Research Staff Forum Meeting

Monday 19 February 2024, 12.30 – 13.30
Room GC22, William Gates Building

Minutes

Present:
James Sharkey, Senior Research Software Engineer (JPS) (Chair)
Celia Burns, Faculty Administrator (CB) (Secretary)
Dr Andrew Caines (APC)
Helen Francis, Research Strategy Manager (HJF)
Dr Sadiq Jaffer (SJ)
Dr Guy Laban (GL)
Dr Ajay Shankar, Research Associate (ASh)
Caroline Stewart, Departmental Secretary (CS)

1. **Apologies**
    Apologies were received from Maliha Ashraf, Dr Challenger Mishra and Dr Alejandro Sztrajman.

2. **Minutes of the Last Meeting**
    The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2023 were approved.

3. **Hybrid Format for Meetings**
    Forum members discussed having a hybrid format for meetings. It was agreed that a hybrid format would not be provided for every meeting but could be provided when one or more Forum members are only available to attend remotely.

4. **Report on Actions from the Last Meeting**

    i) **Research staff email lists**
        With regard to ensuring that relevant email lists include all research staff, Caroline reported that the problem is quite complicated, in particular in relation to the categorisation of staff. Caroline said she would follow up on this. James asked if a check could be made to ensure that all new starters are in included in at least one list. Caroline will ask Reception to do this.

        Action: CS

ii) **Funding for cross-departmental researcher events**
At the previous meeting, the Forum had discussed the West Hub Steering Committee's call for event proposals. There was nothing further to report at this meeting.

iii) **E-bikes and electric scooters**
At the previous meeting, the Forum had briefly discussed the issue of e-bikes and electric scooters, which had been mentioned in the Buildings and Environment Committee minutes (B&EC). The Forum had questioned whether the information could be clarified and circulated more widely.

Andrew (RSF Rep on the B&EC) had sought clarity about the issue from the B&EC and reported that the Fire Safety Team guidance recommended that e-bikes are charged outside and are not stored within buildings unless in a designated carpark or cycle store. If charging outside, these should be a safe distance away from the building and any escape routes. E-scooters other than those recognised as part of the VOI government trial should not be used or charged on University property.

E-scooters are being discussed by the University Sub-committee for Physical Safety. Once a policy is decided, it should be communicated to all building users. Caroline said she will follow this up.

Action: CS

iv) **Research Staff Forum Website**
James noted that Ajay had drafted some proposed revised text for the website, which James will circulate to Forum members for comment. James and Caroline will subsequently use the agreed text to inform the drafting of terms of reference for the Forum to consider and approve before submission to the Faculty Board.

The current website text includes information about Forum members mentoring new starters. The Forum discussed this, noting that this initiative has not been used in recent years. James was under the impression that, similarly, there was not broad take up for the Women@CL mentoring scheme. Additionally, it was noted that the Postdoc Academy offers its own mentoring scheme and that the annual research staff induction event (to be run by the RSF each September) would offer an opportunity to flag to new starters any support available in this area. It was agreed, therefore, that the text about the Forum mentoring would be removed from the RSF website.

Action: JPS, ASh, CS, other Forum members

v) **Staff Induction Checklist:** James reported that he had contacted the HR Manager about this issue but had not yet met up with her to discuss it further. Forum members discussed the department's onboarding process, including the following issues:

- **Online Induction:** how to ensure that line managers carry out the online induction with new starters. James had raised this issue at the recent Faculty Board meeting, where it had been agreed that Caroline would circulate a reminder to PIs, and HR would mention it in their email to PIs when they recruit someone new.

- **Completion of the new starter induction completion form.** It is the line manager's responsibility to go through the online induction with a new starter and complete the completion form (found at the top of the induction page) when the new starter has completed all items on the list. The online induction is divided into three parts, with topics to be covered on the first working day, by the end of the second week, and by the end of the first month/early in the second month. As the information in the first two sections is more critical, it was agreed that Caroline would amend the text to show that line managers are required to confirm completion of the first two sections within a month of the new staff member's start date (rather than waiting until the entire list had been completed). This completion data should be monitored by HR so that they can follow up where there is non-compliance.

