

School of Mathematical Sciences Research Committee

Minutes from the Meeting held on 27 February 2017

Present: Boris Khoruzhenko (Chair), Christian Beck, Michael Farber, Alexander Gnedin, Bill Jackson, Christopher Joyner, John Moriarty (via Skype), Leonard Soicher.

In attendance (only for items 12 and 13): Adrian Baule, Alex Fink, Xin Li.

Apologies: Malwina Luczak, Juan Valiente-Kroon, Jo Young.

Secretary: Elisa Piccaro

Minute	Summary of Agreed Actions	Who	When	Progress
27.03.17-2	Elisa to report whether the EPSRC platform grants are still offered or not.	Research Manager	ASAP	
27.03.17-3	HoGs to provide input to Malwina about aspirational journals.	HoGs	Research Committee June 2017	
27.03.17-4	Elisa to write to the academics about Open Access support.	Research Manager	ASAP	
27.03.17-5	Elisa will email the academics asking them to use the paper version of the pre-costing and get in touch with her as soon as they decide to apply for funding. The academics will also be reminded to submit the proposals two weeks before deadline.	Research Manager	ASAP	
27.03.17-8	HoGs to prepare a proposal and a theme to put forward to the next Research Committee.	HoGs	Research Committee June 2017	

Agenda Item	Reports, Discussions and Actions	Who	When
1. Minutes from last meeting	Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2016 were reviewed. All actions were completed except for the one related to the DTC themes. It was agreed that this will be discussed at the next Research Committee meeting.		
2. Matters arising	Matters raised (DTC, REF, Impact, etc) were discussed as part of the items in the agenda. Boris told the committee that, following the latest fellowships successes in the School (J Moriarty and L Lacasa), Edmund Burke agreed to two backfill appointments in the groups and that these will be permanent positions. Therefore two more lectureships will be advertised soon.		

	<p>Boris also asked the committee if they were aware of EPSRC abandoning platform grants and asked Elisa to investigate this.</p> <p>ACTION 2: Elisa to report whether the EPSRC platform grants are still offered or not.</p>	Research Manager	ASAP
3. Aspirational journals	<p>REPORTED: The committee agreed that this will have to be discussed when Malwina is also present. HoGs should have provided input to Malwina (it was one of their action point from the previous meeting). C Beck asked for clarification about what is needed to bring this exercise to an end as it appears that the exercise is repeating itself.</p> <p>ACTION 3: HoGs to provide input to Malwina</p>	HoGs	Research Committee June 2017
4. Research Manager Report	<p>REPORTED: The Research Manager highlighted what she included in the report, with particular emphasis on the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open Access: The School is doing well as a whole and academics are engaging with Elisa to make sure their records on Elements are compliant; - The EU funding workshop will take place on 3rd May. Elisa will send an email to all academics and postdocs to advertise this; - ResearchFish submission. HoGs were asked to remind academics in their group to submit a return to ResearchFish before the deadline (16 March 2017). Elisa is sending emails to PIs regularly. - Research Enabling Fund. HoGs were asked to remind academics in their group to spend their funds before 31 July 2017. <p>DISCUSSED: Open Access: V Latora proposed that a PhD student could help Elisa on a weekly basis, for 2 or 3 hrs to create records, and update information on Elements so that all academics get the support required and they do not need to engage with the system at all. Boris is supported on doing so. Elisa commented that so far she does offer help and that academics are already supported if in need. M Farber pointed out that the task on Elements is rather easy for the academics to do. It was agreed that Elisa will write to the academics asking for feedback and assess what help the academics need with the Open Access Compliance task on Element. If the work on this becomes too much, then a PhD student will be recruited to help Elisa with this task.</p> <p>ACTION -4: Elisa to write to the academics.</p>	Research Manager	ASAP
5. New Pre-costing questionnaire	<p>REPORTED: Elisa explained that the new online questionnaire is not visible to her as Research Manager. So that if the academics submit one she will not be able to edit any information or advise before the costing is returned by JRMO. There are two options for the School. One possibility is that we retain the paper questionnaire. The academics return it to Elisa and once all costs are agreed she will submit the online one on behalf of the academics. The other option is that the academics are encouraged to consult Elisa before</p>		

