

Royal College of Science Union

Minutes of the 4th meeting of the Academic and Welfare Committee

Held at 12:00 on 14th December 2016 at the RCSU Office (Sherfield 214D)

PRESENT:

- Lloyd James – RCSU President (LJ)
- Michael Edwards – RCSU Honorary Secretary (ME)
- Sinziana Giju – RCSU Academic Affairs Officer (SG)
- Georgios Santis – Biochemistry Departmental Representative (GS)
- Abhijay Sood – Physics Departmental Representative (AS)

APOLOGIES:

- Raven Connelly – Biology Departmental Representative (RC)
- Emma McCracken – Maths Departmental Representative (EM)

ABSENT:

- Maximilian Moser – Chemistry Departmental Representative (MM)

OBSERVERS:

- Luke McCrone - ICU Deputy President (Education) (LM)

Meeting opened at 12:05.

A. Physics Departmental Representative Report

RECEIVED: AS delivered

NOTED:

1. No major updates - most of the pending changes are dependent on having upcoming meetings.
2. AS and LJ have met with the 3rd year lab supervisors to discuss changes, but are unsure if their suggestions will be taken on board. 4th year teaching assistants for labs have not been discussed due to staff unable to meet with reps at a mutually convenient time - AS will be raising this at the Physics Teaching Committee. Computer labs are suggested for the trial by LJ, since the GTAs for those labs are often spread thin.
3. SG asked for any examples of effective practice in the department. AS raised the practice of Year SSC meetings to drive targeted change in each year with smaller meetings (Year Reps, Head of Year, and another member of staff). Biology and Chemistry have a similar year

Minutes
Academic and Welfare Committee (Fourth Meeting)

division system but without the smaller Year SSCs. Smaller meetings were suggested to be a method to make reps more effective.

RESOLVED:

- a. To accept the report
- b. AS to chase up meetings and changes as per these and previous minutes.

B. Biochemistry Departmental Representative Report

RECEIVED: GS delivered.

NOTED:

4. Issues raised at the latest SSC:
 - o **Availability of computer and sockets for student PCs** - some issues have been reported with low availability of the resources and the misuse of these resources (improperly claiming PCs using notes to block the PC, noise in working areas, etc). More posters were suggested to push the low noise message, and a ban system of repeat offenders. The Biochemistry DUGS has made lab space available to Life Science students as quiet work space and will be trialling this going into next year. LJ and AS raised that a similar space technically exists in Physics and could be better used. As well as this, someone has been assigned to patrol and throw out items used to improperly reserve PC resources, since the automatic log-out feature is ineffective. LM suggested pushing it as an issue of safety, with theft more likely to motivate compliance.
 - o **An alumni event** to discuss career planning and coping with final year. This has been scheduled to happen - it's not timetabled but emails have been sent round.
 - o **Issue with Sexual Assault email** - an email was sent from the department that was received negatively. An issue with the email was its insensitivity and lack of constructive meaning. This has been dealt with and in future the department will be more careful with similar communications.
 - o **Tutored Dissertation** - an issue has been raised with the assignment process for dissertation topics, with the algorithm seemingly at fault with a bias based upon the alphabet. LJ suggested a Google Doc to collate the evidence for presentation.
 - o **Chem Research Move to White City** - the department are pushing for LTs, exam rooms and social space in the vacated space. LJ also suggested that cross-departmental lab space would be included, and that GS consult with Prof. Alan Spivey. LM also suggested consulting Rebecca Middleton, and raising this at the next Faculty SSC meeting.

RESOLVED:

- c. TO accept the report.

C. Academic Affairs Officer Report and Matters Arising

RECEIVED: SG delivered this item.

NOTED:

5. Issues have been raised with regards to Departmental Representatives not communicating the role of Year Reps to their teams. This was compounded at the last FoNS SSC, at which some reps were unaware of what should have been raised. AS made a list of the meetings reps are expected to attend as a training and handover document – it was noted that the issues are largely with DepReps absent from this meeting, and a similar document should be disseminated in these departments.
6. The Rep Handbook was raised by SG – it was sent round to the new rep teams.
7. ME raised the work of the Yr 3 rep team in Chemistry – communication has been good, and engagement with students appears to be effective, although MM will have better insight on this.
8. LJ raised that this was something to emphasise in the rep training, regarding what issues and complaints go where for maximum effect. AS and SG raised that the AAO met with all the rep teams two years ago, and ME pointed out this wasn't necessarily handled well in that case to make the correct avenues apparent or to introduce reps to the RCSU. Something more social was raised as a future development on this theme.
9. A clear contact system in a public place needs to be made – LM raised that some people still have no idea who to contact, which was expanded by SG as people who don't typically vote or care for Union systems until they have need for them.
10. AS raised that a good path to more engaged DepRep candidates could be more candidates for Year Rep positions, alongside a higher turnout to actually give the reps a stronger mandate. Reps could also be incorporated into a Blackboard Learn module on the home screen similar to the Union website – GS pointed out people don't typically go on the ICU website to search for their reps. LJ also suggested an issue with communication that is difficult to address – emails and people not reading Union emails. GS raised that his constituency are fairly engaged, with lots of feedback for Life Sciences courses. Examples raised were problematic deadlines, timetabling and Personal Tutor issues in 1st Year.
11. DepReps need to email their rep teams to make sure they know the hierarchy and the correct avenues for raising concerns. A diagram needs to be made to show 'what goes where'. SG asked to be cc'ed in all emails. LJ asked if the BB folder was a good idea, and could be used to store meeting minutes for student consumption – SG asked whether it would actually be effective or be used.

RESOLVED:

- d. To accept the report
- e. DepReps to email their rep teams as per Points 9 and 11.

D. AOB

NOTED:

12. LM asked to be kept in the loop re: rep communication, and stated that a diagram does exist, but not in the form that GS suggested – an RCSU version could be made and placed somewhere. AS suggested in the rep newsletter and on BB Learn.
13. GS raised the prospect of a 'rep card' that could be handed out to students – a resource that will be useful when it is actually needed.
14. SG and AS raised the next FoNS SSC, and reported that all issues were raised successfully at the last meeting.
15. The next Life Sciences SSC will be early next term – late January to early February.
16. It was noted that Alan Spivey and Rebecca Middleton attended the latest Physics SSC. Physics implementation of the traffic light system is underway, and more grading is occurring through BB Learn. LM raised that these discussions seem to be happening at a Faculty level, and are working effectively with IT.

Meeting closed at 13:00.