UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Department of Computer Science
& Technology

Athena
SWAN
Bronze Award

Research Staff Forum Meeting

Monday, 6 February 2023, 12.30-13.30
Room FW11, William Gates Building

Agenda

Forum Membership:

Jasmin Jahić (JJ) (Chair)
Celia Burns (CB) (Secretary)
Dr Andrew Caines (APC)
Helen Francis (HJF)
Dr Eva Kalyvianaki (EK)
Dr Angeliki Koutsoukou-Argyraki (AK)

Dr Challenger Mishra (CM)
Dr Ajay Shankar (AS)
James Sharkey (JPS)
Dr Sergei Skorobogatov (SS)
Caroline Stewart (CS)

1. **Chair**
   The Chair has advised that he will be leaving the department before the next meeting. Do Forum members have any suggestions for a new Chair?

2. **Apologies**
   Apologies have been received from Dr Andrew Caines and Dr Sergei Skorobogatov.

3. **Minutes of the Last Meeting**
   The minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2022 are attached for approval.

4. **Forum Membership**
   At the last meeting, the low membership and lack of representation for some research groups and themes was noted, as well as the lack of a representative for Research Assistants who are not doing a PhD. CB has updated the RSF website to show which research themes, as well as research groups, are represented. Gaps in representation still include the Energy & Environment, Graphics & Interaction, and Systems Research groups; and the Algorithms & Complexity; Graphics, Vision, & Imaging Science; and Human-Centred Computing themes. The number of Research Assistants who are not doing a PhD is to be advised.

5. **Report on Actions from the Last Meeting**
   i)   Part II Project Proposals—UTO Involvement
   The policy for Part II Projects Marking was attached for information to the minutes of the November Research Staff Forum meeting. The policy is for the current year only and will be reviewed after the examinations.

ii)   Policy on Lecture Recording
At the time of the last meeting, the policy on lecture recording was awaiting amendment and approval by Faculty Board, after which time it was to be circulated to Forum members for information. The policy has now been amended and will be circulated to Forum members once it has been approved by Faculty Board.

iii)   Lecturing Opportunities
During the discussion at the last meeting, JPS noted that this issue had been addressed at the Forum several times before and that there was some information about it on the '[Support for Research Staff' webpage](). JPS also suggested that information for Postdocs who would like to offer a course for the Researcher Skills Programme could be added there. The website has now been updated to include contact details for enquiries.

iv)   Process for Suggesting a Master Thesis Course
A proposed new policy for accepting new modules was circulated and discussed at the Postgraduate Education Committee meeting in November and is currently being reviewed by the Heads of Department Team.

6.   Postdoc Event
At the last meeting, Helen Francis reported that she had organised a session for PhD students who were interested in starting their own company to meet members of The Ring. RSF members had shown an interest in having a similar event for the Postdoc community, to be discussed at this meeting. Helen Francis to introduce this topic.

7.   Wellbeing

i)   Departmental Announcements

ii)   Input from Research Staff

8.   Buildings and Environment Committee (B&EC) – Update
The B&EC met on 18 January 2023. Dr Andrew Caines, RSF Representative on the B&EC, has sent his apologies for this meeting, but encourages people to look at the B&EC minutes because everything is of relevance to people in the building. He also encourages Researchers to let him know of anything about our building/environment that you would like him to raise at the next meeting (on 24 April).

9.   Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) – Update
This committee is currently under review, with the last meeting held in March 2021. When the committee recommences activities, James Sharkey, RSF Representative, to report on anything of relevance. In the meantime, any feedback about equality, diversity, and inclusion can be sent to Celia Burns at faculty-admin@cst.cam.ac.uk.

10.   Any Other Business

11.   Date of Next Meeting

Research Staff Forum Meeting

Tuesday, 15 November 2022, 12.30-13.30
Room FW11, William Gates Building

Minutes

Present:

Jasmin Jahić (JJ) (Chair)
Celia Burns (CB) (Secretary)
Dr Andrew Caines (APC)
Helen Francis (HJF)
Dr Eva Kalyvianaki (EK)
Dr Angeliki Koutsoukou-Argyraki

Dr Challenger Mishra (to end of item 6)
Dr Saman Rizvi
Dr Ajay Shankar
James Sharkey (JPS)
Dr Sergei Skorobogatov (SS)
Caroline Stewart (CS)

1. **New Chair**
   The Forum welcomed Jasmin Jahić, who has taken up the position of Chair.

2. **Apologies**
   There were no apologies.

3. **Minutes of the Last Meeting**
   The minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2022 were approved subject to the correction of a typo in the spelling of James Sharkey's name in item 11.