	<p>submitting it online, and changes are made retrospectively after the grant has been costed.</p> <p>DISCUSSED: Boris thinks that it will be better if Elisa has an overall view of who is in the process of applying and what they should include in the costing. All HoGs agreed that they prefer to carry on with the paper version of the pre-costing.</p> <p>ACTION -5: Elisa will email the academics asking them to use the paper version of the pre-costing and get in touch with her as soon as they decide to apply for funding. The academics should also be reminded to submit the proposals two weeks before deadline.</p>	Research Manager	ASAP
6. Update REF 2017 Dry Run	<p>REPORTED: The submission for the REF 2017 dry run is ongoing. Boris summarised the timeline and process and thanked HoGs and academics for their work on this so far. He also reported that according to a very quick look at the data submitted, 46% of the outputs have been judged 4* by the academics (self-scoring). Boris believes that this may be too aspirational. MJerrum, Malwina and Boris will be more realistic in this assessment and this may bring a level of unease amongst the academics. He also pointed out that next year the process should be easier because hopefully we will have HEFCE rules on the next REF. The new guidelines for the REF may require the department to submit on average 2 papers per academic staff member with a minimum of 1 or 0 papers per individual. This would require the school to be as certain as possible on 4star papers. We need to have a good understanding of the papers published in the School. Submitting four papers per academic may give more variability than if we are only allowed to submit two and we need to be prepared for the rules to change. For the moment we are of course working on the rules that we had at the last REF.</p> <p>A last update about the REF was about portability. Boris reported that HEFCE may decide that the outputs become non-portable. Hopefully the new guidelines will be published soon.</p>		
7. Impact	<p>REPORTED: John Moriarty reported that College appointed David Steynor as impact manager and that he has so far provided us with good feedback about the impact cases in the School. This was very helpful in order to address some problems before the REF dry run submission. He added that we use the impact questionnaire to create impact records on Elements. All cases that the School has are work in progress and we judged 6 to be strong cases (with risk associated with them of course). We also have 3 or 4 high potential cases to be monitored in the coming months/years.</p>		
8. Possible bid for DTC in 2018	<p>REPORTED: Boris said that in Malwina's absence we should discuss this item at the next Research Committee meeting and that HoGs should start preparing possible themes. He also reported that there is a possibility of a proposal in collaboration with LSE (Malwina to provide details about this) and one within QMUL (lead by M Farber). We need to</p>		

	<p>think about making the bid special to be able to stand a chance.</p> <p>ACTION -8: HoGs to prepare a proposal and a theme to put forward to the next Research Committee.</p>	HoGs	Research Committee June 2017
9. Research Group Review update	<p>REPORTED: Boris reported that Malwina will have to prepare a report about the review. For the moment it has been agreed that B Noohi and I Tomasic will join the Algebra group, whereas S Majid will stay in the Geometry and Analysis group. L Soicher and J Valiete-Kroon agreed to this.</p>		
10. Research seminars	<p>REPORTED: Boris reported on Malwina's proposal to have one seminar per group each week. If the seminar organiser wants to get financial support from the School, then they should put a proposal through. Also, it would be interesting and useful to keep data about the gender of the invited speakers. Boris' opinion is that we should not limit the number of seminars that we organise in the School. However, some constraints are unavoidable, for example we only have one seminar room for the next two years, so we need to schedule seminars so that they do not clash with one another.</p> <p>DISCUSSED: Boris asked the committee if they agree that the School should not limit the number of seminars that run weekly? M Farber - said that seminars are a way of inspiring research, meeting researchers and talk about the research. He believes that the School should not limit the number of seminars. For some groups one seminar per group is enough, for others bigger and diverse group one is not enough. Limiting a group to one seminars is not a good way forward. Attendance to seminars is not important. They should be run anyway. Moreover, to improve attendance, we should make sure that the speakers give a general talk accessible to more people. Limiting the number of seminars will not increase the attendance. S Gnedin – He said that in his group two seminars are a must. There is no reason to merge or cancel seminars but that low attendance is unfair to external speakers. One way to improve attendance could be to invite external people to join our seminars. C Beck – He agreed that we should not limit the number of seminars. He also added that it is rather strange to having to write reports about seminars and that one seminar works just fine for his group. If there are room constrains then we can limit the number of seminars for all groups. V Latora – Vito said that the School shouldn't reduce the number of seminars offered, unless there is an issue with funding the seminars. L Soicher – He added that informal study groups would work well for</p>		

