



## RESEARCH STAFF FORUM

Tuesday 20 May, 12.30 – 13.30, Room GC22

### AGENDA

#### Forum Membership

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. Research Culture

A talk by Katherine Leckie, Impact Facilitator. See the attached documentation.

#### 2. Apologies

Apologies have been received from Ajay, Andrew and Irmak.

#### 3. Conflicts of Interest

#### 4. Minutes of the Last Meeting

For approval: the [minutes](#) of the meeting held on 17 February 2025.

#### 5. Forum Membership

##### i) Chair of RSF

James will be stepping down as Chair after this meeting but will be continuing his membership of the Forum. See item 14 below for the appointment of a new Chair.

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

James will be continuing his membership of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Are Forum members content for James to continue to represent the Forum?

## **6. Report on Actions from the Last Meeting**

### **i) Membership of RSF**

James and Sadiq have reviewed the membership but have nothing to report.

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

Helen was going to update the guidance to reflect the changes relating to fellowship report and mention it in her next funding call to RAs. Helen to report.

### **iii) BEC Update – meeting pods**

Caroline was going to circulate an email to advise research staff and PIs about the pods. Caroline to report.

### **iv) BEC Update – bike shed gate**

Caroline was going to advise the Building Services Manager that the gate had been open constantly. This issue has been resolved.

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

James was going to contact the Building Services Manager to find out what is expected of an event host. James to report.

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

James was going to contact Maths to find out how they fund their weekly social events. James to report.

## **7. Wellbeing, People and Operations**

### **i) Departmental Announcements**

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

### **iii) Input from research staff / items for the POC:** do Forum members have any issues they would like to raise here or that Ajay could 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 to report on anything of relevance to the Forum.

### **ii) Items for Faculty Board:** do Forum members have any issues they would like to raise here or that the new Chair could take to the next Faculty Board meeting (on 1 July 2025)?

## **9. Research Strategy Committee (RSC)**

- (ii) **RSC Update:** The latest meeting of the RSC was held on 8 April 2025. Sadiq, RSF member of the RSC, to report on anything of relevance to the Forum.
- iii) **Items for the RSC:** do Forum members have any issues they would like to raise here or that Sadiq could 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, has sent his apologies for this RSF meeting.
- ii) **Items for the BEC:** do Forum members have any issues they would like to raise here or that Andrew could 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, to report on anything of relevance to the Forum.
- ii) **Items for the EDIC:** do Forum members have any issues they would like to raise here or that James could take to the next EDIC meeting (planned for some time in June 2025)?

## **12. Any Other Business**

## **13. Date of Next Meeting**

## **14. Appointment of New RSF Chair**

Sadiq has agreed to take over as RSF Chair after this meeting for one year. Do Forum members agree to this appointment?



## **Research Culture, Talk by Katherine Leckie, Impact Facilitator**

Dear Research Staff Forum

The University and Dept take Research Culture seriously. A recent development is that the University Research Culture (RC) team is offering to support Departments as they look at what they are doing well and what they could improve in. The areas that are being considered are as follows:

- Reward and Recognition
- Research Integrity
- EDI
- Careers and Professional Development
- Open Research and Collaboration
- Positive Research Leadership
- Inclusive and Safe Working Environment
- External Engagement
- Environmental Sustainability

I am also attaching a short report of some conversations with around 5 academics who have been in CST for the last 2 years. They were asked what they liked/and thought could improve about Cambridge and the Dept, and what had been positive in research culture terms at their previous institutions.

When I come to the Forum on Tuesday, I would love to get input on how you feel the Dept is doing/could improve in the above categories. And how we could use conversations and feedback from academics (and possibly extend this to all new research staff).

Best,

Katherine

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### **CST Research Culture: Academic Perspectives 2025**

This overview summarizes feedback from academics regarding their perspectives of CST's research culture, focusing on areas of strength and areas for possible improvement.

#### **Strengths**

- **Collegiality and Lack of Competitiveness:** Academics expressed that the institution has a great collegiality and lacks the competitiveness they had experienced elsewhere.
- **Curiosity:** There is a high level of curiosity among staff and students.
- **College Community System:** The college system is considered excellent for encouraging curiosity. Community spaces in the Dept really important for this too.

- **Supportive Culture:** Academics want to create a culture where people get excited about making things happen and know they will be supported. This is often the case for engagement with industry, though maybe less so in group/team building.

## Areas for Improvement

- **PhD Hiring Process:**
  - Lack of transparency in the PhD hiring process.
  - No central place to check the status of applications.
  - This lack of transparency can make the process appear disorganized and unclear, hindering the attraction of top candidates.
- **Postdoc Pay:** The postdoc pay band is a significant issue in recruiting the best postdocs.
- **Wellbeing and Community:**
  - Need for a process to **integrate wellbeing** and community into the workday, rather than treating it as an add-on.
  - Wellbeing should be linked to meaningful work tasks and not just as extra hobby activities.
  - Suggestions included ground-led postdoc community initiatives and annual faculty outings focused on shared activities.
- **Administrative Burden:** Reduce administrative energy sap on ideas that graduates or postdocs or staff might have for spontaneous community building activities so that when people are excited they can make things happen.
- **Facilities:**
  - Improve heating in meeting rooms including F100
  - Upgrade screens in meeting rooms.
  - Provide interactive boards in larger offices for collaborative work.
  - Create "bump spaces" (soft seating near kitchens) to encourage informal interactions.
- **Defining "Impact" and Purpose of Research:**
  - Broaden the definition of "impact" to include societal impact, teaching, and outreach. Not just an emphasis REF impact.
  - Re-emphasize the notion of what it means to be a scholar – its not just climbing the career ladder. Giving back is important. Also, address the focus on metrics ("get money, get lots of papers") and encourage students and young academics to question the purpose of their work.
  - Acknowledge the challenge of changing this culture among students who have succeeded within the current system.