- **Use of the pdf version of the online induction.** It is possible to create a pdf version of the online induction. It appears that only some line managers provide new starters with this document before their start date (i.e., before they have access to the online version). It was suggested that Reception could send the pdf version to new starters when they send them their University access card. This will ensure that new starters will at least be aware of the list's existence.

- **Research Staff Forum information:** it was noted that currently the induction list does not include any information about the Forum and that some information should be added.

- **Visa support.** The lack of visa support for dependents was raised. Caroline said she would feed this back to HR.

- **Accommodation services.** It was noted that the online induction does not include information about accommodation services.

It was agreed that Caroline would look into the onboarding process, bearing the above-mentioned issues in mind.

Action: CS

vi) **Staff Appraisals:** James reported that he and Caroline had been in touch with the HR Manager about the appraisal process and this was now being addressed.

5. **Academic Career Pathways (Research) Consultation**
   The Forum noted that views were currently being sought on the proposed introduction of an Academic Career Pathways (Research) scheme (available here, responses were due by 23 February 2024). James noted that the consultation had been discussed at the recent Faculty Board meeting, where it was noted that while currently promotions to Grades 7 and 9 can be processed relatively quickly by Faculty Board, the proposal would mean that such promotions would need to go through the year-long process aligned with the current Academic Career Pathway process. This would mean the department would lose its flexibility in the timing of its promotions to Grade 9 (Senior Research Associate).

   The Forum also noted that a refreshed Researcher Contribution Increment scheme would be run annually rather than termly.

Caroline encouraged Forum members to submit a response to the consultation.

6. **Academic Roles**

    Sadiq introduced this topic which had been raised at a recent Wednesday meeting: the possibility of research staff participating in the approximately 100 departmental academic roles that need to be filled (committees, admissions panels, and assessing roles, for example). Sadiq noted that this issue was related to the previous point, the Academic Career Pathways (Research) scheme (ACP(R)), in that service to the University, the department and the academic community was an expectation for researcher promotion. Moreover, with the weighting for such service being 30% and 20% for ACP(R) and the ACP Research and Teaching scheme, respectively, research staff are expected to do more service than their research and teaching colleagues. Although not all research staff would need to do this service, it would be important for research staff to be aware of this requirement if they intend to apply for promotion.

    Also considered was the short-term nature of many research staff contracts, how service to the department would encroach on an individual's grant time, and the potential reaction of PIs to their research staff spending time on service to the department. It was agreed that Sadiq would feed this back at a Wednesday meeting.

    Action: SJ

7. **Faculty Board**

    As Chair of the Research Staff Forum, James has observer status on Faculty Board. James reported that at the latest Faculty Board meeting (held on 23 January 2024), the proposed introduction of an Academic Career Pathways (Research) scheme had been discussed (see item 5 above).

8. **Wellbeing**

    i)   **Departmental Announcements.** There was nothing to report.
    ii) **Input from Research Staff.** There was nothing to report.

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

    The latest B&EC meetings were held on 28 November 2023 and 22 January 2024. Andrew (RSF Representative on the B&EC) highlighted that the café space would be put out for tender for a new provider (no timetable yet known) and noted that the minutes are available on the [B&EC webpage](#).

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

    The latest ED&I meetings were held on 7 December 2023 and 30 January 2024. James (a member of the ED&I Committee) noted that the committee is reviewing the action plan that was part of the previous Athena Swan application (in 2018). The application deadline (31 May) is creeping up, and staff and student surveys had been carried out.

11. **Any Other Business**

    There was no other business.

12. **Date of Next Meeting**

    The next meeting will be held in the Easter term. A Doodle poll will be circulated.