

Royal College of Science Association Deputy President's Report 2019



Introduction

Welcome to the RCSA 2019 Annual General Meeting. This is the first general meeting since 2017, following a hiatus in 2018. The RCSA was relatively inactive in 2018 (aside from the very successful 110th dinner hosted by Lord Fox at the House of Lords) but as of Spring 2019, the Association has been experiencing a return to activity. This paper aims to lay out:

- A view the challenges facing the RCSA
- A summary of the activities developed and carried out to address these challenges
- The plan for future progress in the coming year
- The present talent needs and how you can get involved

In doing so, this paper will highlight that the RCSA is an organisation that has continued to struggle in many aspects but has also implemented a series of changes and initiatives that are designed to build brand relevance and activity, bring the organisation into the 21st century, and ultimately deliver membership growth.

We have been changing the organisation to be future-fit within the limitations of availability and skills within the present committee; however, we would love to move further and faster. If you believe you have something to offer the committee, or know someone who might, we would be very keen to hear from you.

A. Challenges

As many of you are probably aware, the RCSA has faced multiple challenges in many dimensions over several decades, which, if anything, have intensified over recent years. The committee sees the most important challenges falling under 3 major categories:

- **Reduced relevance of the RCSU/ RCSA**, due to
 - Imperial brand taking primacy over RCS; through changes in College academic (e.g., use of Faculty of Natural Science replaced the RCS) and student activity (IC Union more prevalent than RCSU)
 - Technology enabling others to stay in contact (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook etc.)
 - Increased activity and resources from the College alumni relations department
- **Declining and disengaged membership**, manifest as:
 - Lack of activity/offer to members in recent years
 - Reduction in annual fees being paid
 - Very low (<20 p.a.) new members
- **Limited existing organisational capabilities:**
 - Low level of digitisation, self-serve and automation of back-office process (e.g., new membership onboarding, banking)
 - Broken information and communications (e.g., unconfirmed membership lists, different mailing lists)
 - Inflexible governance and committee structure

- Limited availability of committee who are collectively lacking all desired/required skills and ideation

In totality the threat is high; at stake is the RCSA's existence. Our assessment is that without substantive change to the organisation the RCSA would have to seriously consider winding down, rather than continue with a poor service to its members and a gloomy outlook to the future health of the organisation.

This said, all is not lost yet. Over the last 9 months we have started the journey to address these challenges and, whilst there are still substantive difficulties to overcome, we believe that the course of action we have developed will provide the organisation with a clear and distinctive purpose in the alumni landscape and a sustainable future.

B. Current direction and activities carried out to address identified challenges

In the last year, we have been **moving to directly address the crises that RCSA face by following the initiative areas below**. There are strong signals of potential in many areas, however, the restricted funding and low availability of willing, qualified volunteers have meant that we have not yet made progress in all areas of activity.

The initiative areas the RCSA have focused on are:

- **Build a strong and relevant RCSA brand**
 - Fostering close collaboration with the RCSU; without a strong RCSU the RCSA is irrelevant to students
 - Establishing a meaningful digital presence, inc. website and social media activity*
 - Redesign of graphics and logos*
- **Bring the core organisational up to 21st century to reduce administrative burden, improve continuity and release committee time**
 - Modular structure of a central Exec. delegating authority and finance to self-running units (e.g., Sparks cup, Young Professional network)
 - Use labour-saving digital services where appropriate (e.g., mailchimp, member mojo - a digital, self-serve membership database)
 - Re-platformed the website to improve speed in use and enable multi-editor access
 - Pursue digital-first mindset for governance and meetings (e.g, Exec calls, potentially move committee meetings to Zoom or VC)
- **Pursue net membership growth**
 - Establishing a dedicated Young Professional network to better serve young graduates of the RCS and act as a growth engine
 - Restart regular activities and communications to membership*
 - Digital-led, self-serve onboarding process (inc. card payments capability)*
 - Pursue partnerships with other organisations and commercial partners to build a compelling offer for membership*

Collectively we believe these areas give us the best chance of realising a sustainable future for the RCSA. Below we give further detail on the recent activities that have progressed the initiative areas stated above. This said in many activities (those marked with '*'), we have yet to make meaningful progress due to a deficit in skills in the committee or other activities being prioritised. We will expand on this in more detail in the final section of this paper.