4. **Forum Membership**
   The Forum welcomed guests Dr Challenger Mishra, Dr Saman Rizvi, and Dr Ajay Shankar to the meeting. The low membership and lack of representation for some research groups and themes was noted, as well as the lack of a representative for Research Assistants who are not doing a PhD. The Chair asked Forum members to encourage more individuals to join from their own groups and themes, in order to provide more engagement in the life of postdocs in the Department. CB agreed to update the website to show which research themes members were affiliated with, and CS agreed to provide at the next meeting the number of Research Assistants who are not doing a PhD.

   Action: CS and CB

5. **Report on Actions from the Last Meeting**
   Support from Researchers from Industry: the Chair reported that he had discussed with Helen Francis his proposal for an annual event to present the Lab's research to the industry community. Helen reported that members of the Supporters Club and The Ring are invited to many departmental events, including the Part IB projects and, since there

are several other events already planned, there is not enough notice to run the industry research event this year. It was proposed that an appropriate time of year for this event might be two or three months after the Part IB projects in 2023.

6. **Part II Project Proposals—UTO Involvement**
The Chair introduced this topic to discuss the new requirement to have a UTO mark Part II projects. The Chair had run a survey among research staff, the results of which had been circulated with the agenda.

Positive aspects of the new requirement were acknowledged:
- responsibility for marking the project moving to UTOs
- having subject specialism among the assessors
- the opportunity for students to receive better feedback and evaluation.

There were also concerns, including:
- the lack of notice before the new requirement had been imposed (2 weeks before the project deadline)
- the risk of a project being rejected if there was no UTO available, thereby further limiting teaching opportunities for postgraduates
- the uncertainty around whether UTOs would be found for subsequent years' projects
- the need for more clarity on logistical issues (such as who would be paid for the marking and/or supervising, and who would sign the mid-term review and progress reports).

Caroline Stewart noted that Affiliated Lecturers had also been added to those permitted to mark Part II Projects. As research staff had not yet seen the policy, Caroline said she would circulate it.

Action: CS

Afternote: the policy is attached to these minutes. Further to a discussion at Faculty Board, it should be noted that the policy is for the current year only and will be reviewed after the examinations.

Afternote: Jasmin Jahić also raised this item at the Faculty Board meeting on 22 November. The minute is as follows:

19. **Research Staff Forum**
Jasmin Jahić, Chair of the Research Staff Forum, raised two items which had been discussed at the recent Research Staff Forum meeting.

   i   *Part II projects—UTO involvement:* Mr Jahić reported concerns that this policy might create a mechanism for filtering out projects, and although the department had provided the assurance that UTOs would be found for all this year's projects, he wondered if that would be the case for future years. Prof Copestake noted that this was a trial, which had been introduced rapidly in response to recent feedback from the External Examiner. As it would be reviewed at the end of the year, it would be inappropriate to commit to anything until the process had been reviewed.

Mrs Averill noted that she had not been informed of any difficulties, and that there were only three projects for which UTOs were still to be found. Prof Lawrence noted his support for the initiative.

ii   *Process for Suggesting a Master's Module:* Mr Jahić enquired whether there was any information that could be shared with Postdocs about the process and criteria for suggesting a Master's course. Prof Jamnik noted that she was in the process of setting out some guidance which would be shared with postdocs.

7.   **Lecturing Opportunities**
The Chair introduced this topic about the opportunities for postdocs to give lectures. The Chair had run a survey among research staff, the results of which had been circulated with the agenda.

Forum members discussed this issue, noting the difficulties involved in acquiring lecturing opportunities. There are few opportunities for giving lectures for various reasons (for example, the need for lectures to match the undergraduate curriculum which is agreed and publicised far in advance, and the risk of postdocs leaving and not being able to fulfil the lecturing commitment). The Research Staff Forum also discussed lecturing at master's level and felt that greater clarity on the process for proposing new modules was needed. It was agreed that the request for clarity would be passed to the Postgraduate Education Committee.

Action: CB

Afternote: At the Postgraduate Education Committee meeting on 24 November, a policy for accepting new ACS modules was circulated and discussed. The policy is awaiting department approval and will be circulated as soon as it has approved.

JPS noted that this issue had been addressed at the Forum several times before and that there was some information about it on the 'Support for Research Staff' webpage (at https://www.cst.cam.ac.uk/local/phd). He also suggested that information about Postdocs offering a course under the Researcher Skills Programme could be added there.
CB agreed to find out options and mechanisms for offering a Research Skills module and to update the webpage.

Action: CB

8.   **Process for Suggesting a Master Thesis Course**
Following a discussion in item 7 about the process for suggesting master's thesis courses, it was agreed that Eva Kalyvianaki would recirculate an email which Prof Jamnik had circulated on this topic. In addition, the request for clearer guidance about this on the website would be taken to the Postgraduate Education Committee.

