



Royal College of Science Union

End of year report

2020-2021 Committee

Aparna Pillai
President

Daniyar Ghani
Vice-President of Education

Maria Borc
Vice-President of Welfare

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Vice-President of Operations

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Vice-President of Activities

Alex Auyang
Secretary

Matthew Leontsinis
Treasurer



President's message

APARNA PILLAI

Recent activity

With the year coming to a close, the RCSU committee has been busy with a few key issues. The education and welfare faculty reps have been focussed on ensuring that feedback on TRAs is being brought back to relevant departmental staff. We have noticed that the Physics and Maths departments in particular have had an overwhelming amount of negative feedback about the style of exams. Aside from this, we have had our award ceremony for the Science Challenge which has gone very successfully. We have also shifted our focus towards securing sponsorships so that we can offer more career events for students in FoNS in the following academic year. There are ongoing plans to expand our Alumni network and organise events in the upcoming months to engage our Alumni. Finally, we have been selecting volunteers in RCSU for the colours awards that will be announced very soon!

Looking forward

We are making plans for handovers, particularly to have a shared platform where we can pass on information from year to year, and store reflections and feedback. Hopefully this establishes a better way to ensure continuity of information and provides an alternative resource for incoming committee members.

We have also been planning in-person events for RCSU students to close off the year and hopefully there will be more events to follow in the summer and starting next year.



Secretary's message

ALEX AU YANG

We haven't had much of a chance to use the office this year. Now that restrictions are easing, the committee has been coming into the office more frequently. Currently, it's very disorganized, so we are hoping to clean it up as a group soon to ensure that next year's committee inherits a tidy space.

RCSU colours nominations have closed, and the panel has selected this year's award recipients. The ceremony will be on the 17th or 18th of this month, depending on availability.

Despite being in our office, the middle section of Theta went missing a little over a month ago. Recently, I've found out that it was taken by the CGCU, which is honestly a relief. Hopefully we will be able to collect the whole of Theta from them this summer and bring him to freshers' events.



Activities

MAREYA SABA

Secret Valentine's Messages

This year for Valentine's Day we decided it would be a great idea to become a virtual messenger service for Valentine's messages, as this year it is more important than ever that we help people stay connected! We received an overwhelming number of messages and delivered these anonymously via email. Many of them were appreciative messages to friends, and at the time when the country was in lockdown and most people were isolated from friends and loved ones, an initiative like this really brightened some people's days!

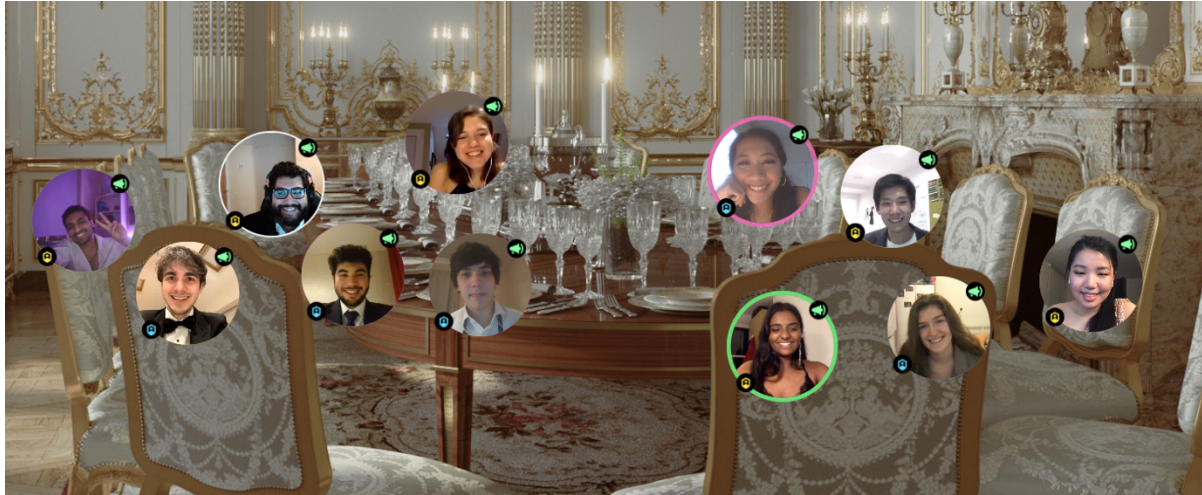
RCSU x CGCU Black Tie Dinner & Cocktails