C. Report on recent activities

1. Young Professional Network (YPN)

The YPN is dedicated to creating a strong community for recent science graduates at Imperial, by bringing together alumni and students to socialise and share experiences of the professional world.

The YPN was launched by Dongwhi Kim (Chemistry 2014) and Nas Andriopoulos (author, RCSA DP, Chemistry with Molecular Physics 2016), with the help of the then RCSU committee members Mike McGill (Maths 2019) and Sully Mughal (Chemistry and Management 2019), in June 2019. The YPN built on the organisers' experience of running a series of successful alumni social events and CV talks/feedback sessions with the Chemistry Society over the last 3 years. Now a similar activity was brought under the brand and support of the RCS and has demonstrated early signs of promise (see summary of the first event below). Since the YPN has passed the proof of concept stage, the intention is to accelerate the roll-out and run more frequent activities in the coming term.

Report on RCSA Young Alumni Launch – Union Bar, June 2019

Overall a good event which proved the YPN concept successful and exceeded expectations in terms of alumni turnout but failed to get the desired student engagement. We resolve to run a similar social event again at a more convenient time of year.

- *With almost zero alumni-facing advertising we had **40+ alumni attend**, all graduates from the last 7 years. Personal approaches did work well. Some attendees willing to get involved in organising in the future.*
- ***Despite 60 registrations, only ~20 students turned up** which was far below expectations. This was attributed to poor timing within the academic year, rather than lack of marketing.*
- *Spend is still to be confirmed with RCSU, but likely between £300-400, which was under budget. The RCSU also made a contribution to support the event.*
- *Technical issues meant we **were not able to take new memberships on the day** via card or website, despite students/graduates wanting to join as members. This is a priority to fix ahead of future events*
- *Registries submitted a non-Imperial email address to attend and we have acquired GDPR-compliant permissions to contact them in future*

2. RCSU Committee Coaching

Related to the YPN, Nas A. and Dongwhi K. also provided some light-tough informal mentoring to the RCSU President this year, which has fostered closer relationships with the RCSU and made collaboration relatively seamless. This was overall a very positive relationship and we thank Mike. M for his efforts and look forward to welcoming him as a member. We also thank him for introducing us to the new RCSU President, Alex Auyang, whom we hope to foster an even closer relationship, through which we can make ourselves available to offer guidance and support to him and the wider Exec committee.

3. Modernising the Core

- a. Association banking** - Duncan Robertson (Chemistry 1997, RCSA Treasurer) has been engaging with Natwest to ensure that we have the correct banking signatories in order to migrate to a digital-first, multiple access point account. This will allow us to engage direct debits, receive card payments and automate financial reporting, particularly on memberships paid. This is an ongoing affair since Natwest have lost records of previous signatory changes, delaying the transition.

- b. **Payments** – Related to the above, we want the organisation to be able to move to a seamless service that new members will expect, including a standard card-based or Direct Debit-based payment mechanism. A key dependency is getting bank account access updated.
- c. **Membership management** - The day-to-day account management has historically been a core responsibility of the Secretary role. Whilst account creation or change events are rare, summed over the entirety of the membership this becomes a non-trivial duty. Over time, incomplete recordkeeping and infrequent monitoring of the secretary's inbox has meant that we do not have an up-to-date, unified membership or mailing list; rather a set of email addresses in excel tables and a list of bank transactions. Therefore, to improve the service to members, create one record of truth and lower reliance on secretary continuity we have trialled a web-based membership service, Membership Mojo. Our intention is transition from manual, static record keeping to using this self-serve digital system as our primary membership database as soon as practicable.
- d. **Mailchimp** - we have migrated the mailing list to Mailchimp to provide analytics and response management services.
- e. **Standing meetings** - the Exec have been conducting a standing phone call every three weeks to discuss RCSA business. Over the summer there were two committee meetings: the first offered an opportunity to reset after a period of absence and was an overwhelmingly positive meeting, also attended by the Dean of FoNS; the second was severely hindered by lack of availability of technology, essentially meaning the meeting was deferred. In future we will ensure that committee meetings occur on a quarterly basis, with function technological support for committee members who cannot attend in person.