Action: EK

9.   **Policy on Lecture Recording**
The Forum received the Department's policy on recording lectures in the 2022/23 academic year. The policy reflects the University's statutory duty to provide lecture recordings as well as individual lecturers' rights to withhold consent to record lectures. Caroline Stewart reported that the current policy was awaiting another amendment and

approval by Faculty Board but after that, it would be circulated to Forum members for information.

Action: CB

10. **Wellbeing – Departmental Announcements**
The Chair expressed his hopes that the period of Covid and people feeling isolated was behind us. He also noted the exceptional (for 2022/23), non-pensionable payment of 2% for all University employees, which had been announced by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for University Community and Engagement on 25 October 2022.

11. **Wellbeing**
The Chair invited ideas for social events and wellbeing. Forum members discussed the following suggestions:
- The reopening of the café to encourage community spirit: this was not straightforward since, as the footfall is so low, the University Centre will not reopen the café, and private companies are likely to impose a surcharge to compensate for the low footfall.
- Revival of the Happy Hour: several factors working against this proposal were:
  o the rules around licensing and providing alcohol (allowed at *ad hoc* free events only)
  o the imminent departure from the Department of Matt Danish, the event organiser, and the difficulty in finding a replacement event organiser
  o sponsorship issues

Some suggestions for social events were made, including:
- Changing the time of the event (to a lunchtime, for example)
- Having a monthly event such as a picnic, hiking, a quiz, or a film
- Having a different volunteer organiser for each event
- Providing vouchers for the W Café and Bar in the West Hub
- Collaboration with the Postgraduate Student event organisers (JPS said he would be happy to bring this up with the Postgraduate Student reps).

Caroline Stewart offered to put in a proposal to the Head of Department Team for funding for a one-off event and to contact the Postgraduate Office to find out contact details for the Postgraduate Student social event managers.

Afternote: It has been reported that the Postgraduate Students Forum have organised social events such as quizzes. Forum members' names are available at https://www.cst.cam.ac.uk/local/phd/gradforum. Alternatively, messages can be sent to the whole group to cl-gradforum@lists.cam.ac.uk.

Action: CS and JPS

12. **Buildings and Environment Committee (B&EC) – Update**
It was noted that the B&EC was seeking a representative from the research staff community. Dr Andrew Caines offered to represent the Forum on this committee.

13. **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) – Update**
It was noted that this committee is currently under review, with the last meeting held in March 2021. Caroline Stewart noted that workload issues and covid had held up this committee but that it was important to get it going again with the Athena Swan application deadline coming around again in 2024.

The RSF representative on the EDIC would normally provide a brief update at each RSF meeting under this standing item. James Sharkey expressed his interest in taking up this role when the committee recommences activities. In the meantime, any feedback about equality, diversity, and inclusion can be sent to Celia Burns at faculty-admin@cst.cam.ac.uk.

14. **Any Other Business**
Postdoc Event
Helen Francis reported that she had organised a session for PhD students who were interested in starting their own company to meet members of The Ring. The PhD students had really valued the opportunity and Helen wondered if there was an appetite for a similar event for the Postdoc community, in which case she would be happy to support it. It was agreed that this could be discussed further at the next meeting.

15. **Date of Next Meeting**
The date of the next meeting is to be decided by Doodle poll.

Part II Projects Marking Proposal from 2022/23

Robert Harle, Director of Undergraduate Education
Rafal Mantiuk, Chief Examiner

October 2022

Proposal

Each Part II dissertation will be associated with a senior member of the department (a *marker*) who will act as one of the two dissertation assessors, the other being an appointed examiner.

[Note this is similar to the dissertation marking model used in the ACS]

In this model we distinguish between:
- The *supervisor*, who oversees the project day-to-day
- The *marker*, who is a UTO associated with the project (this is new). The marker *may* also be the supervisor. For this proposal, **Affiliated Lecturers are considered to be UTOs**.
- The *examiner*, who is the appointed examiner (or an appointed assessor for dissertations as now). The examiner may not be the supervisor.

Status Quo

Today, Part II project dissertations are blind-marked by two markers. The pool of markers includes the examiners and a small number of appointed UTO assessors.

Background

There have been questions around the Part II dissertation marking for some time, but in the last academic year, these came to a head. We have seen:

- Concerns that project topics are increasingly more specialist and that markers may struggle to fairly assess something outside of their own specialist area;
- Supervisors (esp. non-UTOs) who have not previously been markers complaining they have no easy way to calibrate their own assessment of dissertations in order to give the best advice;
- Some DoSes advising students that being supervised by UTOs have an advantage;
- Students complaining that feedback on their work is not provided.

