



Research Staff Forum Meeting

Monday, 17 May 2021, 2 p.m.
(to be held via videoconference)

Agenda

Forum Members:

Matt Danish (MRD) (Chair)
Daniel Bates (DB)
Celia Burns (CB) (Secretary)
Andrew Caines (AC)
Yi Ting Chua (YTC)
Helen Francis (HJF)
Heidi Howard (HH)

Eva Kalyvianaki (EK)
Angeliki Koutsoukou-Argyraki (AKA)
Zohreh Shams (ZS)
James Sharkey (JPS)
Sergei Skorobogatov (SS)
Caroline Stewart (CS)

1. Apologies

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2021 are attached (2021-05-02).

3. RSF Discussion Topic

No-one has volunteered to present a discussion topic.

4. Report on Actions from the Last Meeting

i. Forum Membership

The Forum is still seeking a representative from the Rainbow Graphics & Interaction Group. Given the difficulty in finding someone (see also point 4ii below), the Committee is invited to discuss membership and how we might encourage staff to serve.

ii. Representative for Research Assistants

The Forum is still seeking a Research Assistant who is not doing a PhD.

iii. Lecturing Opportunities for Research Staff

EK to report on status of guest-lecturing opportunities for research staff.

iv. Research Strategy Team Presentation

HJF had agreed to do the presentation again to a wider audience and for the presentation to be recorded and made available after the event. HJF to report.

- v. **Support for Writing Fellowship Applications**
HJF had suggested she could do a presentation on this topic. HJF to report.
- vi. **Town Hall meetings**
CS was going to pass on to the Head of Department the suggestion to hold the meetings in a different slot occasionally to allow people who were not available for the regular slot an opportunity to attend. CS to report.
- vii. **Communications**
Following a discussion about improved communication within the research staff group (for both funding and social purposes), Forum members had agreed to look into adding a Slack group to an existing CST Slack group. Forum members to report.

5. Pulse Survey Discussion Points

The Wellbeing Committee are soliciting feedback for new initiatives leading from the pulse survey. They have prepared the attached discussion document (2021-05-05) looking for input from as many members of the department as possible.

Questions for the Research Staff Forum:

- i) Do you have any initial reactions to the questions in the discussion document?
- ii) What would be the best way to involve all research staff? Do you think it would be best if you ran a consultation and discussion process or would it be more effective if we hosted a discussion meeting? Since the pulse survey turnout has not been particularly high for research staff, we are interested in what method you think would be most engaging.

6. Wellbeing – Departmental Announcements

The Wellbeing Committee has asked the RSF Chair to make any wellbeing-related departmental announcements as a standing item on its agenda. MD to report.

7. Wellbeing – Report for the Wellbeing Committee

The Wellbeing Committee has asked the RSF to discuss wellbeing as a standing item on its agenda. To discuss.

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

Nothing to report. The B&EC has not met again since MRD's report at the last RSF meeting.

9. Equality and Diversity Committee (E&DC) – Update

The E&DC met on 11 March 2021. HH, Postdoc Representative on the E&DC, to report on anything of relevance to the Forum.

10. Any Other Business

11. Date of Next Meeting

Research Staff Forum Meeting

2 p.m. on Monday, 22 February 2021
(held via videoconference)

Minutes

Present:

Matt Danish (MRD) (Chair)
Daniel Bates (DB)
Celia Burns (CB) (Secretary)
Andrew Caines (AC)
Helen Francis (HJF)
Heidi Howard (HH)
Jasmin Jahic

Eva Kalyvianaki (EK)
Angeliki Koutsoukou-Argyraiki (AKA)
Zohreh Shams (ZS)
James Sharkey (JPS)
Sergei Skorobogatov (SS)
Caroline Stewart (CS)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Sergei Skorobogatov.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2020 were approved.

3. RSF Discussion Topic—The Research Strategy Team

Helen Francis, Research Strategy Manager, gave a presentation, introducing the Department's Research Strategy Team and highlighting the support the team can offer research staff.

Questions after the presentation raised the following issues:

- *Repeat of the presentation to a wider audience:* Helen agreed to do the presentation again to a wider audience so that others could have the opportunity to ask questions. The presentation could be recorded and made available after the event.

Action: Helen Francis

- *Support for writing fellowship applications:* Helen expanded on the kind of help she could offer. As well as helping individuals, Helen could do a presentation on this topic. She is very keen to find interested people early on so that support can be provided.

• **Action: Helen Francis**

- *Communication of information:* Forum members acknowledged that there is a lot of support available from experienced colleagues within the Department, but that postdocs and first-year PhD students are not aware of these opportunities, so it is important to communicate the information. It was suggested that information should be

shared by email. The Support for Research Staff Wiki page was also highlighted as an information resource.