	<p>the School, also in terms of attendance.</p> <p>C Joyner – Chris said that too many seminars could result in researchers having to spend too much time in seminars and that this may not be feasible. There is an argument to have some seminars run bi-weekly, but he understands the reasons for groups to have their weekly seminars.</p> <p>J Moriarty- He said that one seminar per group shouldn't be questioned and added that if there are constraints with funding or rooms, then the second seminar should be questioned.</p> <p>B Jackson – Bill commented that the official seminar for each group should remain supported financially by the School. Others may happen, financed or not. He added that it could help to get people talking to each other if there was only one seminar per group per week.</p> <p>The consensus was reached that the number of seminars offered in the School should not be limited.</p> <p>Next Boris asked a question about funding the seminars. At the moment each group gets £2000 to fund all the seminars they want. HoGs are responsible for this budget. HoGs were asked whether they should keep responsibility over the seminar budget or if they would prefer that SEG controls the budget and decides which seminars to fund.</p> <p>S Gnedin – said that the administration of the seminar budget should not change. This way the bureaucracy is minimised.</p> <p>C Beck, B Jackson, L Soicher, C Joiner and J Moriarty – also think that we should retain the current system.</p> <p>V Latora – no preference</p> <p>Overall the predominant view was that we should retain the current structure.</p> <p>Boris asked if the committee could think of alternative seminars funding.</p> <p>M Farber – said that PIs could match fund from their grants to run more seminars.</p> <p>B Jackson – Bill said that the host could make a case to the Research Committee. Boris clarified that in this case it would have to be SEG that one could make a request to, since the Research Committee does not have budget responsibilities.</p> <p>L Soicher – He added that early career researcher could be given a budget to run study groups. Also, the academics could be asked to make a case to HoS, but then HoS could be accused of favouritism, so this is not a good option.</p> <p>Boris asked if a report should be kept by each group about the</p>		
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	<p>seminars that they run. And if this report should only be about funded seminars, or all.</p> <p>S Gnedin, M Farber – agreed that the seminar organisers could compile a list of seminars at the end of the year, with range of speakers and gender information. But they are against recording attendance.</p> <p>Boris – said that keeping data on how many people attend the seminars is a good thing.</p> <p>L Soicher – there should be no problem to get HoGs to write the number of attendees, but no register should be taken in seminars.</p> <p>Boris – thinks that we could ask for a funding request to be made every year. For the first round the seminar organisers could write a short rationale of each seminar. From the second time a report is required. But HoGs should nevertheless provide gender balance statistics.</p> <p>M Farber – added that MSc and 3rd year BSc students should be invited to attend seminars.</p>		
<p>11. Research Committee membership</p>	<p>REPORTED: Boris explained that since the Research Committee reports to HoSAG, and HoGs attend HoSAG, then even if the HoGs do not attend the Research Committee, they still retain the overall responsibility of the group and of the decisions made. He asked the HoGs to say whether they are happy for them to nominate someone in the group to join the Research Committee and replace them.</p> <p>DISCUSSED:</p> <p>C Beck – he is not comfortable with it. He said that the Research Committee is useful and would prefer to remain a member of it.</p> <p>L Soicher – said that it is good to nominate someone else in the group, because of the need to develop a new generation of leaders.</p> <p>M Farber, V Latora – no preference, but they are happy to try to change the membership.</p> <p>B Jackson – he is in favour of the change.</p> <p>C Joyner – said that there may be the danger that other academics may need to continuously consult the HoGs and that therefore no decisions will be made in the Research Committee.</p> <p>Boris, L Soicher – the academic representing the group may need to consult the group anyway, but this is the same as it is already happening with HoGs consulting their groups before making decisions.</p> <p>J Moriarty – said that we could try the new membership for a period and then re-assess the situation.</p> <p>C Beck – suggested that if the HoGs are to be replaced, then so should the HoS.</p> <p>Boris – replied that he is happy to step out.</p> <p>Other HoGs and M Farber said that they are not happy with HoS not attending the Research Committee.</p> <p>Consensus was reached. Each group will nominate their</p>		

