



RESEARCH STAFF FORUM

Tuesday 20 May, 12.30 – 13.30, Room GC22

MINUTES

Attendance

James Sharkey, Senior Research Software Engineer (Chair)
Celia Burns, Faculty Administrator (Secretary)
Dr Davi De Castro-Silva, Research Associate
Helen Francis, Research Strategy Manager
Dr Sadiq Jaffer, Senior Research Associate
Dr Guy Laban, Research Associate
Katherine Leckie, Impact Facilitator
Caroline Stewart, Departmental Secretary

1. Research Culture

Katherine Leckie, Impact Facilitator, joined the meeting for a discussion about research culture. Katherine had circulated some material before the meeting, including:

- a list of the areas that the University Research Culture team is offering to support Departments as they look at what they are doing well and what they can improve in
- a short report following conversations with some academics who have been in the Department for the last two years about research culture in terms of, and in comparison to, their previous institutions.

Katherine introduced herself, noting that she had started to engage with the Research Team a year or so ago, partly due to her work on the Research Excellence Framework (REF), a large part of which relates to research culture. Katherine is thinking about how to track the things that the Department is doing well in terms of research culture and find out where the gaps are.

The Forum discussed various issues, including:

- *Post-doc pay*: a colleague of a Forum member had noted that their salary had gone down 20% in terms of purchasing parity in the last few years.
- *Changes to the Academic Career Pathway for Researchers*.
- *Lack of communal space*:
 - our building is poorly configured to allow serendipitous meetings to happen (unlike, for example, the David Attenborough Building which has central stairs and one large common room).
 - There is a sense of separation in our Department due to there being no communal space.

- Potential spaces discussed included the Intel Lab and the old library space (the latter was also discussed at the People and Operations Committee); however, both these spaces are used, or are planned to be used, for teaching.
- *Colleges*: research staff associated with Colleges have the benefit of having their College community, which other staff lack.
- *Lightweight processes*: some of this Department's processes are more lightweight (and therefore quicker) than other Departments.
- *Wednesday meetings and Wednesday seminars*:
 - for senior staff
 - not clear how much encouragement there is for research staff to attend
 - what about the middle level between academics and students?
 - The Wednesday meeting tends to battle with the Wednesday seminar; there was a suggestion to move the cake to the end of the meeting and open it to everybody
 - The professional services staff have regular coffees/cakes now but there is no interaction with other groups.
- *No social interaction here*:
 - the Department does have socials, but people tend to stay in their groups
 - offer socials in external venues (e.g. The Castle)
 - Maths has regular times for coffee breaks, where a lot of people show up.

Katherine thanked the Forum for the discussion, noting that it had been very helpful. She also noted that the idea of community and wellbeing should not be seen simply as an add-on.

2. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Dr Andrew Caines, Dr Irmak Dogan, and Dr Ajay Shankar.

3. **Conflicts of Interest**

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

4. **Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The [minutes](#) of the meeting held on 17 February 2025 were approved.

5. **Forum Membership**

i) **Chair of RSF**

The Forum noted that James would be stepping down as Chair after this meeting but would be continuing his membership of the Forum. The Forum thanked James for his contributions as Chair. A new Chair was appointed later in the meeting (see item 14).

ii) **Representation on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC)**

Forum members were content for James to continue to represent the Forum at the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

iii) **Change to membership**

Guy noted that he will be leaving the Department from June. The Forum thanks Guy for his service and contributions to the Forum.

6. Report on Actions from the Last Meeting

i) **Membership of RSF**

It was agreed that membership would be reviewed around the time of the Research Staff Annual Lunch, where we hope to recruit new members.

ii) **Research Strategy Committee Update – changes to fellowship support**

Helen reported that the guidance for the fellowship support process had not been updated as there had been some issues with the new process.

iii) **BEC Update – meeting pods**

Caroline has circulated an email to advise research staff and PIs about the existence of the meeting pods.

iv) **BEC Update – bike shed gate**

Although the original issue (the gate remaining open) had been resolved, it was noted that recently several shed users had been trapped inside the shed several times, with the gate remaining closed for at least 90 seconds before opening. The problem appears to have started since the gate open time was changed. It was agreed that Building Services should be asked to put up a sign showing the Security phone number and advising shed users that if the gate appears to be stuck, it will usually open after approximately two minutes.

