



# Royal College of Science Union

## Term 2 Report

### *Contributions from:*

**Aparna Pillai**

*President*

**Daniyar Ghani**

*Vice-President of Education*

**Maria Borc**

*Vice-President of Welfare*

**Mareya Saba**

*Vice-President of Activities*

**Maya Lopez**

*Vice-President of Operations*



## President's Message

**Aparna Pillai**

This academic year has been really interesting so far to say the least, but I cannot stress how much work each and every member of the committee has put into RCSU's smooth operation. Without a committee as motivated and passionate as this one, I don't know how we could keep pressing on during these difficult times.

Like many other societies and unions, we have tried a variety of new ways to engage our student union through various types of events; we have been ensuring that there is sufficient conversation surrounding education and welfare concerns and we have been active in delivering initiatives like broadsheet and science challenge.

The remote environment has significantly minimized our engagement with the student body; however, it has also given us an opportunity to be creative in the way we do things and re-evaluate a lot of the existing structures.

I have been focusing personally on defining RCSU's unique role as a union and what we can actually offer students that other student bodies can't. We are working to minimize the overlap between our activities and those that departmental societies provide so that together we form a cohesive body.

In addition to this, we have also been looking to host combined events between alumni and the student body to bring back the spirit of shared learning and passing down information. The RCSU is one of the oldest unions, with 100s and 1000s of alumni and we are hoping to bring back the alumni network so that it can invoke a sense of belonging within current students.

Together as an executive committee, we have looked at what has gone well and what has gone less well this past term and we have created resolutions for how we can improve our practice, and hopefully we are looking forward to better times and better function within the RCSU.

This report contains an update from each sub-committee in the RCSU and provides insight into our progress in the year so far.



## Activities

### **Mareya Saba**

#### **Freshers' Fortnight**

We hosted 2 weeks of virtual events to welcome new and returning students of the RCSU at the beginning of October. The fortnight saw a broad range of 9 activities from Virtual Escape Rooms to Quiz Night. We also held an RCSU Induction which saw a large engagement from first years wanting to know more about what we do. Some of the events were more successful than others, but overall, the fortnight proved to be successful in creating a community spirit in a virtual environment.

#### **Lockdown Outreach Events**

In the November lockdown, we hosted 3 weekly events as well as an ongoing sports initiative to help students through lockdown. As well as online socials and gaming activities, we partnered with Imperial Careers Service to run a webinar tailored to RCSU students giving a general overview of what to look out for in terms of internships and further studies, as well as introducing the Careers Service workshops and services regarding CVs, interviews and more. Over 80 students attended, and the feedback was very positive.

To encourage students to stay active during the lockdown, we ran a sports initiative called 'How far can the RCSU go?' using Challenge Hound. Students were able to log miles they ran, swam, walked or cycled on the RCSU board, which would then contribute to the collective RCSU mileage and be drawn out on a live map of London. We managed to reach our goal of 100 miles overall, contributed by 15 participants!

#### **Christmas Schedule**

Our final 3 activities of 2020 were Christmas-themed. These included our first RAG event of the academic year, as well as the RCSU's first Christmas Card competition. For the RAG event, we sold gingerbread-making kits and forwarded about £60 of profits to the Crisis UK charity. Overall, there was less engagement from students at the end of the term and we are hoping to have more successful events in the second term!



## Academic Representation

### **Daniyar Ghani**

In the summer leading up to the 2020/2021 academic year, all Academic and Wellbeing Dep Reps in FoNS worked on creating a document of recommendations in response to the 2019/20 National Student Survey (NSS) results. The Dep Reps, in collaboration with the RCSU VPE, VPW and ICU DPE, came up with a set of solutions/suggestions to improve 3-5 aspects of the student experience which scored low in the NSS. Since the start of term, lots of work has been done by the Dep Reps to discuss their NSS recommendations with staff in their departments and begin to implement them. Successes/works in progress include:

- A bank of comments to note examples of high (and low) quality feedback for use in training GTAs – Department of Chemistry
- Introduction of examiners' reports for feedback on exams – Department of Life Sciences
- Negotiation of more funding for student opportunities such as UROPs – Department of Mathematics

A major goal of the Education Board was to improve the communication between reps and their cohorts. As a start, we worked on ensuring that communication channels were set up for students across FoNS and encouraged Year Reps to use these channels. We also introduced anonymous suggestions boxes (on Qualtrics) for use by departmental rep teams to streamline the process of gathering student feedback.

Generally, reps have been addressing issues arising due to the multi-mode/remote format of learning. It hasn't been an easy term given the importance of in-person activity and engagement for student representation, and plans around this have had to be scrapped, but the reps have still done well to amplify the student voice and effect meaningful change this term.



## Welfare Representation

### **Maria Borc**

We organised “30 days of Wellbeing” which consisted in suggesting a list of 5 new habits to pick up each week. We had a wide range of activities and encouraged people to share with us some pictures or comments about how it went.

We put in a lot of effort trying to advertise it and come up with resources for activities so that it would be easier for people to join in. Unfortunately, we didn’t see a lot of engagement across platforms however it seems like there were perhaps more people taking part that we weren’t “seeing”.

Coming into this second term, we are now focusing our efforts into Welfare Week in which we hope to organise events that focus on different aspects of welfare such as physical health, mental health and diversity among others.

In order to feel a bit closer to the year reps and gain some insight on what ideas they had, how I could better support them, I held a “drop-in” session towards the end of the term. Turnout was extremely low. I will be holding another such session soon and hoping to have more engagement. However, I am not too worried about it because the reps form strong teams within their departments and that is what matters most.

A lot of the departmental rep teams have been really active, having says in important issues within their Department, and teaming up with the Departmental society in order to try to fight the feeling of loneliness that most of us are going through.



## Operations

**Maya Lopez**

### **Broadsheet**

In the first term, Broadsheet editors has set-up our first online working platform for meetings and other editing of the edition. While we were not able to hold any in-person gathering amongst contributors and chief editors, the platform has contributed for a closer tie and accessibility amongst the group members to keep in track of the progress. Next term we aim to produce digital edition in same manner, and also host a photography competition.

### **Alumni and Sponsorship**

During the first term, the communication with RCSA posed a great difficulty and it has been difficult to establish events to engage the students with the alumni members. We are hoping to reorganize the relationship with this organization in the following terms.

On the sponsorship front, we have uncoupled the responsibility from the alumni officer and for further efficiency, the sponsorship officer will be under Treasure sector from the coming term.

### **Science Challenge**

This year, we hosted a fully online Science Challenge launch in December and have a major change in the organization of the event, to now accept group entries. We have also worked on establishing a proper registration system through the website so that we can do better record keeping and formalize this operation which historically had a largest budget within RCSU. We also had various payment that were left to be made from last year's event (which was interrupted due to Covid-19 which had halted the transaction from the union), and we aim to distribute all payments and certificate within the coming term.