We teamed up with the CGCU to re-imagine the big annual social event as a virtual black-tie dinner. For this event, we used a platform called SpatialChat – a 'proximity video chat' where you can only hear and see people that are close to you within the virtual rooms, allowing groups to have separate conversations easily. As such, the platform emanated real-life interactions very well and was a new and exciting experience for the large majority of students who attended!

The caterers, Chef In My Kitchen, delivered high quality meals to every attendee, along with preparation instructions so that everyone could eat at the same time on the night of the event. We also provided the option for students to receive a cocktail shaker and a highball glass engraved with the RCSU logo, to use for the cocktail-making part of the evening. We encouraged students to send in photographs of their food and held a competition for the best presented dishes, with categories of starter, main, dessert and cocktail – the four winners received Amazon voucher prizes!



Overall, the event was extremely successful, giving people a chance to dress up, for maybe the first time in a while, and breaking away from the Zoom/Teams standard for a fun, new alternative.



Committee picture on Spatial Chat

Looking forward to end of year events

With restrictions lifting and the exam season coming to a close, we are looking forward to running a few more events towards the end of June. Our Sports Officer has organised some rounders games on 12th June in Hyde Park, which will be our first in-person event of the year. We are also hopeful for a Garden Party event which would take place in the Union as well as a formal dinner party in an external venue!



Operations

MAYA LOPEZ

Broadsheet

In the second term, our Broadsheet completed the second edition of the year and it has been distributed digitally. This was done alongside the advertisement of the second competition Broadsheet team held, which was a poetry competition. We were also able to distribute the prizes for our first photography competition and feature some of the top winners' works.

Overall, this year's Broadsheet has been very successful to maintain student lead magazine endeavor but also successful in increasing the student engagement through newly held competitions. The latter was particularly effective as we had amount of engagement that is not attained by a single edition usually and celebrate the artistic side of the communication from the student body. The quality of the publications were also wonderful, despite the technical hinderance it first experienced with transition to fully remote endeavor. It is evident that the new position of Deputy Broadsheet Editor has greatly enhanced these advancements so it would be important to keep the current system intact. It would be consideration for next year to how much of the process to be maintained remote to best efficiently run this operation.

Alumni and Sponsorship

In term 2, the Alumni officer was able to host a Pub Quiz as a networking opportunity for current students and individual alumni. The officer and president in person has also explored options we may have (and perhaps encourage next year to take) in order to establish a more responsive and communicative relationship with current and graduated RCSU students.



On the sponsorship front, the subcommittee actually remained within the Operation committee as the officer reassessed intertwined nature of possible sponsor's interest to major operations that are being held. Some approach has been made few possible sponsor candidates and while direct sponsorship was not established, different student opportunities were delivered at times in departmental scale.

Science Challenge

This year, science challenge has experience nearly three times more entry than last year. This success was made possible through the officer's effort on outreach to schools and new category of teams which allowed students to tackle potentially difficult Science concepts as a group. On the hindsight we also experienced lack of manpower particularly due to this massive growth in scale, but we were able to formally host Science Challenge even in fully remote conditions. We expect the outline of reorganization of this operation that will be made over summer to be kept as a basis of next year's Science Challenge to sustain the growth and further build upon it. It will also be critical to invest in more automated website/submission process as well.



Academic representation

DANIYAR GHANI

In the months before summer exams, we wanted to ensure that students were sufficiently prepared for the new, open-book format of exams. We encouraged departments to provide students with the necessary learning resources and exam guidance. At the time, this appeared to have been successful as each department was implementing actions to support students.

