



Minutes of the meeting of the Research Staff Forum held at 12noon on
Wednesday 20 March 2019, in Room FW11, William Gates Building

Present: Claire Chapman (CLC) (Secretary)
Matt Danish (MRD) (Chair)
Heidi Howard (HH)
Angeliki Koutsoukou-Argyaki (AKA)
Marwa Mahmoud (MMAM)
Andy Rice (ACR)
Zohreh Shams (ZS)
James Sharkey (JPS)
Sergei Skorobogatov (SS)
Caroline Stewart (CS)

1. Apologies for absence

Daniel Bates
Ekaterina Kochmar

2. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes from the last meeting held on 21 November 2018 were approved.

3. Report on actions from last meeting

i. RA guidelines on applying for travel/conference funds in exceptional circumstances

A link to the Induction Checklist to Forum Members has been circulated. It was requested that *'recipients of the Wiseman Award would be looked upon favourably when applying for Department funds for travel'* should also be placed under the travel section.

Action: CLC

Addendum: *This has been completed.*

ii. Finance Training for RAs and guidelines on Research Grants for web

The Financial Guidelines document has been published on the Research Staff Forum Committee website, with a link to it included in the Induction Checklist.

iii. Cycle Parking

MRD provided an update. The HoD team agreed in principal to modifications to the cycle shelter. MRD has met with Estate Management to discuss draft proposals and advice from an architect is currently being sought. As it was a condition of the Cavendish III planning application to improve the cycle and pedestrian pathway it is hoped that the Centre will fund any changes. It is also hoped that these changes to our cycle shelter will provide the opportunity for more secure cycle parking for staff.

Due to the current department representative for the West Cambridge Shared Hub

Project leaving, CS will seek a new representative.

Action: CS

iv. How to improve the Progression of Post-docs beyond their current position in the Department

Requests for a volunteer to set up and create a wiki page were circulated to lab-ras and lab-sras in February but as nobody has come forward. ZS has now offered to do this but it will need to wait until June due to other workload. The wiki will provide information on all the options available to postdocs for career progression.

Action: ZS

v. Suggested links to add to the committee page for resources for research assistants

If members have any suggestions on resources they would like to add to the committee page, they should send them to CLC.

Action: Forum Members

Addendum: Please send suggestions to the Departmental-Secretary@cst.cam.ac.uk.

vi. Revising the naming of the Forum and its statement of purpose

This has now been completed.

vii. Post Doc training fund

At the last School of Technology meeting, ACR reported that he asked if EPSRC grant money is allocated for postdoc training. However, this information was not known, but as he is currently writing an EPSRC grant proposal, he will investigate if he can include a request for funds to support training. ACR to report back at the next meeting.

Action: ACR

viii. Lecturing opportunities for RAs, and what the Department might do to facilitate more of them.

The Tripos Management Committee have expressed concern that circulating details to postdocs of lecturing opportunities may raise expectations about the number of possibilities available. There are a few occasions when RAs are asked to lecture but most guest lecturing is organised by the lecturers themselves.

It was agreed that all guest lecturing requests should be submitted to the TMC. The TMC will facilitate this by reviewing the list of RAs who have submitted their interest in lecturing on the Moodle site. DP will be asked to instigate this.

Action: CS

4. University's guidelines re Brexit

CS said she has circulated a link to the University's Brexit Information website to all staff and this site is being updated on a daily basis. Information about applying for EU settlement status with the information that a Departmental Android tablet is available to borrow for this purpose has also been circulated to staff.

5. Researcher Promotion and Postdoc Recognition Feedback

Members agreed on the following responses to be submitted to the Office of

Postdoctoral Affairs:-

Researcher Promotions Feedback

1. Does your Department or School provide open guidance on the system for promotion from Research Associate to Senior Research Associate? If yes, please provide link

Yes, the link is: <https://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/local/personnel/promotiontosra.html>

2. Are you aware of rules and procedures applied by your Department or School to the system of promotion from RA to SRA that are not advertised?

Yes, see information provided on above link.

3. Can you give any examples or information about the application of the procedure which illustrates how it is working in practice in your Department or School?

The case study examples listed on the above link are examples of how the procedure operates in the Department.

4. Do you feel that the opportunity for promotion from RA to SRA gives sufficient opportunity for progression? Can you give any examples of types of progression in responsibility or independence which researchers in your Department have achieved which have not merited application for promotion to SRA?

It is felt that the promotion from RA to SRA does allow opportunity for progression.

It was commented that money is a barrier in the promotion application process. In order to overcome this, this could be alleviated by PIs pre-empting funding requirements for promotions in the grant applications. All applications for promotion are subject to Faculty Board approval.

5. Are you aware of any successful promotions in your Department from SRA to Principal Research Associate? Are you aware of any unsuccessful applications for this promotion? If so please supply as much detail as possible.

Some links you might find useful if you are not already aware of them are: [Headline HR guidance about researcher promotions](#), [template Research Associate role profile](#), [template Senior Research Associate role profile](#), [existing Senior Researcher Promotions system](#), [example of Departmental guidance on promotion from RA to SRA \(Computer Lab\)](#)

Members were not aware of any promotions from SRA to PRA. However, the Departmental Secretary reported of one promotion to PRA and one appointment to PRA in the Department. Applications are treated with confidentiality so members would not be aware of unsuccessful applications. It was noted that PRA is the equivalent of a Reader, so promotion from SRA to PRA in the Department is not a typical promotion route.

Postdoc Recognition Feedback

1. Does your Department or School have any kind of prize or award specifically to recognise excellent contributions by postdoc research staff?

The Department has The Wiseman Award which is currently run in the

Department. <https://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/local/wiseman.html> However, this award is also open to PhD students.

2. Are you aware of postdoc research staff in your Department who have been recognised by existing University schemes, e.g. [Vice Chancellor's Awards](#) or [Pilkington Prize](#)?

Forum Members were not aware of any postdocs having been awarded via an existing University scheme.

3. Would you support the introduction of specific categories in existing schemes or the creation of a specific scheme intended to recognise excellent contributions by postdoc research staff?

Members felt that awards targeted at specific categories would be a good way of recognising excellence. The following categories were suggested.

- i. Contribution to Outreach
- ii. Research
- iii. Impact (not just measurable by number of publications/journal articles, but should also include things such as software which has been written used by third parties, number of talks, news articles etc.)
- iv. Contribution to Diversity

4. Do you have any suggestions about how any such scheme should work, e.g. what it should recognise specifically, criteria, how to make it relevant to postdocs in different disciplines and different contexts (e.g. lab/group-based v. single researchers)?

It was agreed that these schemes should be open to all staff but the length of service and tenure should be a consideration.

5. Does your Department advertise or provide open guidance on the [Contribution Increments for Researchers scheme](#)?

Information is circulated to researchers 3 times a year by the Department Secretary.

MRD agreed to submit this feedback to the OPdA.

Action: MRD

6. Any other business

i. Open Meeting

It was agreed to reinstate the policy that future Research Staff Forums are open to all Research Staff. The meeting date will initially be agreed by all Forum representatives and then the date and agenda circulated to all Research Staff. Additional attendance would be monitored via a doodle poll to help with catering. It was suggested that part of the meeting could be aimed at specific topics e.g. a session on promotion from RA to SRA, or 10-minute research presentations, which may encourage wider attendance.

Action: MRD

ii. Researcher Developer Talk

ACR asked if members can submit suggestions of talks which they would like to include in the Researcher Development Programme. Past events have included talks on grants and setting up and ending contracts.

Action: Forum Members

- 7. Date of next meeting**
To be held in Easter Term.