



Research Staff Forum Meeting

Wednesday, 22 November 2023, 12.00-13.00
Room GC22, William Gates Building

Minutes

Attendance:

James Sharkey, Senior Research Software Engineer (JPS) (Chair)
Celia Burns, Faculty Administrator (CB) (Secretary)
Helen Francis, Research Strategy Manager (HJF)
Dr Sadiq Jaffer (SJ)
Dr Guy Laban (GL)
Dr Ajay Shankar, Research Associate (ASh) (from item 9)
Dr Alejandro Sztrajman (ASz)

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Maliha Ashraf, Dr Andrew Caines, Dr Ajay Shankar, and Caroline Stewart.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 May 2023 were approved.

3. Forum Membership

The Forum welcomed four new members: Maliha Ashraf (who had sent her apologies), Dr Sadiq Jaffer, Dr Guy Laban, and Dr Alejandro Sztrajman; and introductions were made.

4. Report on Actions from the Last Meeting

i) Process for suggesting new MPhil modules

A new policy for proposing new MPhil modules had been approved by the Head of Department Team and subsequently posted to Moodle but restricted to UTOs and other relevant teaching staff. CS was going to follow this up with the Director of Postgraduate Education but had sent her apologies for this meeting.

Post-meeting note: the Postgraduate Education Committee have agreed to make the policy available on the [Support for Research Staff webpage](#).

For the benefit of the new Forum members, James noted that the lack of teaching opportunities had been a complaint at the Forum for some time, but one option is to propose an MPhil module.

ii) Forum membership

It had been agreed that the webpage would be updated to show what categories of staff are eligible for Forum membership. This action had been completed.

An induction/social event for research staff in lieu of an October Forum meeting had been planned in order to generate interest in the Forum. This action was complete: an event had been held on 20 September, which had prompted four new members to join the Forum.

iii) Research staff email lists

CS was going to check that relevant email lists included all research staff but she had sent her apologies for this meeting.

Post-meeting note: CS is waiting to hear from IT about this matter.

5. Funding for Cross-Departmental Researcher Events

The Forum discussed the West Hub Steering Committee's call for event proposals which had been circulated to West Cambridge Heads of Institutions. The call advised that funding was available for cross-departmental researcher events to be held at the West Hub and invited postdoc societies and graduate student societies in departments wholly or partially located in West Cambridge to propose events that could fall under the category of 'research café' (or similar) to be hosted at the Hub. Dr Sadiq Jaffer said that he could talk to contacts in Plant Sciences and the Cambridge Conservation Research Institute (CRI).

Helen Francis said that she would include information about this issue in a forthcoming Funding and Events email to the research staff.

Action: SJ and HF

6. Faculty Board

James Sharkey, as Chair of the Research Staff Forum, has observer status on Faculty Board. James noted that there had been two Faculty Board meetings since the last Forum meeting, from which he wanted to highlight two things:

i) Outreach Administrator: an Outreach Administrator, Aga Niewiadomska (outreach-admin@cst.cam.ac.uk), had been appointed in the summer. Aga can be contacted about anything outreach-related and will be happy to offer her support.

ii) Awards Committee: a proposal for a new Awards Committee had been approved. The committee will support SRAs and UTOs in applying for awards.

For the benefit of the new Forum members, James noted that although as an observer on Faculty Board he does not have voting rights, he *can* raise potential issues.

7. Wellbeing

i) Departmental Announcements

There were no announcements.

ii) Input from Research Staff

JPS noted that the Postdoc Academy circulates an interdepartmental weekly newsletter, the Postdoc Bulletin (sign up: <https://www.postdocacademy.cam.ac.uk/>).

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

The latest B&EC meetings were held on 20 June and 12 October 2023. Ordinarily, Dr Andrew Caines, RSF Representative on the B&EC, would report on anything of relevance to the Forum. Dr Caines had sent his apologies for this meeting but had submitted the following information:

The minutes of previous meetings may be found on the [committee webpage](#) and may be of interest to all. There is ongoing discussion about use of space in the building, which may result in building occupancy surveys, but no concrete news about that at present. Now that winter is approaching, research staff may wish to note the following from the minutes of the last meeting: "Heating problems: The heating issues are long term, with the building not capable of producing a comfortable working environment for some areas even when it is working as optimally as it can. A solution will require a big infrastructure change."

James recommended that in the event of an office being unworkable in terms of temperature, they should contact building-services-manager@cst.cam.ac.uk.

Forum members briefly discussed item 11 of the B&EC minutes relating to e-bikes and electric scooters, questioning whether the information could be clarified and circulated more widely. JPS said he would ask APC to feed this back to the B&EC.

Action: JPS/APC

9. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (ED&I) Committee – Update

James Sharkey, a member of the ED&I Committee, reported that the Committee had reconvened after a pause since covid and had held its first meeting on 1 November 2023. The Committee was focusing on its application for an Athena Swan Bronze Award (an equality charter and accreditation scheme that recognises and celebrates good practices in higher education and research institutions towards the advancement of gender equality). The application will be made in May next year, before which time there will be data collection and analysis. Staff and student surveys will be circulated soon. James encouraged Forum members to fill in the staff survey constructively and encourage other staff to do so as well since the information provided will be very useful.

James noted that the minutes from the ED&I Committee are available on the website, and that this item was also an opportunity for Forum members to discuss anything they might want to raise.

10. Any Other Business

i) Departmental Social Event: James reminded Forum members of the lab social event scheduled to be held on Friday, 24 November, noting that it had been organised by Nicholas Boucher and funded by the Supporters Club.

ii) **Research Staff Forum Website:** Ajay Shankar noted that he and James were going to update the text on the website. He and James agreed to collaborate on this together and bring some revised text to the next meeting for the Forum's approval.

Action: ASH/JPS

iii) **Membership and Guest Attendance:** James asked the Forum to encourage research staff in the research groups that are not currently represented or any Research Assistants (who are not currently represented either) to join the Forum or come along to a meeting as a guest.

iv) **Research Staff Induction and Social Event:** Ajay noted that the induction event held on 20 September had been very good, with people appreciating the input received from the Postdoc Academy, Cambridge Enterprise, HR, and the Research Strategy Team. The Forum agreed that the event could be an annual one and that September was a good time of year to hold it.

v) **Staff Induction Checklist:** Forum members discussed the department's induction process. None of the three new Forum members had seen it or knew it existed, even though they had been in the Department for 2 year, 6 months and 2 months respectively. It was felt that a system was required to ensure that line managers know to carry out the inductions and that completion of the induction by new starters is recorded. James said he would contact the HR Manager to enquire about this issue.

Action: JPS

vi) **Staff Appraisals:** Forum members discussed the appraisal process, noting that it did not appear that the official appraisal system had been running as it should. James said he would contact the HR Manager to enquire about this issue.

Action: JPS

11. **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting (Lent 2024) will be arranged by Doodle poll.