Research Staff Forum Meeting

Wednesday, 22 May 2024, 12.00 – 13.00
Room FW26, William Gates Building

MINUTES

Attendance:
James Sharkey, Senior Research Software Engineer (Chair)
Maliha Ashraf, Research Assistant
Celia Burns, Faculty Administrator (Secretary)
Dr Andrew Caines, Senior Research Associate
Helen Francis, Research Strategy Manager
Dr Sadiq Jaffer, Senior Research Associate
Dr Guy Laban, Research Associate
Dr Ajay Shankar, Research Associate
Caroline Stewart, Departmental Secretary

1. **Apologies**

   There were no apologies. It was noted that Dr Alejandro Sztrajman had left the department at the end of his contract so his name will be removed from the Forum membership list.

2. **Minutes of the Last Meeting**

   The minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2024 were approved (RSF-2024-05-02).

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

   i) **Research staff email lists**

   Caroline confirmed that all research staff are now appearing on relevant email lists.

   ii) **Electric scooters**

   It was noted that there is still no University policy for electric scooters (other than to note that it is illegal to ride any scooters other than Voi scooters on public roads). This issue will continue to be monitored by the Buildings and Environment Committee, but it can come off the Forum agenda.

   iii) **Research Staff Forum website**

   See item 4 below.

    iv) **Staff onboarding process and induction checklist:** Caroline confirmed that HR are now including details about the induction checklist in the new staff welcome letter and are following up with PIs to ensure the onboarding process is carried out.

4. **Research Staff Forum Website Text**
The Forum approved the proposed new text for the website (RSF-2024-05-04) subject to a few small changes, including adding contact information at the bottom of the page. It was agreed that James would arrange for a shared mailbox to be set up to be monitored by the Forum Chair and Faculty Administrator, and Celia would update the website with the new text.

Action: James and Celia

5. **Research Staff Forum Terms of Reference**
The Forum approved the proposed terms of reference (RSF-2024-05-05) subject to a few small changes. The terms of reference will now be submitted for Faculty Board approval.

Action: Celia

6. **Research Annual Event**
The Forum discussed the next annual event, agreeing to call it the 'Research Staff Annual Lunch'. It was agreed that last year's format worked well, with 5-minute (maximum) slots for speakers. In addition to last year's speakers (Research Strategy Manager, HR Manager, and representatives from the Postdoc Academy and Cambridge Enterprise), it was agreed that the Head of Department and representatives from the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee and Women@CL should also be invited to speak.

In terms of advertising, since there would be no Wednesday meetings during the lead-up to the event, an email should be sent to the Wednesday group before the event, asking PIs to encourage attendance from anyone who had joined the Department since last year's event.

It was agreed that Celia would send a Doodle poll to Forum members as soon as possible so that a September date and a venue could be confirmed, and speakers invited.

Action: Celia

7. **Ethical Research**
Sadiq noted that at the recent Research Strategy Committee meeting, the topic of how to gauge potential unethical research in AI was raised, including whether there is value in providing training in this area for PhD students and postdocs.

This issue relates to the environmental impact of computer science research, from a compute resource perspective (separate to the human-participant ethical issues considered by the Ethics Committee). The Forum discussed the issue, including the following:

- The Ethics Committee's opinion that a separate committee should address AI research-related ethical issues. The Ethics Committee has well defined ethical considerations for regular ethical issues, but these are not applicable to AI research ethics.

- The availability of information showing the solar panel-generated energy, and connected to this, the possibility of encouraging researchers to use in-house compute resources rather than external ones.

- The potential risk of engaging with unethical companies (for example, whilst there is a check when a funder is first approved, their behaviour may subsequently change. Also, companies may not undergo the due diligence process if they do not provide funding).

- Supervisors should be responsible for ethical decisions, and they should have a clear idea of what is acceptable and what would need to be escalated.

- The question of whether declarations of interest in this area should be provided.

- The inclusion of this issue in Helen's Research Staff Annual Lunch presentation.

It was agreed that this issue falls within the remit of the Research Strategy Committee and should first be considered at a Departmental Wednesday meeting. Information, once agreed, should be provided to all research staff.

