



Research Staff Forum Meeting

Tuesday, 24 May 2022, 11.30 a.m.
(videoconference)

Minutes

Present:

Dr Matt Danish (MRD) (Chair)

Dr Franck Courbon (FRC)

Mrs Helen Francis (HJF)

Dr Jasmin Jahić (JJ)

Dr Eva Kalyvianaki (EK)

Mr James Sharkey (JPS)

Dr Sergei Skorobogatov (SS)

Mrs Caroline Stewart (CS)

Celia Burns (CB) (Secretary)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Dr Andrew Caines.

2. Researcher Promotions

Prof Copestake gave an overview of career paths for Postdocs, noting the precarious nature of Postdoc positions due to funding issues, and that the University is trying to support Postdocs, for example by helping them to improve their CVs so that they can go on to the next career stage (typically moving department or going into industry).

Prof Copestake outlined the University's grading structure, noting the jump between Research Associate (RA) at Grade 7 and Senior Research Associate (SRA) at Grade 9, as well as the big leap to the professorial level positions of Principal Research Associate at Grade 11 and Director of Research at Grade 12. The primary criteria for moving to SRA is research independence, which is possible to meet (if things are going well) at around three years after a PhD.

Prof Copestake also talked about the funding situation (where SRAs currently need confirmation there is funding available for their promotion) noting that one of the Department goals is to do more philanthropic fund raising so that it can provide top up funding for SRA promotions when needed.

In response to a question from an RA whose PI didn't have funding for their promotion, Prof Copestake noted that the Department would like to be in a position (though it's not there yet) where it has sufficient unrestricted funds to support promotion for someone in that position.

In response to a request for clarification in research independence, for instance, where someone's research was not going well but who is supervising students who are

publishing, Prof Copestake noted that there are no hard and fast rules, however evidence is required of leading a piece of research (either as a lead author or in some other way), and that the referees for promotion applications need to support this evidence. She noted that supervising at Master's level, is often an effective way of achieving this.

Prof Copestake also offered to talk about how Postdocs can get more involved in teaching. In response to a question about creating a Master's level course, she noted that because research staff often leave the Department with relatively short notice, this is why courses need to be supported by a Faculty member. Prof Copestake also noted that the primary objective is to have modules that form a coherent part of the offering for the students taking ACS and Part III, so some proposals for modules may be rejected just because they don't fit. There was an individual query about the creation of an MPhil module, which Professor Copestake agreed to look into further with the postdoc concerned.

Dr Kalyvianaki noted that she is preparing a document outlining teaching opportunities and hopes to have something available in the next few months.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2022 were approved.

4. Report on Actions from the Last Meeting

Sponsor for social events: Helen Francis reported that she and Ben Karniely have been discussing sponsorship for the Friday Happy Hours with The Supporters Club and that Ben would be getting back to Matt Danish about this shortly.

5. New Chair

Matt Danish noted that his contract ends in September and therefore a new Chair is being sought. Caroline Stewart noted that we need to push for more committee members as well. Jasmin Jahić noted his interest as Chair and requested more information about what is involved. Matt suggested they talk more about this outside of the meeting.

Action: MRD/JJ

6. Support from Researchers from Industry

Jasmin Jahić introduced this topic, noting that many companies are interested in the Lab's research and might be interested in supporting PhD and Master's students. Jasmin suggested having an annual event to present research to the industry community. Helen Frances noted that her Research Strategy Team could help with such an event and suggested that Jasmin discuss this further with her outside of the meeting.

Action: JJ/HF

7. Wellbeing – Departmental Announcements

Caroline Stewart reminded committee members of the Book Exchange event taking place in The Street on 27 May. Matt Danish noted that since there was no funding or resources, there would be no Friday Happy Hour events for the time being. Caroline noted the recent opening of the Café Bar in the West Hub and encouraged people to use it. Matt said he would check it out and send an email to building-users.

Action: MRD

8. Wellbeing – Report for the HR Strategy Committee

Caroline Stewart noted that the Wellbeing Committee has been taken over by the new HR Strategy Committee, and that any feedback about wellbeing could be sent to Celia Burns at faculty-admin@cst.cam.ac.uk.

9. Buildings and Environment Committee (B&EC) – Update

MRD, Postdoc representative on the B&EC, noted that works to the bicycle racks and shelter would be taking place from 5 July for a few weeks. A question was raised about where to park bicycles while the works are ongoing. It was thought that temporary or new racks would be installed on the south side of the building. Caroline Stewart said she would find out and ask Martin McDonnell to circulate relevant information.

Action: CS

10. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) – Update

This committee is currently under review, with the last meeting held in March 2021. Caroline Stewart noted that the committee may become part of the new HR Strategy Committee. In the meantime, any feedback about equality, diversity, and inclusion can be sent to Celia Burns at faculty-admin@cst.cam.ac.uk.

11. Any Other Business

James Sharkey reminded the Committee that, although he retained his Committee membership when his status changed from Research Assistant to Research Associate, there is still a vacancy for a Research Assistant representative; and that this vacancy might be added to the call for a Chair and new members (see item 5 above).

12. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be arranged by Doodle poll for some time in the Michaelmas term.

Caroline thanked Matt for having chaired the Committee, and for so long.