



Research Staff Forum Meeting

Monday, 17 February 2025, 12.30 – 13.30, Room GC22

Minutes

Attendance

James Sharkey, Senior Research Software Engineer (Chair)
Celia Burns, Faculty Administrator (Secretary)
Dr Andrew Caines, Senior Research Associate
Dr Davi De Castro-Silva, Research Associate
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. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Conflicts of Interest

James asked for any conflicts of interests to be declared at the relevant point in the discussion.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2024 were approved.

4. Forum Membership

It was noted that Maliha Ashraf has now left the Department and so we are a member down. James to review the membership and coverage of the department in light of this.

Action: James

5. Report on Actions from the Last Meeting

i) RSF Representation on the People and Operations Committee (POC)

It was noted that Ajay is now a member of POC. See item 7(ii) below.

ii) Feedback for the Buildings and Environment Committee (BEC)

It was noted that, following the disruption caused by the significant noise during Wi-Fi works in November, Andrew (BEC Rep) had raised the issue of better communications for building works at the November BEC meeting and asked for improved communication about when works were taking place. The Building Services Manager had noted the concerns; unfortunately, UIS had not

communicated with her, which was why building users had not been informed of the works.

It was noted that the noise effect of recent LED upgrade works on the ground floor had been addressed by closing some of the corridor doors to reduce noise level and posting advisory notices.

6. Health and Safety Committee – Recruitment of New Members

Forum members were advised that the Health and Safety Committee is looking to recruit new members, and if any member of research staff is interested in joining the Committee, they should contact [the Health and Safety Committee Secretary](#), Helen Scarborough.

7. Wellbeing, People and Operations

i) Departmental Announcements

There was nothing to report.

ii) People and Operations Committee (POC) Update: Ajay, RSF member of the POC, reported on the recent meeting which took place on 28 January 2025. The most relevant item was the fact that the [People and Operations Committee](#) exists and the Committee wanted people to be aware of that. The main focus of the meeting had been on the action items from the Athena Swan application, with a view to working out which of those items the POC could act on (some of which may be relevant to research).

iii) Input from research staff / items for the POC. Nothing was raised for Ajay to take to the next POC meeting.

8. Faculty Board

As Chair of the Research Staff Forum, James Sharkey has observer status on Faculty Board, the latest meetings of which were held on 26 November 2024 and 28 January 2025. James noted that he had not attended the November meeting and there had been nothing of relevance to the Forum at the January meeting. He noted that the Faculty Board minutes are available on the [Faculty Board website](#). It was also noted that minutes of other committees are available with the Faculty Board agendas.

9. Research Strategy Committee (RSC)

(i) RSC Update: The latest meeting of the RSC was held on 29 October 2024, which Sadiq had already reported on at the November RSF meeting. Helen noted that the Faculty Board had approved the terms of reference for the External Advisory Board and Sadiq noted that there had been some changes to fellowship support: instead of decisions on applications being made by UTOs, the decisions are now made on a department level, by the Head of Department Team. PIs have been made aware of this change, and the change was also announced at a recent postdoc session. Helen said she will update the guidance accordingly and mention it in her next funding call to RAs.

Action: Helen

ii) Items for the RSC. Nothing was raised for Sadiq to take to the next RSC meeting.

10. Buildings and Environment Committee (BEC)

- (i) **BEC Update:** The latest BEC meetings were held on 15 November 2024 and 20 January 2025. Andrew noted that there were lots of general interest items (available in the minutes on the [BEC website](#)). Items highlighted for the interest of the Forum were as follows.

- **Meeting pods:** three more pods have been ordered and should be installed soon (GE, south alcove; FN, end of corridor; and SN, end of corridor). It was suggested that an email be circulated once the pods have been installed to advise research staff and PIs. Caroline said she would do this. It was noted that there is no booking system for the pods.

Action: Caroline

- **LED upgrade:** the upgrade is currently underway on the ground floor.
- **Bike shed gate:** the gate is now staying open for longer (for 45 seconds). It was noted that the gate has been open constantly for at least the last week. Caroline said she would advise the Building Services Manager of this.

Action: Caroline

- **Café:** Caffiend has indicated an interest in providing a cafeteria service for the Department. The service provision now needs to go to tender (which can be quite a slow process).
- **Out of hours use of the public side of the building:** as someone who had been asked to be the host for a recent event, James said it would be very useful to know what is expected of an event host, and said he would contact the Building Services Manager about this.

Action: James

- (ii) **Items for the BEC:** Nothing was raised for Andrew to take to the next BEC meeting.

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

- (i) **EDIC Update:** The latest meeting of the EDIC was held on 29 October 2024, which James (a member of the EDIC) had already reported on at the November RSF meeting. James noted that the next meeting will be held on 28 February 2025 and one of the topics on the agenda is an exit survey, for which James will be drafting some potential survey questions. Another item mentioned was the departmental survey. Forum members noted that they had found the survey reminders to be helpful. Survey results will be considered at the 28 January EDIC meeting.

- (ii) **Items for the EDIC:** Nothing was raised for James to take to the next EDIC meeting.

12. Any Other Business

- i) **Department social events:** Davi followed up on this issue from the November meeting. He noted that his home department (Maths) seems to have no problem obtaining funding for its own weekly social events—even with alcoholic drinks, which has been a licensing concern for this department.

The Forum discussed this issue, noting that the problem in this department is not so much about funding; it's more about the event organisation. Funding is available (though perhaps not for *weekly* events), for example from UTOs' donation pots, and some events are run in conjunction with events funded by the student offices or are funded by the Research Strategy Office (the annual quiz, for example). Davi confirmed that there has been interest from people to help with event organisation, and Andrew noted that the current event organiser, Chaitanya Joshi, would be happy to provide a handover briefing (Chaitanya is happy to organise the events for this term and next term). James offered to contact Maths to find out how they fund their weekly social events.

Action: James

- ii) **Cambridge Festival Open Day:** Helen noted that volunteering at the Cambridge Festival CST Open Day, taking place this year on 22 March, is always a great social thing to do. Lunch is provided for volunteers (who help with tours around the department and other activities) and there is pizza and beer afterwards.
- iii) **Academic Career Pathways (Research) scheme:** Sadiq updated the Forum on the scheme: the General Board's report on the proposal (which aims to unify postdoc staff promotion with the other two Academic Career Pathways schemes: for Research and Teaching and Teaching and Scholarship) had gone to Council and Council had submitted a grace which, unless a ballot is requested, would deem to have been approved on 21 February. The scheme introduces Grades 8 and 10, which should make promotion easier, and new titles (Grade 7, Research Associate; Grade 8, Senior Research Associate; Grade 9, Assistant Research Professor; and Grade 10, Associate Research Professor).

It was noted that promotions to Grade 9 would still be handled within the department rather than by this much lengthier, annual, scheme.

If approved, the scheme will be implemented in October 2025. Helen noted that anyone applying for funding would need to consider the impact of these changes on their funding requirements.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held in May, for which a meeting poll will be circulated in April. It was noted that the week commencing 26 May is half term.