

RCSU General Committee

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Royal College of Science Union Second Term Report to Council Tuesday 23rd November 2018



*Prepared by Michael Edwards on behalf of the
RCSU General Committee*

President's Report - Michael Edwards

The first term as the Committee of the Royal College of Science Union has presented us with a series of challenges to overcome and opportunities to take advantage of. From the first FoNS Wellbeing SSC meetings to the Launch of the eleventh annual Science Challenge, the gears of the RCSU continue to grind on.

My focus over the last term, other than the direct management of the committee and assisting in all the major operations of the Union, have been the development of the RCSU Governing Documents and the RCSU Strategy (which is directly reported in the activities of the Executive), and engaging with Union committees and processes more effectively to ensure the needs of the students of the Faculty are being served well by the organisation-at-large.

Papers submitted and supported by RCSU Officers have provoked discussion regarding the development of the Safe Space Policy, Union provision for neurodivergent students (for which we must acknowledge the tireless work of the ICU Mental Health Officer, Ariana Sadr-Hashemi), general practice for Staff-Student Committee meetings, ICU affiliation with London Nightline, and the membership of postgraduate students in the 'Faculty' Constituent Unions. Over the next term we will be continuing to bring business to all fora as frequently as other time commitments allow, in collaboration with our partners in the other Constituent Union to continue to deliver change for our members and all students of the College.

The latest developments of the General Committee are outlined in this report with an update regarding the current situation of each strand of our operations. The Governance implications of the introduction of the Wellbeing Representation Network have been attended to, and the Wellbeing Representatives now exist in parity to their Academic counterparts, with the Departmental Representatives sitting on Club and RCSU Committees. The last major holdout of the WBRN, the Department of Physics, is being attended to and as of this meeting elections should be underway or appointments made to the multiple vacant positions courtesy of senior volunteers in the Department of Physics.

Again, thanks are due to all the Officers and Representatives of the General Committee for their work over the Autumn Term. I look forward to the new term, and continuing to deliver on our potential to bring about significant and positive change for all students of the Faculty of Natural Sciences.

A plain text version of this report is available on request.

General Committee

It must be stated from the start that a series of miscommunications, coupled with the misunderstanding of the motives of other Officers, have meant that members of the committee have felt disengaged from the normal activity of the General Committee and its subcommittees – a trait that is often shared with its ICU Council counterpart. Steps are being taken to ensure that people feel empowered and able to speak their mind at these meetings without fear of perceived intimidation; a decision taken by the Executive to impose a 'safe space' for discussion to freely occur during these meetings, which will be enforced by the President and the Executive Officers present.

In our November meeting of the General Committee, the following items were discussed.

Development of the new RCSU Governing Documents. Following this meeting a series of 1-2-1 meeting with all committee members was carried out covering the RCSU General Committee and the Clubs Network regarding the future development of officer, representative and club roles during the lifetime of the upcoming RCSU Strategy. These documents were further scrutinised at an Emergency Meeting on Tuesday 8th January, and we may already have discussed the Constitution at this very meeting.

The RCSU Position on GSU Remuneration and campaigning for an equivalent. The circumstances behind the remuneration of the GSU Presidency was discussed and we decided that if an equivalent were to be sought for the RCSU, the proceeds should go towards the central budget of the RCSU and not towards the remuneration of a single Officer.

Communication of Union Democracy. The work done by CGCU to promote the work of their officers was praised and an equivalent mooted for the work of the Council Officers and Representatives of the RCSU. This is in development.

An RCSU Elections Information Session is provisionally planned for Thursday 1st February for the General Committee to promote the opportunities available with the RCSU and the FoNS volunteer network. This will hopefully be followed by a FoNS hustings during the election period, pending committee planning.



Following on from the changes made to Regulations One and Three, the Wellbeing Representation Network volunteers are formally recognised as part of the RCSU-FoNS volunteer community, and the Wellbeing Departmental Representatives now sit on the General Committee of the Union in parity with their Academic counterparts.