4. Sparks Cup - June 2018

Sparks Cup, an historic intermural rugby tournament, is now in its third year since reinstatement. The tournament is organised by students under the supervision of Stephen Davies (Biochemistry and Management 2017). This saw ~70 students and alumni descend upon Grasshoppers RFC for the round-robin tournament. After an initial investment from the RCSA to reinstate the tournament three years ago, the running costs are primarily met by our yearly contribution, but as of next year we will be working with the CGCA and RSMA to balance the funding contributions across the associations, whilst looking to increase the size of the event. For a full match report please see rcsa.org.uk .

D. Plans for the next academic year

The program of activities for the coming year will be a continuation of the direction we have laid out in section B. We will **focus on developing the Young Professionals Network, completing upgrades to the core infrastructure, and restarting regular activities and communications**. Much of this can be delivered by current resource, but others, particularly comms and marketing is contingent on acquiring new skills to the committee.

Planned events currently are:

- **September** - RCSU Committee training (led by the RCSA YPN)
- **October** (provisionally 24th) - RCSA Young Professionals - Careers Tips & Tricks for graduate applications

- **November** - Autumn committee meeting
- **December** - RCSA Young Professionals - 2019 End of Year Social
- **Spring** - Talk from students who were granted funding by the RCS Trust via the Exploration Board for excursions this year
- **Spring** - RCSA Annual Dinner/ social (tbc)
- **Summer** - RCSA Young Professionals - Graduating students social

Planned activities that we can deliver with current resources:

- **Banking** - complete migration to digital, multi-access account
- **Payments** - complete Go Cardless registration, direct debit registration and acquire card payment terminal (e.g., iZettle)
- **Membership** - complete migration to membership mojo
- **Mail list** - update mail chimp with full, unified and up-to-date membership list
- **Committee structure** - bring formal revisions to reflect modular structure to committee and next AGM

Planned activities that we would like to deliver, but lack the current resource/ expertise:

- **Communications** - restart regular communications (email, social media, website) on association activities and matters of interest to members. We would appreciate someone with communications, marketing or social media management experience to come on board to assist.
- **Entertainments** - develop/coordinate a program of events, potentially one a term. We would like recruit someone to lead entertainments with freedom to program events that appeal to the membership (e.g., annual dinner etc.) and sub-groups of membership (e.g., discipline specific talks)

If you would be able to volunteer time in these areas, we would be very interested to speak with you. If we are not able to identify willing, qualified volunteers we will look to acquire these services commercially on a part-time basis, although the cost associated with this would require funds to be released from our reserves.

Close

I hope this gives an indication of the direction and activities of the society. I want to reassert that we are confident that the direction we have outlined will deliver a future for the RCSA, but as with any transformation there remains a risk of failure, and like most volunteer-based organisations that risk is fundamentally related to key volunteer availability. If you can at all spare some time to assist with the day to day running of the Association or have an idea for a new activity within the Association, please get in contact. We are always open to new ideas where the RCSA can leverage its infrastructure and funding to support activities for the benefit of our members.

For further information, questions or to get involved in the RCSA committee please reach out to royalcollegescienceassociation@gmail.com.

Yours faithfully,



Nas Andriopoulos
Deputy President, Royal College of Science Association

On behalf of the Executive Committee