

**Faculty of Natural Sciences
Undergraduate Student Staff Committee**

Date: Wednesday 7 February 2018

Time: 12.30-14.00

Location: HXLY 341

MINUTES

Present:

Abhijay Sood- Chair (AS)	RCSU Academic Affairs Officer
Emma McCoy- co-Chair (EMc)	Vice-Dean (Education) FoNS
Yizhou Yu (YY)	Biology Department Student Representative
Michaela Flegrova (MF)	Physics Department Student Representative
Lidia Ripoll Sanchez (LRS)	Biochemistry Department Student Representative
Isabel Esain Garcia (IEG)	Biochemistry Y2 Student Representative
Ruihua Zhang (RZ)	Maths Y1 Student Representative
Alex Dyer (AD)	Physics Y4 Student Representative
Huw Williams (HW)	DUGS Life Sciences
Jing Zhang (JZ)	Senior Tutor, Physics
David Evans (DE)	DUGS Mathematics
Anita Hall (AH)	Faculty Senior Tutor
Rebecca Middleton (RM)	Faculty Education Manager
Michael Edwards (ME)	RCSU President
Shervin Sabeghi (SS)	RCSU Welfare Officer
Becky Neil (BN)	RCSU vice-President Operations
Nicholas Burstow (NB)	ICU Deputy President (Education)
Nazia Hirjee (NH)	Faculty Operations Officer
Rob Law (RL)	Senior Tutor, Chemistry
Anamaria Grijincu (AG)	Biochemistry Year 1 Rep
Peter Hull (PH)	Maths Year 2 Rep
Christos Klerides (CK)	Maths Year 3 Rep
Timothy Marley (TM)	Physics Year 3 Rep
Michael McGill (MM)	Maths UG Departmental Representative
Bob Forsyth (BF)	Physics Director of Undergraduate Studies
Rohan Mehta (RM)	Biochemistry Year 1 Rep

Apologies:

Donald Craig (DC)	Acting DUGS Chemistry
Katerina Stavri (KS)	Chemistry Department Student Representative

1. Welcome and Apologies

AS welcomed the attendees to the meeting and apologies, as above, were noted.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2017

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

3. Review of Actions

All actions raised at the meeting of 15 November 2017 have been completed- see action tracker.

4. Reports from Department Student Representatives:

4.1 Life Sciences – Biochemistry

The Biochemistry Student Representative tabled a report, which is summarised below:

Academic

- Biochemistry first year has a new year convenor, Dr Anita Hall. The first year student representatives have already started working with her.
- BiochemSoc in collaboration with other departmental societies has started a very successful Python course (on the first day >80 people assisted). This helps increase student computing knowledge in our department.
- In response to last year's NSS comments the department has started leaving 2 days of holidays after exams period before starting the new term. This is a much appreciated measure by students.

Community building

Student representatives' main aim this year is to enhance the community feeling in the department, besides performing the standard activities of the role. In line with this aim, they have asked faculty and the RCSU to help the Department in getting more common spaces for Life Scientists.

- As well, in line with the aim of community building the reps continue organising activities in collaboration with the department and BiochemSoc. Among those are the Christmas decoration party, the quiz with lecturers and the leavers' ball.
- As a response of student interest (especially final year) and in collaboration with Biology and the wellbeing representatives, it has been decided to organise a Town hall meeting on mid or end of March.

4.2 Life Sciences – Biology

- The Biology Dept Rep initiated a discussion on the lack of effective space/common room for students to use after lectures for study, rest or until next lecture. It was pointed out that Medics have a common room for their exclusive use, which is underused. The College should be encouraged to reach a compromise on effective distribution of space for students where no facility is available. It was suggested that a proposal that Medics and Life Scientists share common room space in SAF should be tabled to Alan Spivey, the Assistant Provost- Learning and Teaching, and the outcome reported back at next meeting.
- NH reported that a working committee had been set up to develop a shared space for students, which included a proposal to redesign the SAF ground floor. Costings had been obtained with a view to progression of a shared space if funds were available. The proposal could be resurrected for further discussion at the working committee but at an increased cost.

ACTION: AS to contact Alan Spivey to discuss whether it might be possible to revisit the proposal to redesign space in SAF to create a shared common room area, and to emphasise the view that space should be prioritised for those departments which currently have none available.

- Regarding the FoNS/ RCSU Student Survey it was reported that reps had wanted to add some questions relating to the levels and types of stress that students experienced, however, it was noted that the survey had already been sent out to students and a number had already completed it.

4.3 Chemistry – nothing to report.

4.4 Mathematics

The FoNS/RCSU Student Survey had not yet been distributed. Reps are planning to promote the survey soon.

4.5 Physics (Paper 2)

The Physics Dept Rep submitted a report, which is summarised below:

Various SSC meetings took place in January and February, one for each year. Issues discussed included:

- Problematic lecture course in Term 1 (Vibrations & Waves). Additional support to be offered in Term 2 so that students can prepare for exams.
- Lab survey. Problems had been noted and changes are to be made. UROP students are being recruited now to help with the implementation.
- Generally lack of demonstrators in Y3 labs, leading to a lack of support during labs, and also delays with marking. Teaching allocation could potentially be completed earlier for next year to prevent this from happening again.
- An NSS review panel has been set up to analyse the NSS scores and comments and to discuss changes. Panel had met once in December. No conclusions have been drawn yet.
- SSC guidelines have been revisited and the agenda writing process for the SSC meetings is to become more transparent, allowing for more input from the staff members.
- It had been pointed by the rep team that the department often takes long to react to problems and changes are often not implemented as quickly as they could be. The HoD is looking into the problem and a meeting with the reps to further discuss the issue.
- A Rep Hot Desk event took place in January and 150 responses were received.
- "Town Hall Meetings" have taken place. Going forward staff members and reps relevant to each year are to be available in a lecture theatre to meet with students and answer questions.