Executive Committee

Despite one of our Executive Officers never seeming to be in the country – *congratulations to Ayush for his second consecutive longest distance Jailbreak* – the Executive has been working hard to support the operation of the Union through its subcommittees, which are being separately reported

As well as this, the prior incomplete development of the RCSU Five Year Plan presented us with an opportunity to develop a professional and long-term strategy for the organisation, which has been graciously supported by the time and input of the Sabbatical Officers and Union staff, who have provided us with a valuable source of information regarding ways we can meaningfully develop over the next three years.

Following discussions with the Head of Student Voice, Andrew Keenan, we will be presenting an executive Strategy document with a roadmap for three years of development, with the need for three annual 'tactical' operational documents to guide consecutive committees with their own developed objectives through the lens of the Strategy.

We hope that the Strategy, coupled with the parallel

development of other CU strategies, will lead to a renaissance of the Constituent Union concept; strongly reiterating the need for this unique system of governance in ICU, whilst arguing for further development of the role and responsibilities of CUs in their spheres of influence.

Thanks are due to the President, DPCS, DPW, Head of Student Voice, Student Development Manager, and the Education and Welfare Team for their input so far. The work has only just begun, and more rigorous work is needed on the Strategy before its launch at the March meeting of Council.

Following on from the changes made to Regulations One and Three, the Academic Affairs and Welfare Officers will be attending meetings of the Executive Committee in preparation for full implementation in the 2018-19 Committee as VPE and VPWW.

Entertainments Board

Since the last report to Council, the only major social event that has occurred from the RCSU has been the Christmas Pub Crawl on Thursday 7th December, to which 50 people turned out. We've also spent a lot of time supporting clubs to put on department-level events, which shall be covered later.

We were fortunate to support a second Quad-Union event on 24th November, which came at no overall cost to the RCSU as it was run centrally by Commercial Services. A debrief on this event has not occurred on the RCSU side, and we hope to chase this up in the coming term to determine the long-term viability of centrally supported inter-Union events.

Upcoming plans for the term include:

A Bar Night on Thursday 1st February to mark the start of the Leadership Election season, which will follow on from an Information Session regarding the RCSU and the positions open for election.

A series of inter-CU competitive events have been proposed for the RAG Week. Current plans are to hold a bowling or arcade tournament during RAG Week, selling tickets with a donation to charity. This will form the first step towards re-engaging the RCSU more effectively with the operations of ICU RAG.

Revel – the third iteration of what has always been highly popular event. Information is pending, but the provisional date lies between late February and early March.

Early plans for the summer term include the **Sparkes Cup** rugby competition and a tentative **joint RCSU-CGCU Ball**.