Throughout exam season, however, students reported issues with the open-book exams, particularly concerning the difficulty of exams in some departments. This has been raised at departmental and Faculty level. We want to make sure departments are fully aware of any problems related to open-book exams this year so that they can be investigated properly.

All RCSU academic rep roles for next year have been filled, and we will be working on handovers over the next few weeks.

The academic reps have consistently worked hard this year, collecting and raising feedback on multi-mode education, among other efforts to improve the academic experience in their departments. The work of all RCSU reps has been, and will continue to be, important in shaping the delivery of teaching next academic year.



Welfare representation

MARIA BORC

Last term, our main focus was on Welfare Week.

Speed Friending Bingo - An event aimed to help people socialise and meet students from other departments in a fun, relaxed setting.

Sign Language - We were lucky enough to be able to hold 2 events and increase our reach, The first one was focused around understanding the history and culture of British Sign Language, whilst the second one was a workshop where all participants learnt some basics in BSL.

Games Afternoon with RSM - Since the RSM were also holding their Welfare Week at that time, we decided to hold an event together in order to increase chances for students from both unions to mix together. Held on Discord, the event had a wide variety of games so that all students would feel included.

Yoga - In order to cater to students' schedules, we also decided to hold 2 events that day. The first one was a classical yoga flow session, whilst the second one focused on relieving back pain, which many students have been dealing with due to bad posture from sitting at desks all day.

Arts - Once again, we were able to have 2 events which were also quite different in order to try and attract more students. The first one was a workshop on painting with coffee whilst the other one was a more social one where students got to meet new people whilst speed sketching them.

Overall, we had a wide variety of events, catering to different needs of students. Unfortunately, it was quite poorly attended, even with the many incentives of prizes and giveaways that came with participating in the events.



Indeed, later in the term, we organized a big wellbeing giveaway for all RCSU students. The prize was a parcel that we put together filled with things such as a stress ball, a small fluffy toy, candles, reed diffusers, condoms.

The Departmental Representatives continued to be very involved in their department and bringing on change.



Finance and societies

MATTHEW LEONTSINIS

Societies Report

The COVID crisis marked a significant change to the nature of CSP activity across the board this year. In many respects, however, the pandemic has been particularly challenging for Departmental Societies (DepSocs), who are uniquely responsible for fostering a sense of community among a large number of students alongside their Constituent Union. Nevertheless, RCSU DepSocs have achieved exceptional results. PhySoc, for example, successfully launched their student-led Physics Review magazine this year, alongside organising a whole host of well-attended online talks. Nearly all of the DepSocs have organised a range of stimulating online activities/lectures with good levels of student engagement, including some fairly innovative new events. They have also achieved an impressive level of external sponsorship, which bodes well for future years.

The annual budgeting process was well-handled by the DepSocs, with presidents and treasurers proving cooperative and engaged. I was able to meet with the relevant figure from every society to talk through their financial plans for next year and ensure sustainable grant requests were made. Overall, our constituent societies have ambitious projects in the works for the coming year and are all in good financial shape, aside from BioSoc. All of them deserve a special mention for their thorough work on budgeting this year, which made the process as painless as possible.

I would like to once again bring BioSoc's financial situation to the attention of the Council. The society's lack of funding has proved a serious issue for their activity, severely limiting their ability to provide events (and hence a sense of community) for their students. It is imperative that the Department



provide them with appropriate support next year and that this situation is carefully monitored.

RSCU Finances

The RCSU's financial position continues to be strong. We enjoyed a successful annual budgeting process this year and are grateful to have received a considerable increase in grant funding compared to last year, which we have largely budgeted to increase the inclusivity of our activities.

We may find an exciting outlet for the savings that we have built up owing to the pandemic in the form of a potential end-of-year ball, which the Activities Subcommittee are currently planning.

It has been a pleasure to work with all members of the Executive Committee on matters of financing this year.