5. Department Student Staff Committees - Updates

See **Reports from Department Student Representatives** above.

6. FoNS/RCSU Student Survey

Good response to the RCSU Student survey received to date except for Mathematics. Full data will be shared at the end of the survey with any redactions made, if any staff are referred to by name.

7. Annual Monitoring Reports

Annual Monitoring Reports have been completed and have been made available online to students. Judith Webster from Registry is working on making the external examiner reports that form part of the annual monitoring process available and visible to all on the Registry website.

8. UROP Bursaries

It was noted that a meeting had been scheduled between RM, FoE, Registry Student Finance and the Assistant Registrar (Placements) on 09 February to discuss UROP funding and specifically, student feedback regarding the bursary levels, which are not in line with the cost of living in London. RM will report back to the next SSC.

ACTION: RM to report back to SSC on any progress made from meeting of 09 Feb to discuss UROP Bursaries.

It was also noted that there were discrepancies in the way Imperial Bursary funds are allocated, with students being treated differently dependant on year of entry/ income bracket- with some students in the middle income bracket receiving £300 and others only £600. It was agreed that EMc and NH should bring the discrepancy to the attention of Malcolm Edwards, and to request that a one-off adjustment is made to students receiving the lower level of payment.

ACTION: EMc and NH to bring the discrepancy in the Imperial Bursary payment amount to the attention of Malcolm Edwards, and to request that a one-off adjustment is made to students receiving the lower level of payment.

9. The NSS response

A draft response from the ICU has been prepared. Need to follow up on various actions before final review.

10. Chair's business

10.1 Proposal to integrate Horizons/ BPES into the core curriculum

Students did not think it beneficial to take a compulsory 5 ECTS module outside of their core subject e.g. a student doing a degree in Physics having to do a horizon course in Spanish or any subject in which they are not specifically interested. Other concerns raised included:

- Progression- would a student be unable to progress if they failed a compulsory 5 ECTS Horizons/ BPES module?
- Class size and resourcing- one of the key benefits of Horizons was noted as being the small class sizes- this would not be possible if it were compulsory for all students.
- Module choice- currently Horizons offer a system whereby students have to select a 1st/ 2nd/ 3rd choice. If compulsory, student would like to know that they would get their 1st choice of module.
- Quality and assessment- student raised concerns regarding the quality of the module offering and level of assessment. It was generally felt that Horizons and BPES modules were not comparable in terms of level of study with courses offered within Departments.
- Some students would prefer the opportunity to take modules from other Departments, rather than from Horizons/ BPES.

Further discussions with the Education Faculty Committee are needed to review the proposal.

10.2 The SACAS

Nominations have exceeded previous years' totals, with 1320 nominations received to date. The deadline for nominations is Sunday 11 Feb.

SS mentioned the disparity between promotion for the Big Elections and the SACAs, having seen much more regarding the latter. NB explained that the ICU had chosen to focus on one major campaign at a time this year. Once the SACA nominations closed, all efforts would move to promoting the Leadership Elections. This year there was an overlap between the two campaigns, but this would not be the case next year.

10.3 The NSS Response Rates

RM reported that the latest response rates (as of 05 Feb) were as shown below:

Biology- 23.64%

Biochemistry- 17.45%

Chemistry- 65.33%

Maths- 25.53%

Physics- 51.43%

10.4 TEF Submission

A government led initiative from the Department for Business Innovations & Skills which will form part of an education provider's Teaching Excellence Framework. Gold Silver & Bronze Awards will be made for TEF Submissions. The deadline for returning data is next Friday. Students to be kept informed of results of the College.

10.5 UCU Strike Action

AH explained the rationale for the UCU strike action and confirmed that the dates in question were as follows:

Week 1-	22 and 23 Feb
Week 2-	26, 27 and 28 Feb
Week 3-	5,6,7,and 8 Feb
Week 4-	12,13,14,15 and 16 Feb

AS encouraged students to support staff and noted that the UCU stance would be in the interests of students in the longer term. He noted that he would be bringing a paper to Union Council to both support staff and encourage renegotiation to avoid strike action.

It was agreed that the RCSU President, ME, should write a note to the Dean of Natural Sciences outlining the formal RCSU position. It was also agreed that the RCSU should disseminate the UCU statement to students.

ACTION: ME to write a note to the Dean of Natural Sciences outlining the formal RCSU position on the UCU strike action pending the outcome of the Union Council meeting on 13 February 2018.

ACTION: The RCSU to disseminate the UCU statement to students pending the outcome of the Union Council meeting on 13 February 2018.

11. Dates of Future Meetings:

- 12 March 2018 12.30-14.00
- 20 June 2018 12.30-14.00