



People and Operations Committee Meeting

Monday, 19 May 2025, 11.00 – 12.00
Room SW00, William Gates Building

MINUTES

Membership:

Dr Fermin Moscoso del Prado Martin, Faculty Member (Chair)
Celia Burns, Faculty Administrator (Secretary)
Dr Evangelia Kalyvianaki, UTO
Professor Thomas Sauerwald, Deputy Head of Department
Dr Sue Sentence, Wellbeing Advocate (for research staff and UTOs)
Caroline Stewart, Departmental Secretary
Alicja Zavros, HR Manager

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Professor Anil Madhavapeddy and Jo de Bono.

2. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were reported.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The [minutes](#) of the meeting held on 28 January 2025 were approved.

4. Report on Actions from the Last Meeting

(i) Recruitment suggestions (item 6 (iv), 28 January 2025)

At the last meeting, the Committee discussed flagging to the University some suggestions around recruitment. PEC and EDIC were asked to address the 'no research opportunities' issue. Caroline reported that she had not yet had an opportunity to take action on these discussions.

Action: Caroline

(ii) Athena Swan action plan and family leave policies (item 6(v), 28 January 2025)

See agenda items 5(i) and (ii) below.

(iii) Making other committees aware of the People and Operations Committee (POC) (item 6(vi), 28 January 2025)

Jo has notified other committees about the POC, and Fermin has notified people at a Wednesday meeting.

- (iv) **UTO membership on both the People and Operations Committee and the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee (EDIC)** (item 6 (vii), 28 January 2025)
Caroline and Thomas are currently looking at roles and will bear in mind the suggestion to have one UTO member on both the POC and EDIC.
- (v) **Request for an outdoor table tennis table** (item 7, 28 January 2025)
See item 6(iii) below.
- (vi) **Wellbeing Survey for Research Staff** (item 8 (i), 28 January 2025)
The results of Sue's survey were discussed in item 6 (ii) below.

5. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (ED&I)

(i) Athena Swan Action Plan

At the last meeting, the Committee discussed how it might contribute to the [Athena Swan Bronze Award action plan](#) in terms of HR and wellbeing matters and agreed to identify which actions are relevant to this Committee, to schedule those actions in, and to advise EDIC which items we are addressing. Due to lack of time at this meeting, this item was not discussed and will be rolled over to the next meeting.

(ii) Family Leave Policies

The University's policy on family leave had recently been updated. Alicja is going to include on the Department's webpage a link to the University's family leave policy webpage and a link to the University's child-care office.

Action: Alicja

6. Wellbeing

(i) Mental health first aiders

The Health and Safety Committee had raised the question of whether there is a need in the Department for Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs). The Committee agreed that it was important for there to be MHFAs alongside the physical First Aiders and that there should be good visibility (including clear signage) of them. The department already has one MHFA.

The Committee agreed that the first steps should be to find out who would be interested in being an MHFA and has been trained, and who would be interested in being a MHFA but has not been trained. Celia expressed an interest in being trained as a MHFA.

It was noted that there would be a cost to the 2-day training course and that there is a waiting list (as the University is currently only offering refresher courses). In this regard, Alicja suggested that we might be able to explore sharing the Judge's regular MHFA training courses as a more cost- and time-effective option.

When thinking about the optimal number of MFHAs, it was thought that it would be good to have a range of staff categories, and we would need to take into account that MHFAs might be working part-time or working remotely for part of the time. It was agreed that it would be useful to gauge interest in the MHFA role first, and Caroline agreed to do this.

Action: Caroline

(ii) Wellbeing survey for research staff

Sue introduced the results from her wellbeing survey (which had been circulated to Committee members and shared with the Head of Department), noting that although the survey had been sent to all researchers, only 13 people had filled it in. Sue had received 2 long email responses alongside the survey. The Head of Department had suggested to Sue that she summarise the results and try to get further responses on one or two issues.

The Committee discussed many of the issues raised in the survey and responses, in particular, the need for more social opportunities and structure about where people meet at a certain time (the most popular suggested activity/facility shown by the survey results was for set-time coffee breaks).

Also considered was the isolation some researchers feel and the lack of community and communal social/meeting space in the building (such as they have in Astronomy), where chance meetings and interactions, 121 meetings, and other collaborations could take place. It was noted that, whereas the new meeting pods are very useful, they have been located in spaces that were formerly useful casual meeting spaces. Committee members discussed the old library space, noticing it as a possible location for a communal social/meeting/collaboration space, where perhaps teas/coffees and biscuits (and/or other kinds of incentives to use the space) could be provided.

Sue suggested asking the Research Staff Forum to consider these issues. She will also raise these issues at a Wednesday meeting and perhaps run another survey in the Michaelmas term. Fermin said he would bring up the subject of using the old library space as a community space at a Wednesday meeting.

Actions: Fermin and Sue

(iii) Requests for an outdoor table tennis table and a pull up bar

Fermin had received substantial support for the outdoor table tennis table idea after he talked about it at a Wednesday meeting, and positive responses had also been received via the Research Staff Forum. It was agreed that Fermin would take this idea forward with the Head of Department.

A request from a postgraduate student had been received for both a table tennis table and a pull up bar. The Committee considered the pull up bar idea and decided that it was not viable due to health and safety considerations.

(iv) Weekly meeting-free day

The Committee discussed the possibility of having as a soft rule a weekly department meeting-free day for all employees. It was agreed that Fermin would bring this up at a Wednesday meeting.

Action: Fermin

- (v) **Mitigating stress peaks related to overlapping deadlines in January/February**
Fermin reported that, since putting this item on the agenda, he had learned that the stress peaks caused in January/February were caused by university-driven deadlines which were outside of our control.

7. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held in June. A meeting poll will be circulated.