	representative to the Research Committee.		
12. Policy in PhD students' space	<p>REPORTED: Boris reported that there is not much space and the strategy of the School is to recruit more students. Therefore we should start thinking about a policy for allocating desks to the students. When should we provide desk until? The School has no policy on this so far.</p> <p>DISCUSSED: Boris proposed to allocate a desk to all students in year 1, 2, 3 and 4 (developmental year). And everyone else should be offered a hotdesk. Part-time students could be asked to hotdesk but special circumstances can be agreed on ad hoc basis. We do not have many part-time students in the School anyway.</p> <p>Everyone in the Committee agreed to this proposal.</p>		
13. PhD studentship application process	<p>REPORTED: Boris reported that there is already a document about the allocation process. This document was written by M Farber. The main reason for having this document is to have a clear process to allocate PhD studentships. However, decisions are based on subjective information such as interviews and references. How can we be sure the list produced is fair? Academics can say if the applicant is good or not, but not much more information can be given.</p> <p>DISCUSSED: Boris asks for feedback on the process.</p> <p>A Fink – reported that there was a certain aspect of opacity with the process. For example when awarding studentships to early career researchers and grant holders, he was not sure about what this means and what weight it has on the overall allocation. Also it was not clear that some academics should have not been advertising a project. He added that different HoGs behaved differently with the process. For example one of the HoGs nominated two students with the same supervisor.</p> <p>X Li – agreed with what Alex said.</p> <p>C Beck – reported that in his group they interviewed carefully the applicants, and was surprised that all that was required as a feedback was a list of 5 candidates to put forward.</p> <p>Boris – commented that there should be a person that attends all interviews. Only if this happens we can have an objective overview of the process and every applicant.</p> <p>B Jackson – asked why the HoGs shouldn't have put the candidates in a list of priority. He also added that it is rather normal that the HoGs give the best feedback about their applicants, to grow their group and get more studentships awarded.</p>		

	<p>M Farber – explained that there was no ranking needed because the process is about evaluating student plus supervisor, and not just the student.</p> <p>Boris asked everyone if they thought that the process should be more transparent. This would cause more pressure on the allocation committee. He also gave an overview of the criteria used in the last allocation round: early career researchers with a shortlisted candidate and everyone with a grant had priority and got a studentship awarded.</p> <p>B Jackson – commented that the students could apply with no supervisor.</p> <p>L Soicher – commented that HoGs should know the rules and the strategic aims.</p> <p>M Farber – maybe next year we should add another supervisor that the student could work with. But it is important that the student applies to a particular project.</p> <p>Boris – Added that it is important to select the best students but that we need to continue this conversation to get the process to work better. He also encouraged the HoGs to think positively about this.</p> <p>C Beck – he suggested that we pre-allocate a number of studentships to each group. Each group will have different priorities. Also, this would avoid competitions between groups.</p>		
14. Date of next meeting	The next Research Committee meeting will take place at 13:00 – 15:00 on Monday 05 June 2017.		