Operations Board

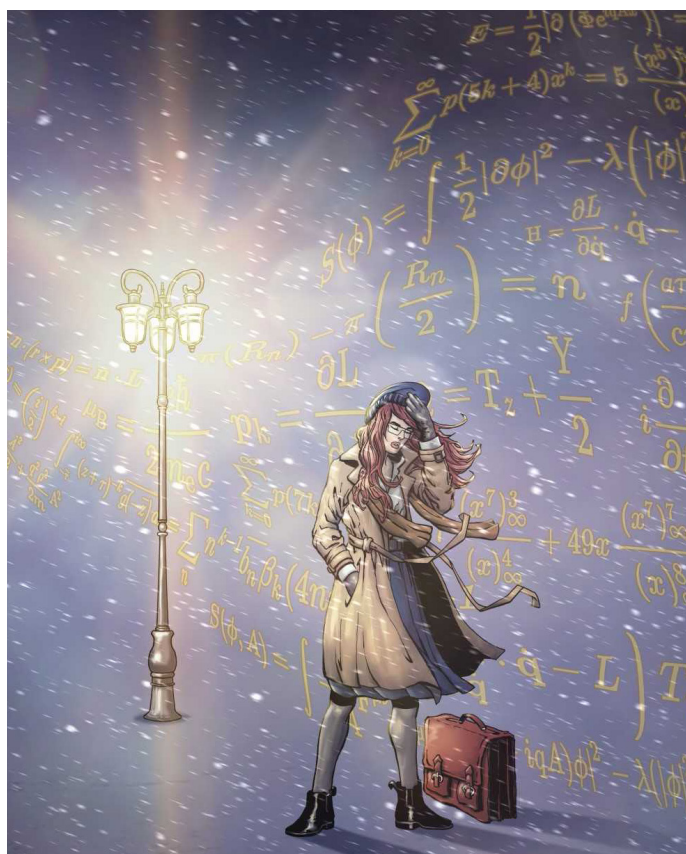
Broadsheet

The first copy of the RCSU Broadsheet has been published and distributed on campus. The theme, Unheard Voices, was very well received and we've managed to attract a new crop of writers from beyond the immediate committee and periphery, improving our overall engagement on the publication. Work on the next edition has begun and we are aiming for publication by the start to middle of March to coincide with the BAHFest and other major events.

Science Challenge

Since the last report, the judges for the Challenge have been confirmed and the Launch has occurred on Tuesday 5th December, which is our excuse for the lower RCSU attendance at the last Council meeting.

Over 100 people attended to watch the opening of the competition, with speeches from Lord Robert Winston, our three attending Judges and our very own Vice President (Operations), Becky Neil, who stood in for Lord Ron Oxburgh. The 'Imperial Family' is very



well represented with an alumna (Felicia Yap, author of Yesterday), a former Rector (Lord Ron Oxburgh) and a visiting researcher (Martin Archer, Department of Physics) as well as Lord Winston on the judging panel.

The Final will be held on Tuesday 6th March at the House of Lords, at which time the winners of our £4,000 prize pot will be announced. Thanks are due to the Science Challenge Committee for their efforts to promote science communication through their work on the competition.

Web Communication

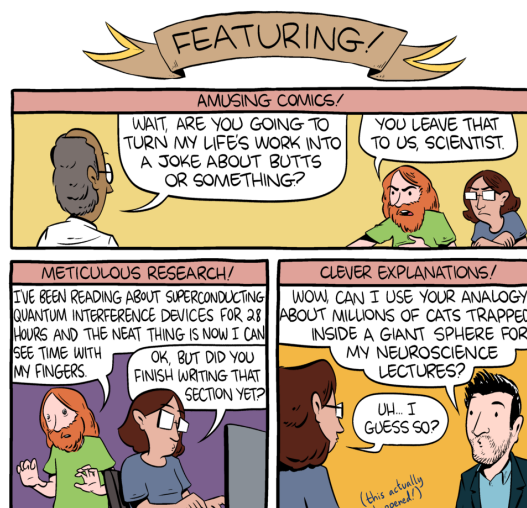
A review of the RCSU's presence on the internet has been undertaken after two years of inactivity. Our Web Communications Officer, Ivan Tang, is redeveloping the main website to ensure our operations and activities are as accessible and transparent as possible to our members, by ensuring documents such as meeting minutes, updated role descriptions and the new Governing Documents are easier to access than they are now.

The Science Challenge and Broadsheet websites have also been worked on, and the support of the CGCU Vice President (Finance and Societies) is greatly appreciated during the redevelopment of the Science Challenge website for the 2018 competition. An effective handover strategy has been raised as a change for next year.

BAHFest

We were fortunate enough to welcome Zach and Kelly Weinersmith to Imperial College London in November, as a stop on their UK book tour for Soonish their latest book, in co-operation with the Physics Society. The Main Lecture Theatre in the Blackett Building was packed out by students and staff, and we were able to sell 50 signed copies of Soonish. This was a highly successful event, and further serves to put Imperial on the map as a beacon for student-led science communication and science comedy events.

The third annual BAHFest is planned for Saturday



17th March in the Imperial College Great Hall. the host of the event will be the noted comedian and mathematician Matt Parker, with a keynote from cartoonist Boulet. Submissions are currently open, and we are seeking on-the-day volunteers to help make this year's event the best yet.

Alumni and Sponsorship Affairs

We were fortunate to welcome the RCSA President Mo Dulloo to our Committee Christmas Dinner on Friday 15th December, and we're looking forward to meeting with the committee over the coming months to support their events such as the Annual Dinner on the 27th of February at the House of Lords, and developments around the Alumni Weekend in May.

