

Royal College of Science Union

Education and Representation Board Report

Thursday, 12th October 2017



Michael Edwards (*RCSU President, ME*), Abhijay Sood (*RCSU Academic Affairs Officer, AS*), Lidia Ripoll Sanchez (*Biochemistry, LRS*), Yizhou Yu (*Biology, provisional, YY*), Katerina Stavri (*Chemistry, KS*), Michaela Flegrova (*Physics, MF*), Michael McGill (*Mathematics, MM*)

RCSU Academic Affairs report – Faculty Level (AS and ME)

As a Constituent Union, the RCSU will be focussing on the following key areas to ensure that student voice is heard in the Faculty of Natural Sciences and that our constituents are represented effectively.

“Hidden Course Costs”

- This was raised at the TEF working group in the middle of last year, and we feel it would be appropriate to investigate further. Students in disciplines such as Chemistry and Life Sciences are required to renew their PPE year-on-year, and some courses contain a field trip element. We need to ensure support is available for students who struggle to afford such items which are mandatory or key to their success in the course.

Rep-ository Project

- As part of the RCSU Five Year Plan, we are looking to develop an archival system for the documenting and storing of progress on representation projects across FoNS and the College in general. This could be something that could benefit the work of other Constituent Unions, and we are looking to discuss this course of action with the Systems Team as well as our colleagues in the other Constituent Unions. Ideally, we are hoping for an integrated system with eActivities that will encompass the work of the ARN and WBRN, and are hoping to make some headway on this project this year. The new WBRN, and the proposed diagnostics for the trial years, provides us with the opportunity to develop how we handle communicating and archiving our successes.

2018-19 Course Reviews and ECTS Standardisation Projects

- This has been a long-term project within College and the Union, but as this edges closer to something concrete for the student body, we will be pushing for increased student involvement in the process to ensure the interests of students in this project are heard. Our Departmental Representatives in tandem with the Academic Affairs Officer will be spearheading this in FoNS.

Formalising Departmental Society Support

- Although this is a clubs-based objective, we recognise the power that DepSocs have to develop community and hence affect NSS results. We believe the support Departments deliver for DepSocs, which is not limited to financial contribution, needs to be formalised and developed year on year to improve the staff-student community. We will be bringing this to all staff-student committees and feeding back the results.

Departmental Representative Reports

- **Life Sciences (YY and LRS)** – Meetings with the Life Sciences DUGS’s has had the following resolutions. Improvements based on the NSS results have been mooted.



Lack of community – the Department is planning to organise social events for each third year course, adding a social element to the poster review session and supporting a final year leaver's event. Other events in earlier years, such as a Mums and Dads quiz, are also planned that will have staff attendance.

Stress and MH problems – this is obviously a wider issue for the whole College, but DoLS will be supporting the WBRN representatives to organise events and promote careers coaching with the Careers Service. The Department will be encouraging a sense of co-operation against competition to improve student wellbeing in DoLS.

Changes to Second Year exam scheduling – in order to make the schedule more similar to Third Year (exams immediately following modules), changes are being mooted to the Second Year. These will take two years as this requires several approvals from Department and College committees.

- **Chemistry (KS)** – Meetings with the HoD, acting DUGS and new Student Liaison Officer have happened recently to discuss the NSS results, changes in course structure, the White City move and the WBRN implementation. A further meeting with the White City lead, Prof. Paul Lickiss, is planned to discuss the move to White City and disseminate valuable information to students.
 - **NSS results** – It is planned to share information about all meetings in a more effective way to the student body, to ensure no information is omitted by Year Representatives. Also, ChemSoc will be working hard to foster a sense of community in the Department.
 - **New Rep Strategy** – KS is developing a plan to improve the Rep network within the Department, including aspects of how we communicate with students and how often, which will be developed when students are elected into the rep roles. A short Chemistry-specific training is also mooted with KS and key RCSU Representation volunteers.
- **Physics (MF)** – Meetings with DUGS, HoD and the Student Liaison Officer have happened to discuss the poor NSS results, the WBRN and other departmental projects.
 - **Problems** - the sense from a lot of reps from the previous year is that the staff are unwilling and obstinate in the face of change or even constructive criticism. This is something the Department is aiming to work on, and to encourage more staff-student interaction. There have been difficulties with engaging some staff members – improving relationships with these staff members will form a key part of the strategy for student representation in Physics.
 - **Proposed changes** – changes to labs and marking procedures are proposed, along with a review of how feedback is handled and disseminated to students. MF is also hoping to actively engage more students in the feedback process for lecture courses to ensure student voice is heard.
- **Mathematics (MM)** – The Department are hoping to turn around the recent dip in NSS results. Key problems appear to be the perceived lack of a student voice or community within the department.
 - A revamp of the problems class format is mooted to improve provision for Years 1 and 2 and to improve intra-cohort community.
 - This year is a curriculum review year, and discussions will be brought to this Board as and when information is made available.