

# Royal College of Science Union

## Communities and Welfare Board Report

Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2017



Michael Edwards, *RCSU President (ME)*, and Shervin Sabeghi, *Acting RCSU Welfare Officer (SS)*

### Faculty Welfare Officer Report - SS

- Since taking the role on an appointed basis in June, my focus has been on developing the Wellbeing Representation Network (WBRN). During the summer, I had meetings with the WBRN implementation team, including the Deputy President (Welfare), in which the RCSU shared its concerns about the WBRN and made suggestions about how the network should be developed. The (now mandatory) training of reps was shaped off the back of these meetings, and we've pushed to ensure the training is sufficient to give reps skills to do their roles, but to also safeguard them.
- I have also been meeting with College staff across the departments of the Faculty of Natural Sciences to ensure that there is enough support in place for the incoming wellbeing representatives, and to take suggestions about how the WBRN could be tweaked in each department to suit their needs. This has led to being able to talk to all 1<sup>st</sup> year students (and other years where possible) to advertise the WBRN, and ensure students are aware of the precise nature of the roles.

### Wellbeing Representation Network Development in the Faculty of Natural Sciences – ME and SS

- One of the concerns we have is that Mental Health First Aid training will be optional and on request for WBRN volunteers. This feels like a vital component that will complement the role, augmenting the abilities of the Year and Departmental Representatives to identify issues and appropriately signpost.
- Pending CWB discussion, we will be campaigning for Departments to take on all or some of the burden (financial or otherwise) for the training of WBRN representatives. We believe that the cost is more manageable on a departmental level and is more likely to be adopted by staff, as compliance will show their concern for the issue.
- At a cost suggested by a Union staff member, external training for the WBRN volunteers of a department would cost £300 (at a cost of £60 per person in a department with four year cohorts). This could be further negotiated and expanded to cover other relevant volunteers in the departments.
- This is an item that will be raised at Faculty and departmental Staff-Student committees for discussion.

### Community Development within the Faculty of Natural Sciences - ME

- A key finding of the National Student Survey was the lack of student-staff community in Departments, and that the Union (RCSU and ICU) does not do enough to foster a sense of community within the student body, let alone including staff. We recognise this to be a key problem that will be exacerbated if we do not act upon it.



- We believe that the clubs beneath Constituent Unions, the Departmental Societies or DepSocs, offer the best opportunity to begin to address the problem.
  - Anecdotal evidence from last year's Sabbatical Officers suggest that the Departments that perform best in the NSS have strong ties to their student-led DepSoc and provide support to them, that is not limited to financial contribution towards activities.
  - Further evidence from our Management Group last year has shown that the Departments are open to further discussion regarding their support for DepSocs. A key example are the DepSocs of the Department of Life Sciences, who were open and willing to provide funding for final year events, and to discuss how to further contribute.
- To this end, we will be pushing our DepSocs to enter discussion with their senior Departmental staff to formalise the support arrangements between staff and DepSocs year-on-year. We will be reporting on this in both a clubs-focussed and a community-focussed approach throughout the year at the Clubs and Societies Board and this Board respectively.

### **Closing Remark – ME**

As the role of Welfare Officer has been put up for election, I would like to thank Shervin Sabeghi for his work as my appointed Welfare Officer over the last four months. I look forward to working with his elected successor for the remainder of the year.