

Reference for Dr Roberto Stefan Stefan Foa



Academic Career Pathways

Referee details

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Diane Coyle
Bennett Professor of Public Policy

To the promotions committee: Roberto Foa

30 November 2021

I strongly support the application for promotion by my colleague Roberto Foa, who presents outstanding evidence that he surpasses the relevant criteria in terms of research, impact, teaching and service.

He joined us in 2019 and has made a significant contribution to POLIS and the Bennett Institute through his high-impact research, excellent teaching record, large grants, and collaborative research projects offering students and postdoctoral scholars a step on the publication ladder.

Beginning with teaching, Roberto's first responsibility on the POLIS MPP programme was to overhaul the delivery of the statistics module. Previously, students were sent on the Social Sciences Research Methods Programme, but consistently negative feedback led us to bring this in-house. Based on his extensive experience in providing statistical analysis to policymakers at the World Bank and United Nations, Roberto designed the course with the needs of future policymakers in mind, emphasising the critical interpretation and applied use of statistical data. The response from students was extraordinary. It is difficult to state just how unusual it is in any university degree for the statistics module – and a mandatory one at that – to receive top ratings from course evaluations. Yet Roberto delivered this in his first term. In addition to taught seminars, he supervises a large number of masters and doctoral students. He has also cheerfully taken on a number of committee roles and the arduous task of organising MPP work placements, which are a key selling point for the programme.

Within the Bennett Institute, Roberto has been building the Centre for the Future of Democracy, and more recently, the YouGov-Cambridge Centre for Public Opinion research. The reports that Roberto lead-authored achieved substantial impact, receiving coverage across the spectrum of international media, and leading to invitations to speak to the House of Lords, OECD, and the Cabinet Office. He repeated this success not once, but several times – with both the second Centre for the Future of

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Democracy report, and his paper on COVID-19 and subjective wellbeing achieving widespread coverage – providing evidence of his ability to consistently deliver high-impact research. He has an impressive list of policy engagements as well as being an effective and prolific public commentator. This build on his publication record, which measured by citation count, is highly impressive for someone at this career stage. He has, again with remarkable consistency, delivered a steady stream of high-quality research published in leading journals since his arrival here in Cambridge. I have not commented specifically on his research, as his external referee will do so, but here would simply highlight his stellar publication record.

I would also like to emphasise Roberto's inclusivity and collegiality, especially with regard to students and junior researchers. He includes post-graduate students as co-authors on shared publications, offering our students the opportunity to gain valuable CV entries as they approach the job market. Already, two of the postdoctoral researchers with whom he has worked – Stephen Hall, an ESRC postdoctoral scholar, and Mark Fabian, whom I hired on my AHRC/ESRC wellbeing project – have found competitive tenure-track jobs. Several of Roberto's students have had the opportunity to appear in press interviews and media articles, including in high profile outlets such as the BBC and Guardian. And nearly all of his supervisees have gone on to successful roles either in further postgraduate studies or prominent public policy jobs. Roberto is a well-liked and, importantly, highly effective mentor and colleague. He is collegiate, works in a collaborative way, and is impressively hard-working and dedicated to the success of the department and the Institute.

Joining the Bennett Institute just a year after our launch, Roberto has been an essential contributor to our success at establishing our reputation, in an increasingly competitive terrain of policy institutes. He is a widely-recognised scholar in a field of huge and growing contemporary interest, and he can, and will, easily attract other offers. As we expand our MPP programme and cement Cambridge's reputation for public policy (a School strategic priority), Roberto is playing a key role in the administration and delivery of our programme, as well as the quality and dynamism of our research.

With best wishes,



Professor Diane Coyle

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Dr Roberto Stefan Stefan Foa