The last point has been growing in volume from the student body over the last decade, culminating in a significant number of students using Subject Access Requests to obtain feedback from the examination process last year. Such requests are time consuming for all, and it reflects poorly on the department that students feel they must resort to this. Moreover, we appear to be out of step with other UK Universities, who typically provide more detailed feedback on final-year dissertations.

Examiners have not provided dissertation feedback previously because it would impose a significant overhead during the time-impoverished exam period. Few assessors have the time to write anything substantial on each dissertation they mark. In 2022 the examiners trialled a new system of providing a coarse 'traffic light' rating of each dissertation section Unfortunately this did not prove to be of much value to the students and just added to the examiner workload.

Associating a UTO with each project who acts as a marker solves many of these problems:
- At least one marker will be expert in the dissertation topic
- The marker will work with the supervisor to mark the dissertation, allowing the supervisor to be sufficiently informed to give constructive feedback to the student.
- Non-UTO supervisors can be involved closely in the marking process and can calibrate their oversight.

Implementation

Marker and examiner interactions
- Each dissertation will have two initial marks
- **The first mark will come from unblinded marking by the marker.** Where the marker and supervisor are not the same person, the marker will assess the dissertation with the help of the supervisor, such that the supervisor understands the reasoning for the proposed mark (allowing them to provide feedback this year and to calibrate for future years).
- **The second mark will come from blinded marking by an examiner (as now).** They will not have access to any of the marker's output prior to submitting their assessment (and in fact these marking tasks will likely run in parallel)
- The examiners will reconcile the first and second marks to the final mark as they deem appropriate (as now). If a significant mark change is chosen, the examiners will ensure that the marker is aware of the reasoning.

Marker and supervisor interactions
- The marker will work with the supervisor to assess the dissertation. In many cases this will take the form of a conversation before the marker assigns mark(s).
- The marker will assign the first mark based on departmental guidelines, the dissertation and the supervisor discussion.
- The marker will update the supervisor if any substantial mark change occurs from the examiners. This ensures the supervisor is fully informed and can relay the correct feedback to the student if requested.

Who could be a marker?

Markers will be UTOs in the Computer Science and Technology Department.

The Director of Studies (DoS) of a given student cannot be their Marker. This would introduce a conflict of interests since the DoS could benefit from the student scoring higher. It is, however, acceptable for the DoS to be the supervisor of a project (as is the current case).

A UTO may be Marker and Supervisor for a project provided they are not the student's DoS. Some projects are specialist enough that there is only one UTO expert, who may quite reasonably be the supervisor. Having to associate another UTO as a marker could disadvantage the student. Furthermore, this will significantly increase the workload for each UTO in the department. This model does risk that the student with a UTO supervisor gains an advantage over the student with a separate supervisor and UTO Marker, since the latter may have less interaction with their Marker. In practice, however, we view this as a very small risk outweighed by the benefit since we will encourage Markers to have some level of involvement with the project prior to submission. We will review this for next year.

A UTO supervisor may elect another UTO to be Marker if they so wish, provided the Marker is suitably qualified to assess the topic.

Timeline

We will implement this for the academic year (2022/23) to show responsiveness to feedback and to avoid a repeat of the high administrative burden imposed by serving legal requests this summer.

Part II in 2022/23 contains 119 students of which:
- 74 have UTO supervisors
- 45 have non-UTO supervisors
- 5 have their UTO DoS as supervisor

For 2022/23 the department will work with supervisors who are not eligible to be Markers to identify a suitable UTO. In most cases we would expect this to be the supervisor's line manager or academic supervisor. We expect this process of finding markers to be invisible to the students.

External Examiner's view

The external examiner (Prof. Peter Pietzuch, Imperial) wrote: "I am very supportive of this change. It would address some of the concerns that I have raised previously, and it appears to be a balanced proposal. "

Feedback

Due to the short timeline, we have notified UTOs that this change is being proposed already. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, with a number of members of the department writing to express their support.

One concern raised is that having an unblinded marking component could introduce bias (although it is unclear whether this would be positive or negative bias!). However, there will still be blinded marking by the examiners for the second mark and a reconciliation process if the two marks diverge. The current system also has a bias caused by the examiner/assessors having to mark dissertations in or out of their field of expertise, which this proposal addresses. We therefore believe that this proposal represents a better process that solves more problems than it creates.

Review for 2023/24

At the end of this academic year, we will review this process with the aim of refining it if necessary. We will consider:

- What students feel about the feedback they got from their supervisor
- Whether there is significant difference in mark between students who had a supervisor mark their project and those that had a different marker
- What students feel about having had their supervisor mark their project
- How UTOs feel about the workload added