- *Fellowships and funding opportunities*: Helen confirmed that the requirement for a minimal level of experience following PhD for these opportunities was normally strongly adhered to unless the applicant had taken some time away from academia (maternity leave, for example), in which case there was some flexibility.

4. Report on Actions from the Last Meeting

i. Forum Membership

The Forum is still seeking a representative from the Rainbow Graphics & Interaction Group.

ii. Representative for Research Assistants

The Forum is still seeking a Research Assistant who is not doing a PhD.

iii. Lecturing Opportunities for Research Staff

EK reported that there had been a discussion at a Wednesday meeting about guest-lecturing opportunities for research staff, but nothing concrete had been decided. The Head of Department was quite keen on the idea but needs to see what kind of plans will be put forward.

iv. Notifications of Happy Hours and Wellbeing Teas

MD noted that he had not had time to organise Happy Hours recently. He confirmed that the Wellbeing Teas are still taking place and that a reminder had been circulated.

v. Use of Face Coverings

CS confirmed that she had sent a reminder to students about wearing face coverings.

5. Results of the Pulse Survey

The Wellbeing Committee had invited Forum members to discuss the results of the initial pulse survey. The Forum noted that it would be important to encourage a greater turnout from research staff and PhD students in the next survey. There was concern for the high number of respondents disagreeing with the 'Stress and anxiety arising from work are rarely overwhelming' question, but there was also uncertainty about the validity of the statistic for research staff due to the low turnout.

6. Wellbeing – Departmental Announcements

MRD encouraged Forum members to participate in the fortnightly Town Hall meetings. A suggestion was made to hold the meetings in a different slot occasionally to allow people who were not available for the regular slot an opportunity to attend. CS said she would pass this suggestion on to the Head of Department.

Action: CS

7. Wellbeing – Report for the Wellbeing Committee

Forum members discussed wellbeing under the Results of the Pulse Survey item (item 5) above.

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

MRD, Postdoc representative on the B&EC, reminded Forum members that anyone who needs to go in the building must email cl-shutdown@cl.cam.ac.uk beforehand; and plans for providing more secure enclosed cycle parking are going ahead.

9. Equality and Diversity Committee (E&DC) – Update

The E&DC is currently trying to find a Chair to replace Richard Mort who is on sabbatical, and consequently has not met since November. HH, Postdoc representative on the E&DC, noted that there was nothing else to report.

10. Any Other Business

(i) Communications

The suggestion for improved communication within the research staff group (for both funding and social purposes) was raised. Forum members discussed adding a Slack group to an existing CST Slack group and agreed to look into this further outside of the meeting.

Action: Forum members

11. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that CB would circulate a Doodle poll for a meeting in the Easter term.

Action: CB

Wellbeing initiatives

The wellbeing committee has now received feedback from all the groups involved in our survey. We also had a discussion with some colleagues within the University but external to the department for a neutral take on the results. Synthesising the discussions together we feel that three possible initiatives have emerged. We would be interested in your views to help decide what to do next.

Here are three topics which we feel have emerged from the discussions around the pulse survey. The motivation for each is based on the points that have been made to the committee as well as our own views.

Recognition

Positive feedback is important. Recognition refers to positive feedback in regards to things that someone does. There's also appreciation: recognition is about what you do, appreciation is about your inherent value.

1. What mechanisms are you aware of through which you have been recognised or appreciated either by the department, university or colleges?
2. What schemes do you know of from elsewhere? How well do they work?
3. Have you any suggestions as to what mechanisms for feedback would work well in the Department?

Stress and work-related pressure

1. What contributes significantly to your levels of stress (e.g. unrealistic expectations of workload, lack of resources, excessive admin, lack of support/good management). Any suggestions as to how these factors could be objectively measured or tracked?
2. Some amount of stress and pressure should be expected at work and study. Resilience refers to our ability to cope and respond positively to it. What input (if any) have you received that has helped you improve your resilience (directly or indirectly)?
3. Have you any suggestions as to what mechanisms the department could put in place to help improve personal resilience to stress in the workplace?

Complaints

An effective complaints/feedback procedure might allow us to respond to a growing issue or grievance before it becomes a major problem.

1. What mechanisms are you aware of in the department for giving feedback or raising complaints about something arising from work?
2. Do you know of any schemes from elsewhere? How well do they work?
3. If you had a complaint to make, what mechanism for dealing with it would you like to be in place?

Overall

1. Which of the above would you prioritise and are there any you would dismiss?