Action: Caroline

v) **BEC Update – out-of-hours use of the public side of the building**

James reported that he had spoken to the Building Services Manager about this issue, who had advised that it was being discussed at the Buildings and Environment Committee (BEC). Caroline noted that the issue is still on the BEC agenda.

vi) **Any Other Business – department social events**

James reported that he had discovered that his contact in Maths will be on sabbatical leave until the middle of the summer. Davi noted that some social events were being funded by Professors, and that he will probably take over the organisation of the department social events from Chaitanya Joshi after they have organised one event together.

7. Wellbeing, People and Operations

i) **Departmental Announcements**

There was nothing to report.

ii) **People and Operations Committee (POC) Update:** The latest meeting of the POC was held on 19 May 2025. Ajay, RSF member of the POC, had sent his apologies for this RSF meeting

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

8. Faculty Board

- (i) **Faculty Board Update:** As Chair of the Research Staff Forum, James Sharkey has observer status on Faculty Board, the latest meetings of which were held on 4 March and 6 May 2025. James highlighted one item concerning a bid for an increase in the number of professional staff, which had been discussed at a Wednesday meeting. Caroline noted that the bid was partly based on the increase in undergraduate numbers that had not been matched with an increase in funds from the Chest (the University's allocation of funds). There was also the issue of space. This led to a brief discussion about the potential refurbishment of the Roger Needham Building, which raised the question of how to integrate people if the Department were split over two buildings.
- ii) **Items for Faculty Board:** nothing was raised for the new Chair to take to the next Faculty Board meeting (on 1 July 2025).

9. Research Strategy Committee (RSC)

- (i) **RSC Update:** The latest meeting of the RSC was held on 8 April 2025. Topics discussed had included impact, poster sessions (well received and beneficial to students), and a paper on the size of the department. The External Advisory Board will be discussed at the next meeting (there are tentative plans for the Board to meet in November).
- iii) **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 17 March and 12 May 2025. Andrew, RSF member of the BEC, who was not available for this RSF meeting, had sent a report highlighting the following:
 - the Building Services Manager (Alison Digby) had left, and a new Building Services Manager (Diana Gauvit) would be starting on 9 June.
 - the BEC meeting agendas and minutes are available [online](#).
 - the lighting upgrade project and the 13 May email from Professor Mortier (BEC Chair) updating building users about the project.

James noted there had been a lot of feedback about the lighting upgrade in the offices on the ground floor. The lighting in the Lecture Theatres, which had been failing, had also been upgraded.

- ii) **Items for the BEC:** nothing was raised for Andrew to take to the next BEC meeting (scheduled for 13 June 2025).

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

- (i) **EDIC Update:** The latest meeting of the EDIC was held on 28 February 2025. James, RSF member of the EDIC, reported that he expected discussion at the next meeting (in June) to include the topic about new guidance about bathrooms

following the Supreme Court ruling on the definition of woman. Forum members could address suggestions to James or Robert Watson (Chair of EDIC).

In addition, the Athena Swan actions are still ongoing, including data analysis of some of the disparities relating to gender, and issues relating to access to the building and heavy doors.

- ii) **Items for the EDIC:** nothing was raised for the RSF Chair to take to the next EDIC meeting (planned for some time in June 2025).

12. Any Other Business

Research Staff Annual Lunch

The Forum discussed the annual lunch, including:

- **Date of the event:** a poll had been circulated, and a date would soon be set. *(Post-meeting note: the date has been confirmed as Wednesday, 17 September).*
- **Pre-lunch meeting:** as was the case last year, the Head of Department will hold a meeting before the lunch for Senior Research Associates, Senior Research Fellows, and Senior Research Software Engineers.
- **Speakers:** a suggestion after last year's lunch was to include speakers from Women@CL and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. The Forum discussed the increase in the number of speakers and proposed that presentations should be much shorter (say 2-3 minutes), with the idea that speakers could signpost resources, highlight what had changed since their presentation last year, and introduce the individuals that attendees could speak to after the presentations. It was felt that these shorter presentations might encourage more questions and discussion after the presentations.
- **Highlighting what has changed:** in order to encourage re-attendance from last year's attendees, it was suggested that we make it clear in event notices that presentations will comprise of what has changed since last year (rather than being a repeat of last year's information).
- **Event planning:** It was agreed that Celia would continue to plan the event.

Action: Celia

13. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that it would be useful to have a meeting in addition to the annual lunch. A poll will be circulated to find a date towards the end of Michaelmas term.

14. Appointment of New RSF Chair

The Forum approved the appointment of Dr Sadiq Jaffer as RSF Chair for one year from today.