



Royal College of Science Union

End-of-Year Report

2021-2022 Executive Committee

Aparna Pillai (President)

Priantha Pretheshan (VP of Activities)

Tianyu Wen (VP of Welfare)

Nicolas Barykin (VP of Education)

Trinity Stenhouse (VP of Operations)

Susan Rutter (Treasurer)



The Aims of the Royal College of Science Union:

- 1. To further the community experience of UG and PG students in the RCSU by providing sporting, social and other recreational activities.*
- 2. To build a stronger relationship between RCSU and departmental societies and the FoNS alumni association.*
- 3. To represent the welfare and education needs and concerns of students.*

President's message

APARNA PILLAI

Since the last report, we have made a lot of progress in our ideas and execution of the way we want to re-envision RCSU post-COVID. This year has been an essential step forward in our vision, particularly to re-establish the role of the RCSU amongst students in the Faculty of Natural Sciences. Our initiatives this year have engaged more students than ever before and our tickets sell-out within minutes despite the event capacities being larger than before indicating a peaked interest in the activities of the CU. We have also seen increased social media engagement, for example when putting out surveys to the student community on instagram we received 80+ responses in a day, whereas, before we would never have used social media as a tool to reach out to the student body. It has become a key platform for RCSU communication to its members.

We have also seen a lot of engagement in the past year with the academic and welfare side of RCSU, particularly with the reps who have done a great job to establish the role of RCSU in representing their welfare and academic concerns. We have also been able to make changes to science challenge which we hope will make the operations of the event easier in future years. Finally, the departmental societies and the RCSU have been working harmoniously this past year to provide engagement to our membership that does not overlap, and the societies have been doing a fantastic job in keeping their membership engaged.

This last term, our most significant achievements have been to provide input in the relevant forums about what the different departments wish to see for their exams this year. We have also placed particular focus on helping with student welfare coming out of COVID with the RCSU Welfare week which saw record levels of engagement for each event hosted during the week. This term we were also able to continue the tradition of hosting Revel engaging around 600 students with a 50/50 split with DocSoc. We will have to consider if this partnership should continue into future years since there are fundamental differences between the two student communities being catered to, which can cause conflict about the vision for the event.



This year we also hosted our first large scale Tri-Union event with CGCU and RSM which turned out to be very successful. There was a larger proportion of RCSU students present on the day of the event, which I hope can be more balanced in future years if we plan the event at the start of the year, and perhaps start the ticket sales sooner. We ended the 2nd term with Science Challenge which was hosted at the Science Institute.

The final event of the year, was the RCSU awards ceremony hosted just recently in metric. The reason we hosted it at metric was to establish the awards forum so the volunteers that are recognised for their amazing work can be recognised in a way that really celebrates their achievements. We have also been trying to clear the back-log of awards from previous years that were affected by COVID, it will take some time to sort this out fully.

Other areas that we feel require more work in the upcoming years, is the alumni network, I am hoping to get more involved on this side of things when I myself become a member of RCSU alumni next year, and hopefully can engage support from senior RCSU alumni to get a network up an running. We were unable to secure any sponsorship this year, but are hoping to do so next year and have a plan ready for this. We were able to engage potential sponsors with the panel talks that took place at the science challenge ceremony and will continue to chase this up. Finally, there is a lot of work to be done in the area of post-graduate members engagement, and this is something that we hope we can receive more support for from the union so we can create a plan for how to address this in future years.

Finally, I would like to thank all the volunteers in the RCSU for their incredible work this year, without them the RCSU is nothing and together it is unbelievable how much we can achieve. I am definitely really going to miss this amazing community of volunteers and the CU itself, but I am very certain that it is being left in good hands, and that the RCSU is only going to continue to prosper and grow!



Tri-Union Night



Revel Under the Stars



Activities

PRIANTHA PRETHESHAN

EVENTS

Term 2 was just as successful as term 1 from the events point of view, although this term had more of a focus on large-scale events.

