the first year. Students also have access to additional support over the summer before they start.
- *Separate Diversity Committee*: the question of whether there should be a separate Diversity Committee.
- *Data*. The data held on HEAT (Higher Education Access Tracker). Data is held on any students who have been part of any outreach activities at the University, but the data is limited, depending on what has been input by Outreach practitioners (who have the option to select 'unknown'). Tracking data updates are carried out twice a year—for applications and offers and, later, acceptances to Cambridge. It is possible to do quite in-depth data analysis, but you need to partner with UCAS and pay for that service.

The question of which diversity metrics to focus on was discussed and Aga noted that there would be a meeting with the central admissions office about their updated selection criteria for outreach events. These criteria are based on a review of the research behind common indicators used to signify underrepresentation in Higher Education and/or educational disadvantage. It was also suggested that we liaise with the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee and see what groups the University is targeting.

- *Talk by Lisa Jardine-Wright*. Aga noted that Lisa Jardine-Wright would be doing a talk about STEM SMART and Isaac Physics next week, describing how they've worked with UCAS to conduct an independent evaluation of the impact of these programs.
- *University CST websites*. It was noted that the University websites are very outdated and that we should monitor them (we cannot edit the pages ourselves; it is necessary to liaise with someone in the University for this).
- *Scholarships*. The Committee discussed the lack of scholarships—leading to the Department losing out on some of the top students in the world who go to Harvard and Stanford, for example, because they provide scholarships and we do not.

5. Extending outreach events to Thailand

Aga had received a suggestion (included with the agenda) to extend our outreach events to Thailand. The Committee discussed the suggestion and agreed that it was more a question for the undergraduate and postgraduation education offices. Aga said she would forward the suggestion to those offices and ask them for their thoughts.

6. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Aga will send a Doodle poll for the next meeting.