

Royal College of Science Union

Minutes of the 3rd meeting of the Academic Affairs Committee

Held at 12:00 on 16th November 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)
- Raven Connelly – Biology Departmental Representative (RC)
- Abhijay Sood – Physics Departmental Representative (AS)

APOLOGIES:

- Maximillian Moser – Chemistry Departmental Representative (MM)
- Emma McCracken – Maths Departmental Representative (EM)
- Luke McCrone - ICU Deputy President - Education (LM)

ABSENT:

OBSERVERS:

Meeting opened at 12:05.

A. Approval of the Minutes of Last Meeting

RECEIVED: ME presented this item.

NOTED:

1. No issues reported with the minutes.
2. No matters arising from the minutes.

RESOLVED:

- a. To accept the minutes.

B. AAO Report

RECEIVED: SG presented this item.

NOTED:

3. No updates from SG - reminder that the Faculty SSC is on the 30th of November and all departmental representatives are expected to attend and contribute.

RESOLVED:

- b. To accept the report.

C. Physics Report

RECEIVED: AS presented this item.

NOTED:

4. The report from Physics is as tabled in the Appendices. AS also said his report had been circulated to the department as a student update.
5. Further to the report - AS has three meetings planned with department staff. One is with the Physics DUGS and the UG Liaison to discuss a departmental Education Newsletter for wider distribution and to discuss Teaching Awards, which the reps in the department will help to decide. The second is to discuss department use of Panopto. The final is to discuss Physics Lab Coursework, which has been addressed by LJ and is seen as a particular issue for the Yr 3 provision.
6. LJ and AS have submitted proposals for UG demonstrators (UTAs, like GTAs) - not all have been approved but could be addressed by next term. SG noted that GTAs in Life Sciences receive £22 / hr for their work. AS suggested we wouldn't need to pay that much, and London Living Wage would be sufficient. LJ and AS will discuss this further with department staff. These UG demonstrators would not be needed in all labs, and could be prioritised to areas of need, such as computational labs.
7. A brief calculation suggested the use of 3 UTAs over the course of a year could cost c. £24,000, which is less than the required salary of a dedicated staff member.
8. AS suggested there was an issue with the quality of feedback available and this needs to be addressed further through responses to SOLE, which aren't mandatory in Physics. LJ proposed a form to fill in similar to the Chemistry Department, and to raise this at the DUGS meeting.

RESOLVED:

- c. To accept the report.
- d. LJ and AS to consult with the Physics department regarding Undergraduate Teaching Assistants for early years labs and coursework, prioritising computational labs
- e. AS to report back from the three meetings at the next AAO meeting.

D. Maths Report

RECEIVED: SG presented this item in EMs absence.

NOTED:

9. There is nothing major to report from Mathematics. Minor course clashes have been resolved by year rep work. Regarding NSS - her targets for improvement are Assessment and Feedback and Personal Development.
10. LJ asked whether the welfare workshops planned by the Welfare Officer could be classed as personal development. Also, ME raised that skills development was partially addressed through the sessions given by sponsors, but more could be done.
11. SG raised the prospect of student-led skills workshops as something to consider. LJ suggested working with the existing structures, and AS stressed the importance of having student-driven activities.

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12. DepSoc involvement was suggested. LJ suggested they could be asked to do more, and raised the prospect of a new pot of money for funding these activities. Examples included a LaTeX workshop, which could be funded with food and labour (professional).
13. An issue with reporting individual module scores was raised alongside access to exam scripts. ME stated that College rules prohibit this, since reporting individual marks for modules means each needs to be passed, rather than the aggregate score of all modules resulting in a pass. This is better for students in some ways but affects students' knowledge of their strong points. Comments for exam scripts can be seen.

RESOLVED:

- f. To accept the report.
- g. LJ to raise the prospect of DepSoc-led skills workshops to C&A on the 30th November meeting.

E. Biology Report

RECEIVED: RC presented this item.

NOTED:

14. Major time has been spent on discussing the Turnitin software used for submissions - not much was elaborated upon.
15. Other issues raised to RC were the potential for a Life Sciences "Community Area" in spaces to be vacated by moves to White City, and another call for a student microwave.
16. At the latest SSC, lecture concerns were raised, but largely dealt with before the meeting by email by the relevant Year Reps. Teaching Committee raised concerns of teaching staff regarding students taking pictures of lecture slides. An issue with some slides not being uploaded to Blackboard Learn was seen.
17. Further to this, the Peer-Wise Study software was raised as a potential programme for integration with the course. The best coursework would be available to all students who did the task as a source of perceived best practice. SG asked whether the programme would be automatic or voluntary. RC is to ask Moira in Life Sciences about this.
18. Personal Tutor issues with regards to references have been resolved by the Senior Tutor, who is the point of contact students with issues should approach.

RESOLVED:

- h. To accept the report.
- i. RC to chase up the Peer-Wise Learning software with Moira.

F. Biochemistry Report

RECEIVED: GS presented this item.

NOTED:

19. Issues are as per the Biology report - with minor concerns regarding changes to the demanding nature of the course, but no follow up - largely just 'bitching'.
20. On the topic of a Life Sciences 'Common Area' - there has been a call for input on the use of space in the vacating Chemistry Research area and the Locker room. Student input so far

has been towards a functional communal space similar to that which exists in other departments.

21. Biochemistry have been having the same personal tutor issues as Biology - resolved as per Biology.

RESOLVED:

- j. To accept the report.

G. Postgraduate Representation and RCSU

RECEIVED: LJ presented this item.

NOTED:

22. Since a move is being made to incorporate PG students in RCSU events, there is a feeling that we could also incorporate some aspects of their academic representation, which is currently handled by GSU, who are seen to be ineffective. This would be a large change that could negatively affect GSU - and so they will need consulting.
23. An observer suggested a compromise - that taught postgraduates are held by the RCSU and research postgraduates (PhD and MRes) would remain with the GSU. There was general agreement - AS raised that the interests of taught PG students overlap similarly with fourth year MSci students. They're also already members of the Departmental Societies, but would be unlikely to engage with our events as they're geared towards UGs.
24. LJ stated that PGs need to be better engaged with by DepSocs.

RESOLVED:

- k. To consult with GSU officers on the possibility of taking on taught PG representation.

H. Education and Representation Board

RECEIVED: AS presented this item.

NOTED:

25. An ERB meeting has been called for two weeks time.
26. AS has found ERB to be an ineffective forum so far, and wants to push ERB to be a 'Council-style' forum, with papers and policy recommendations to Council. SG suggested that as ASs first ERB, and the ICU DPEs first ERB, the meeting may not have been as effective as planned, but normally these are better organised.
27. AS requested that SG make a formal report to ERB.

RESOLVED:

- l. SG to report to ERB at the next opportunity.

H. AOB

NOTED:

28. The FoNS Staff-Student Committee is on 30th November at 12:30. All DepReps and AAO to attend. We need to set a plan for the meeting in advance.

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RESOLVED:

- m. AA Board to meet prior to FoNS SSC on 30th November.

Meeting closed at 12:55.