Nothing new has developed in terms of sponsorship for this year, although during the deliberations regarding the RCSU Strategy and Governing Documents a dedicated Sponsorship and Alumni Officer role has been created to enhance our work in this area.

Academic Affairs Board

Work on the academic representation of FoNS undergraduates has been ongoing since the last Council meeting, with developments in key areas. Updates from the Academic Representatives can be seen in ERB minutes.

- Work on the Representation module on eActivities has been raised following on from internal discussions regarding an archival system for representation achievements. The 'Rep-ository' has been mooted to the Education and Welfare Team as a project with potential and we will be following up on developments this term.

- All departments are functioning well and providing communication between staff and students regarding courses. On a Faculty level, the first SSC of the year has been held, with the core theme of 'The National Student Survey' sparking discussion regarding improving scores and the student experience through the introduction of intermediate surveys that more naturally map onto the NSS themes. This work is being jointly led by the Academic Affairs Officer, the Departmental Representatives, and Faculty Education staff members.
- Life Sciences presented a challenge with the implementation of wellbeing representation conflicting with the joint academic SSC for Biology and Biochemistry. Progress has been made on a productive solution between the Academic and Wellbeing requirements of our Representation activities, and will be reported on at a later date.
- Campaigning for a dedicated common recreational space for Life Sciences students continues.

Prof Michele Dougherty has recently taken position as the new Head of Department for Physics, and we wish her well in her new position.

Wellbeing Affairs Board

Work on the welfare representation of FoNS undergraduates has been ongoing since the last Council meeting, with developments in key areas. Updates from the Wellbeing Representatives can be seen in CWB minutes.

FoNS had its very first Faculty Wellbeing SSC, chaired by the RCSU's Welfare Officer, on 13th December with the aim of sharing best practise between wellbeing teams in each department, identifying problems within the Faculty and how to most effectively solve them. It is planned that these meetings will have a 'theme' to focus them, and this one's was personal tutoring. The meeting saw a good student and staff turnout. After discussion, it was decided the Faculty will look into creating a system for students to feedback on their tutoring experience, similarly to SOLE (and previous TOLE).

Currently, a separate departmental wellbeing SSC has been installed in the Chemistry department, with a view to also do so in Life Sciences. Otherwise, wellbeing reps have been attending joint SSCs and bringing forward issues, and finding solutions.

Lead by our 2nd year Maths wellbeing rep, a 'Scientists of Imperial' scheme, where FoNS students give testimonials about their experiences (mental/physical health, bereavement etc) and these to be published weekly to all students, is in early stages of development. The aim is to create a sense of community, get people talking about their issues, and to show people that it's ok to have problems and they're not alone.

The RCSU's welfare focus this term will be getting this scheme off the ground, and to organise our yearly Welfare Week, which is scheduled for the latter weeks of term.

Clubs and Activities Committee – The RCSU Management Group

The RCSU Club network – the five FoNS departmental societies, Synthetic Biology, and our incubator clubs – are currently operating well, with adequate support from the Management Group Officers, informally known as 'the Michaels'. All Departmental Societies successfully ran Christmas social events, including three large-scale formal Dinners. Chemistry once again ran the largest with a turnout of 200 students, staff and alumni. This was followed by Maths and Physics who attracted around 150 apiece. Demand for tickets to the dinners was higher than supply, demonstrating the need for capacity expansion on these events in the future.

Issues have been raised to the Clubs, Societies and Projects Board, ranging from sponsorship administration to the implementation of the Mums and Dads programme (CSPB, November 2017). We will be following up on our work of the last term regarding these items to ensure these issues are addressed.

Budgeting is well underway within the Management Group, with members of RCSU Exec (730) being directly consulted on the development of central operations, and budgeting sessions being offered to all of our clubs to ensure their yield from the Budgeting process is maximised through strong co-operation with the MG Officers.

Clubs were also directly consulted regarding their constitutions and several will be making amendments in time for a Summer term by-election.