Action: Helen

8. **Research Culture Initiatives**

Helen introduced this topic, noting that funding is available for initiatives to improve research culture in the areas of precarity, access and participation, challenging dynamics, and time and space (for creating a better environment). The Research Strategy Team would be applying for funding on behalf of the Department (the deadline for which is October). Katherine Leckie, Impact Facilitator, is leading on this issue, discussing it with Alicja Zavros, HR Manager, and interviewing new faculty. For information, the Forum had been provided with the University's Research Culture Institutional Action Plan, which included several funding case studies (RSF-2024-05-08).

The Forum discussed the issue, including:

- Asking new faculty about what has worked well in their previous environments.
- The possibility of appointing Research Culture leads.
- The Institute for Manufacturing's award scheme for PhDs (as an example).
- The need to make sure other researchers are aware of this offer (Helen will circulate something about this).
- The possibility of doing something physical to the building (currently, it is not a great space for mixing) and getting the building busy again.
- The lack of places in the building where people can participate in online meetings (thereby prompting the need for people to work from home).
- The need for more meeting pods. There are already pods in the café area and the SN corridor, but their existence needs to be communicated (for example noting them in the online induction).

Helen noted that when she and Katherine have some potential ideas, she will circulate them to the Forum for input.

9. **Wellbeing**

   i)   **Departmental Announcements.** There was nothing to report.

   ii) **Input from Research Staff.** In response to a question about the Wellbeing Committee, Caroline noted that a People and Operations Committee is being established which will cover wellbeing as part of its remit. The Forum agreed that there should be Forum representation on the People and Operations Committee.

10. **Faculty Board**
    As Chair of the Research Staff Forum, James has observer status on Faculty Board. James noted that there was nothing of particular interest to note from the 27 February and 23 April meetings and that the minutes were available on the [Faculty Board website](#).

11. **Research Strategy Committee (RSC)**

   (i)   **Forum Rep on the RSC:** the Forum agreed to elect Sadiq as the Forum Rep on the RSC.

   (ii) **Forum Rep Report:** Sadiq attended the first RSC meeting, held on 7 May 2024. He noted that the following two items would be discussed at the Department Away Day in July:

   - the size and shape of the Department (following on from the question, 'What does the Department want to be?') and
   - the establishment of an External Advisory Board for the Department.

   It was noted that there would be no research staff representation at these discussions.

   (iii) **Items for the RSC:** It was agreed that Sadiq would feed back to the RSC the Forum's discussion on ethical research (see item 7, above). Helen confirmed that RSC minutes would be available on the [RSC webpage](#).

   Action: Sadiq

12. **Buildings and Environment Committee (B&EC) – Update**
    The latest B&EC meeting was held on 30 April 2024. The following items were highlighted:

   - **Policy for out-of-hours use of rooms on the public side of the building.** Caroline invited Forum members to email her if they had any thoughts about or suggestions for this policy being drafted by the B&EC.
   - **Meeting pods.** The Forum had discussed meeting pods in item 8 on Research Culture Initiatives (above) and asked Andrew (B&EC Rep) to raise the request for more pods.
   - **Café space.** Andrew noted that the café space is currently out to tender.
   - **Building heating.** Sadiq highlighted the email about the heating in the building, sent by Professor Mortier on 8 May to Department-members@cst.cam.ac.uk.

13.   **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (ED&I) Committee – Update**
      James (a member of the ED&I Committee) reported that the Committee had not met since
      the last Forum meeting, but there had been separate meetings to work on the Athena
      Swan application, which will be submitted on 31 May 2024.

14.   **Any Other Business**

      Hybrid meetings: Further to discussion at the February meeting, the Forum agreed that
      all future Forum meetings will be set up in hybrid format—still offering lunch for in-person
      attendees but allowing remote participation for those who cannot join in person.

15.   **Date of Next Meeting**
      It was agreed that the next meeting will be scheduled for early November. Celia will send
      a Doodle poll nearer the time.

                                                                        Action: Celia