The first event of the term was held in the first week of March and was Revel in collaboration with DocSoc. It was held at Sway in Holborn for about 350 of our members (and 350 from Doc) and had the theme of 'Revel Under the Stars' which was very well received! It was very different from the Autumn Ball in that not only was it a collaboration event so we had a greater mix of people there, but it had more of a cocktail reception feel at the start with canapes being served and has less of a 'clubby' vibe in general. That being said, people seemed to enjoy this event just as much and since it meant that even if the same people came to both events they had a very different experience, we received no complaints!

The second big event was a Tri-union club night at Cirque le Soir (in collaboration with the CGCU and RSMU) for 500 people in the last week of term. We had plenty of drinks tokens to hand out at this event, circus-themed performers such as a fire act and dancers and free access to a ball-pit, photobooth and make-up artist so there were many attractions to keep guests entertained throughout the night! Unfortunately, as it was held at the end of term, some departments had exams/fieldtrips and so in general we had a lower attendance than expected and the split of tickets per union had to be adjusted according to demand rather than an even split. In the end the RCSU ended up selling about 225 tickets (rather than the original 150). The unexpected attendance could have also been because COVID was going around at the time as well. As this was a new idea however, planning took a little longer than expected which was why the date was held so late. Now that the event has been established, this shouldn't be an issue in future years, especially as we don't think that the attendance was in any way due to the nature of the event. In fact, if it were earlier in the term, we discussed finding a bigger venue as the three union represent thousands of students together.

Due to timings, we were not able to find a suitable date for a Tri-union bar night and so this event was scrapped, and the funds originally allocated were used for the club night instead. We will, however, be suggesting to next year's committee that this event be held in the future (and possibly in term 3).

Overall I think the two events were a great success, with all attendees having a great time, giving us encouraging feedback and tickets selling out in record time on our end.



Activities

PRIANTHA PRETHESHAN

The only event hosted in term 3 was the RCSU awards ceremony followed by a bar night in Metric. For this event we hired out Metric for a couple of hours, handed out around 250 drinks tokens to attendees and also offered pizza during the awards itself. Most of the full colour awards and special awards were collected but only 3 of the half colour awards were collected. We also invited last years award winners to collect their prizes as they were unable to get them during COVID however, none of these certificates were collected. The event itself was a fairly low-cost, low-attendance event but gave whoever came a good chance to mingle and celebrate the great work of RCSU volunteers this year!

Due to different departments having exams at different points earlier in the term, nothing else was scheduled. We did send out a survey to see if an end of year event was in high demand and if so, what type of event they wanted, however, due to a short turnaround time and limited venue availability we did not think such an event was feasible and so decided to scrap this idea rather than put on a sub-par event. We will, however, hand over the results from that survey to next years committee.

RAG and SPORTS

Both RAG and sports took a back seat over the last two terms. When it came to sports, the main reasoning for this was funding and spacing. As it was a new idea, a very limited budget was allocated for our sports league and so booking courts/pitches was often outside of the budget. Whilst Ethos would have been a more affordable option, we found it was booked up from the start of the year and hence there was no availability for us there. Now that we know the requirements of hosting a league, hopefully next year we can extend it and include more sports!



Welfare Representation

TIANYU WEN

The main focus of the last term was ensuring students in all department are well supported mentally and physically during exam period. In the end of the day, students are very happy with their respective exam formats. While many students voiced concerns about in person exams being more stressful, they reflected that they preferred the in person exams after sitting it.

The returning from online learning has been challenging for the past year. As a rep team we tried to act proactively ensure the student voice was prominent in the discussions on this matter. This involved survey into the level of online teaching students would like. We felt this was particularly relevant to the wellbeing of students, given the effect of online learning on students, both with regards to the accessibility of learning resources (e.g. improved lecture captioning, ability to pause, inadequate studying environments at home) and social isolation during the pandemic. These results were communicated to the departments. While students in many departments did not appreciate the reusing of lectures, effective communication between the HoD and students clear misunderstanding up. However, we would expect everything return to pre-covid time next academic year.

Departmental reps are being very proactive during the entire year and multiple welfare events were being held throughout the year, including mental health awareness held in the physics department, working class events held in the newly opened life sciences common room, "chemistree" held in the chemistry department. Additionally, we've held the most well-attended welfare week RCSU has ever had so far.



