

Royal College of Science Union

**Minutes of the 4th Ordinary Meeting of the Academic Affairs Committee**

Held at 13:00 on 6th March 2015 at the RCSU Office (Sherfield 214D)

**PRESENT:**

- Zoe Hsu – RCSU Academic Affairs Officer
- Philip Kent – RCSU Honorary Secretary
- Annina Sartor – Chemistry Departmental Representative
- Sinziana Giju – Biology Departmental Representative
- Serena Yuen – RCSU President
- Clark Baker – Physics Departmental Representative
- Arijit Gupta – Maths Departmental Representative

**APOLOGIES:**

None

**ABSENT:**

- Alexander Nash – Biochemistry Departmental Representative

**OBSERVERS:**

None

*Meeting opened at 13:10.*

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**A. CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

**RECEIVED:** This item was verbally presented by ZH.

**NOTED:**

1. ZH confirmed she has attended two College/FoNS meetings which have brought up matters of concern to the Committee.
2. In regards to the SSC forum, only Life Sciences and Mathematics sent items to the meeting. Of note, Mathematics staff noted that the final degree transcript is not specific enough to distinguish a high first from a low first – a percentage would be beneficial as it has module marks but no weighting by module. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students have been positive about this change.
3. The second was the Science Studies committee. Of note were changes to the Chemistry – 4<sup>th</sup> year on MSci programmes. Firstly, MSci projects will be allocated during third year, with students expected to submit a research proposal by the end of the academic year. The aim of this change is to allow students to commence work on their project promptly in 4<sup>th</sup> year. In regards to lectures, the number of courses taken is to be halved, however students are to take longer courses. These will cover multiple topics to acknowledge the overlap between the various areas of the chemical sciences. There may also be changes to the nature of examinations – i.e. a written exam may no longer be the default method used for such modules. Overall, more self-study is expected (e.g. literature analysis). Students seem OK

with the changes overall however there is concern over the workload in the second term of the year (especially in third year).

**B. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING OF THE AA COMMITTEE**

**RECEIVED:** This item was verbally presented by ZH.

**RESOLVED:**

**C. DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS**

**RECEIVED:** This item was verbally presented by each dep rep in turn.

**NOTED:**

4. CB reported that there is concern over the attitude the Physics department has taken this year. However, on a positive note the Professional Skills course in the first three years will be changed soon.
5. One student has submitted a petition to change how the Research Interfaces course is taught; however this has not been taken on board as the course will be overhauled in a few years time (alongside other courses) and suggestions will be taken into account then.
6. SSCs have changed in format, two of the three termly meetings have been changed to 'year' meetings, where the year reps, departmental representative, and head of year meet instead of a full SSC, which will take place at the end of the term. This method seems to work well, however there is concern of a lack of consistency between years. In SSC, the situation is still somewhat in flux as there has not been a sufficient number of meetings under this new regime and will be monitored.
7. First year satisfaction is very high – a paper-based survey circulated by the year reps showed 87% satisfaction. Second year was high, 3<sup>rd</sup> year attendance at the lecture where the survey was issued where survey was issued was poor. This survey helped Physics understand why SOLE turnout was poor, and to see if a paper survey was better used than online SOLE. PK suggested the survey is uploaded to the shared Dropbox.
8. The Physics department is currently trying to get lecturers to respond to SOLE feedback, this system is compulsory in Maths and Chemistry. Biochemistry (but not Biology) also has this system in a non-compulsory fashion There is concern that lecturers may write poor quality feedback if the system is compulsory, AS reported to combat this the Chemistry department have all responses sent via the DUGS however no quality issues have been observed in practice.
9. AG had nothing to report for Mathematics.
10. SG reported that Panopto turnout is on the up following statistics from second year lectures last term, which showed a lot of students using the system. Progress is slowly being made in rolling this out across all the years, and meanwhile the number of student requests for Panopto is falling.
11. Some coursework is not being returned which is unusual as the department is usually very quick; the UG office is currently looking into this.
12. AS reported that the main focus of matters within Chemistry is the Year 4 overhaul – this has mainly been due to the very large year 1 and 2 intakes.
13. In regards to lecture theatre capacity, currently there is a streaming room, which is not liked due to a poor experience compared to being in the lecture theatre, and 'glitches' with the Panopto powered system leading to reduced trust. Overcapacity has reduced as people cease attending lectures.

## Minutes

### Academic Affairs Committee (4th Meeting)

14. In regards to identifying larger lecture theatres, there is apparently no centralised booking system hence this is not possible. Centralised timetabling is expected to be introduced in 2016/17, which will correct use of lecture theatre capacities. Chemsoc are taking part in education day.
15. AN was not present so Biochemistry were not able to report.
16. Zoe asked the committee if any issues have been reported with the personal tutoring system, as this had been brought up at the SSC forum. According to College, personal tutor issues are not reporting due to concern over naming, but students were advised not to worry about it as anonymity will be assumed. The Committee had nothing to note.

**ACTION:** ZH to attend next Physics SSC.

#### **D. STAFF STUDENT COMMITTEES**

This item was struck from the agenda.

#### **E. RCSU MATTERS**

**RECEIVED:** This item was verbally presented by PK.

#### **NOTED:**

17. PK asked representatives to circulate the RCSU survey around their membership in an aim to increase participation rates. PK explained the purpose of the survey is for the RCSU to identify where it can do better outside of the scope of events.
18. SY asked everyone to vote in the Big Elections.

#### **I. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

#### **NOTED:**

19. SG asked as to why some departments have two departmental representatives – this is currently just Biology. Concern was raised over the need for two representatives – it was suggested that this would introduce confusion through questions as to which representative handles specific items of casework.
20. PK confirmed if two reps cannot be elected this term (only one candidate is running), then a second election would take place next term.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING:** May 2015.

*Meeting closed at 13:00.*