



Research Staff Forum Meeting

Monday, 11 November 2024, 12.30 – 13.30

Minutes

Membership:

James Sharkey, Senior Research Software Engineer (Chair)
Maliha Ashraf, Research Assistant
Celia Burns, Faculty Administrator (Secretary)
Dr Andrew Caines, Senior Research Associate
Dr Davi Castro-Silva
Dr Irmak Dogan, Postdoctoral 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. Welcome

The Chair welcomed new Forum members, Dr Irmak Dogan and Dr Davi Castro-Silva. Forum members introduced themselves.

2. Apologies

Celia Burns sent apologies.

3. Conflicts of Interest

The Chair asked members to declare any conflicts of interest at any point in the agenda if relevant.

4. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2024 were approved

5. Report on Actions from the Last Meeting

i) Research Staff Forum Website Text

Forum members noted the website text has been updated as agreed at the last meeting, including the inclusion of contact information, for which a shared email box (research-staff-forum@cst.cam.ac.uk) has been set up.

ii) Research Staff Forum Terms of Reference

Members noted the terms of reference as agreed at the last meeting, which were approved by the Faculty Board in June. They are now available on the [RSF website](#).

iii) Research Staff Annual Lunch

The Chair reported that the Research Staff Annual Lunch was held on 17 September 2024 and had a very good turnout (approximately 50 people).

iv) Ethical Research

At the last meeting it was agreed that the issue of ethical research from the perspective of compute resource falls within the remit of the Research Strategy Committee and that it should first be considered at a Departmental Wednesday meeting and the Research Strategy Committee meeting on 29 October 2024. Helen Francis and Sadiq Jaffer reported; they explained that Professor Paula Buttery has written a paper on how the Department should deal with ethical research. Research involving human subjects is covered by the Ethics Committee but this was more about things such as the use of large amounts of compute resource. It was still in discussion and PIs should communicate the outcomes to post-doc staff and the RSF can then receive any feedback.

v) Research Culture Initiatives

Helen Francis reported on the training session to help post-doc staff considering applying for Fellowships that was held in June. Professor Vicary gave some really helpful advice and the session was very well received. It was also pleasing to see lots of post-doc staff chatting with each other at the end of the session. We are hoping to run another session in January. January seems to be a good time due to the upcoming application deadlines.

Helen also reported that an application was made for research culture funding to support research staff with coaching and further workshops but, unfortunately, this was unsuccessful as the fund supports university-wide activities rather than department-wide impact. Katherine Leckie (Impact Facilitator) is continuing to focus on the research culture agenda and the Research Strategy Team is looking at other ways to fund these kinds of activities.

vi) RSF Representation on the People and Operations Committee

The Chair reported that at last meeting, the Forum agreed that there should be Forum representation on the new People and Operations Committee (POC) and asked for a volunteer. The Chair would be willing to undertake this but felt it would be good if we could have someone other than the Chair to contribute to the work of other Committees. Ajay Shankar agreed to serve on the Committee. Caroline agreed to send Ajay more information and ensure Ajay is included on the poll for the next meeting.

Action: CS

6. New Academic Career Pathway for Research Staff

The Chair reported that this has been pushed back a year and will now be starting in 25/26. Sadiq Jaffer reported that this is the University's attempt to unify post-doc staff promotion with the other two other career pathways for promotion.

7. Research Event

Francis reported that information about the winter quiz event on Thursday, 5 December 2024 at 16:00 – 18:00 will be circulated this week. It will be open to research students,

postdoctoral researchers and alumni. As well as the quiz, there will be a poster session, food and drink.

8. Wellbeing, People and Operations (note the title of this item will now include People and Operations)

i) Departmental Announcements

It was noted that the event in the agenda was not a research staff event, but that the Winter Quiz was.

ii) Input from Research Staff

As noted above, a change to the title of this item was agreed and it will now be “Wellbeing, People and Operations” to bring together the aspects of wellbeing that will be included in POC, and to collect items for the POC representative.

The Chair invited wellbeing related suggestions. Davi Castro-Silva would like to see more social events in the Department and felt this would help towards an improved research culture. The Friday social event was discussed, and the Chair encouraged Davi to get involved as they are trying to recruit people to help with the organisation. It was also suggested that Davi contact the PhD Administrator phd-admin@cst.cam.ac.uk to find out more about the Research Students Forum and to ask if anyone there would be interested in helping organise the Friday Socials.

9. Faculty Board

As Chair of the Research Staff Forum, James Sharkey has observer status on Faculty Board. The latest Faculty Board meetings were held on 25 June and 15 October 2024. James did not feel there was anything directly relevant to report back from the last two meetings but informed Forum members that the agendas and minutes of Faculty Board meetings are all available online on the Committee page.

10. Research Strategy Committee (RSC)

(i) RSC Update: Helen Francis and Sadiq Jaffer reported that AI in Ethics, a Research Review Committee, and a revised process for Fellowship applications had been discussed at the last RSC.

(ii) Items for the RSC: Helen suggested the following things may also be future topics of the RSC:

- How we engage with philanthropic funding in the Department.
- Communications, mainly about internal communications relating to research and what the Research Strategy Team can do to support research and communicate our research widely.

There was a question raised about how we get something into the social media. Helen reported that you should speak to the Communications Manager communications-coordinator@cst.cam.ac.uk. They will either share it on social media or write a news article, depending on the nature of the news. Items may also then go to the Central Communications Office.

11. Buildings and Environment Committee (BEC)

- (i) BEC Update: Andrew reported following the last two meetings of the Buildings and Environment Committee that had taken place.

- Part of the roof is now covered in solar panels and during the summer months, this provides enough energy for the needs of the building. This might make a nice news story once we understand the data a bit more.
- An LED lighting upgrade of the ground floor is due to start in the winter break. This will start with Lecture Theatre 2 and the offices on the ground floor.
- The Department's Security (access) system is fragile and needs to be replaced.

The minutes of the meetings are online with fuller details.

Other BEC items still being discussed are:

- The creation of a policy for use of the building out of hours use of rooms.
- Meeting pods. Caroline reported that these are soon to be ordered but there are some issues regarding ventilation (CO2) to resolve.

- (ii) With regard to further items for the BEC, Ajay Shankar reported that the noise which occurred during the wifi replacement was not announced and caused significant disruption to members working in certain areas of the building. Andrew agreed to raise the issue of better communications for building works at the BEC Committee at the end of the week.

Action: AC

12. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (EDIC)

- (i) EDIC Update: The Chair reported that we have had a meeting of the EDIC. The Department recently achieved a Bronze Athena Swan award, which has resulted in a list of actions the Committee is committed to undertake. The EDIC's remit is also to look and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion more generally.

It is looking likely that the EDIC will formally require representation from the RSF. James Sharkey will report back once that is decided but Committee members may wish to think about putting themselves forward if they are interested in ED&I.

- (ii) Forum members had no current issues to take to the next EDIC meeting.

13. Any Other Business

A question was raised about the heat in the building and the possibility of using heat from the server room to heat the building. It seems that that is not a viable plan and would require some major changes to the building infrastructure. Caroline reminded members that they could request a heater if their offices are not warm enough. It was agreed this message needs to be communicated widely.

14. Date of Next Meeting

A poll will be circulated for a meeting to take place early next term.