Academic Representation

NICOLAS BARYKIN

Overview of specific departmental issues discussed since the last council report:

Life-sciences

First-years did not appreciate lecturers reusing recordings from previous years for first and second term, but a year-group talk with the department head helped clear this up. And while many students voiced concerns about in-person exams being more stressful, they reflected that they preferred the in-person exams after sitting it. Finally a more joint initiative that has taken place between biology and biochemistry is the opening of life sciences department common room and a form-system has been created to allow bookings of the space for life science related events (for example a working-class networking event for life-science).

Maths

Maths reps have helped to review the assessment schedule to minimise clashes between tests and courseworks, so this minimised the workload on students. Reps have also played a big role in discussing the format for summer exams. Steps were taken to improve specific modules.

Physics

Reps have reported that lab report feedback is too slow but it seems that the department is showing responsiveness to at least improve communication, however the feedback isn't being acted upon quickly enough. The exams were written so they could be shifted from closed book to open book if required, this raised mixed feelings from students: they don't want to memorise but they also don't want this to be an excuse to make exams unreasonably difficult. Reps feel like they are not consulted enough by the department when making decisions like this.



Operations

TRINITY STENHOUSE

Broadsheet

Broadsheet successfully distributed the magazines for term 1 and term 2 throughout this term. Students are starting to reconnect with Broadsheet and planning to fit writing/making contributions for it in their schedules for next year.

Hopefully the team's work this year will have made a long standing impact on the public opinion of the magazine, and will set us up for a bumper year next year.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship application season is about to start and we have a prepared sponsorship document ready to send out to prospective sponsors. We hope a new sponsorship officer will be elected soon so that this can get underway. We are also awaiting union decision of whether to include postgraduates in our numbers, which may make our union more appealing to sponsors as they could reach more people through us.

Science Challenge

The Science Challenge was a great success, with hundreds of entries per category. The Ceremony went smoothly, with speakers and RI members in attendance, as well as of course the shortlisted candidates and their families. Some revenue was made from ticket sales also. Thank you to the team of Kiarash Shaddel, Xavier Keogh, Susan Rutter and Lingyi Wang for helping set up and making sure the ceremony went according to plan.

The trophies will still need to be shipped to winners in countries such as Bangladesh and Thailand, but for those in this country, alongside their trophies, they will enjoy a trip to parliament on 31st May to see the House of Lords debate and have afternoon tea.

I have also worked alongside the faculty to keep the website updated, and written 2 articles (one about the winners and the other about the organisation of the challenge) to boost visibility to various audiences. The articles have already been grossed significantly and published in the Faculty Newsletter, so I hope there will be a massive boost in entries for the SC next year. I am also working on updating the Instagram but didn't have time to make graphics during my exams.

Susan is currently working on delivering payment to PhD student markers, and luckily since there are no monetary prizes this year, there will be no delay in paying the winners.

I think that the work this year had laid the foundations for the Science Challenge to be a very successful internationally recognised competition, and I hope it will continue to grow in future years.



Finances and Societies

SUSAN RUTTER

Last term the RCSU societies continued with their impressive schedule of events, between biweekly and weekly. Highlights of second term included the BioChemSoc Spring Ball and the MathSoc and PhySoc rescheduled Christmas Dinners.

The societies have now begun their end of year events, these range from boat parties to a trip to Kew Gardens. Many have arranged academic events to provide impartial advice about next year's modules.

All societies seem financially healthy, though some have had cash flow problems, this should be resolved by the end of the year.

The exec finances are in great shape, there remains a large budget surplus due to the success of the Autumn ball, and this will increase further once VAT has been reclaimed from term 2 events.

Looking forward, I have begun talking to societies about handover documents for next year. I have asked all societies who planned events or financial procedures last minute this year to include in their handover how this will be avoided next year. I am confident that the societies have the resources to effectively give handovers to their successors, and will be on hand in July to assist with this.

I would like to thank the societies for their hard work this year, I have been impressed with the range of events they have managed to put on.