

## **Departmental Societies**

*A note by the Deputy President (Clubs & Societies)*

### **Background**

Historically departmental societies have existed throughout many departments in the College, mainly in the Engineering and Science departments and until reasonably recently only on the South Kensington campus.

There is virtually nothing contained within the Union's policies regarding the detailed operation of departmental societies, the only reference being from the Clubs & Societies Policy:

*"42. The above policies shall apply to the formation of departmental societies with the exception that all matters relating to their creation, and any requisite additional measures, shall be considered by the relevant Faculty Union in the place of the New Clubs and Societies Committee."*

This reference merely relates to the establishment of a departmental society, there is nothing regarding membership of departmental societies in particular.

### **Current situation**

The membership of a departmental society is somewhat unclear. While it is relatively obvious for departments such as Mechanical Engineering, where undergraduates and postgraduates in the department are members of MechSoc, it is somewhat less clear in other areas:

- Some departments are undergraduate only (eg. School of Medicine, Life Sciences), while some are postgraduate only (eg. Division of Biology, NHLLI, Centre for Environmental Policy). This creates some confusion in departmental society "reach", for example should postgraduates in the Division of Biology be members of BioSoc?
- Life Sciences has two "departmental" societies which are effectively now course societies – BioChemSoc and BioSoc.
- Some courses straddle departments and the associated departmental society is sometimes unclear. For example JMC (Maths & Computing) has a society – JMCsoc, but ISE (Computing & EEE) does not. It is unclear to which departmental society ISE students should therefore belong.
- Where courses straddle departments it is not clear if the students on such courses have membership of the various departmental societies as well of the hosting departments as well. For example should JMC students be members of DocSoc, MathSoc and JMCsoc?
- Some courses arguably have potential "membership rights" over more than one departmental society from the "style" of the course option – for example graduate entry medicine students for GradMed and MedEd, or Geophysics students joining GeoPhysSoc or DLB.
- For courses with a significant component beyond the host department, should these students have membership of the departmental society of the other department as well. For example a student studying Maths with Management

– they are currently a member of MathSoc, but should they be a member (of a currently hypothetical) departmental society of the Management School for their year there?

- Conversely there are also gaps within the coverage of departmental societies – some courses do not have an associated departmental society at present, particularly postgraduate ones.

With postgraduate courses particularly becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, there is no provision for students to join another departmental society – for example a BioPhysics student might wish to join the BioEngineering society from an academic point of view; while a Medical student may wish to join DLB from an interest perspective.

There is also a potential argument based in equal access to extra-curricular opportunities by restricting the membership of these societies, indeed in probable contravention of our own Clubs & Societies policy:

*“60. All Full Members of the Union are entitled to join any club or society, unless a club or society is registered with a government agency or national governing body which prohibits membership of affiliated clubs and societies on certain grounds. Membership may only be restricted on unavoidable legal or insurance issues (e.g. firearms control). Clubs and societies shall exercise the minimum possible restriction of membership, and inform the CSC or Faculty Union and Deputy President (Clubs & Societies) of any such restriction. The Deputy President (Clubs & Societies) may strike out any prohibition on membership.”*

Having somewhat limited clarity on membership presents challenges regarding elections to committee positions for departmental societies. Recently the issue has been raised about whether someone studying on a course which straddles two departments is a member of both the host departments’ departmental societies, and therefore whether they are able to stand for election to a committee position in one of them.

### **Proposed changes to clarify the position**

1. To amend the Clubs & Societies Policy to reflect that applications to begin departmental societies should be referred to the New Clubs Committee for consistency.
2. From now on to make reference to these societies as course based societies, reflecting better their function and the current structure of the College, especially with regards to increasing provision of postgraduate opportunities.
3. That each course based society has a defined list of course codes for which membership of said society is automatically derived for those studying on those courses.
4. Each course code shall have one and only one course based society for which membership is automatically derived. This membership will be free. The association between course code and course based society will be determined by the ultimate (sole) lead host department in areas of uncertainty.
5. Appendix 1 shows how course codes currently in use are matched to course based societies, and where gaps currently exist.

6. Individuals are free to join any course based society they may wish – this will be processed in the normal way via the website. A charge may be made levied for those wishing to do this.
7. Any member of a course based society (whether deriving their membership automatically or not) is eligible to stand for election to the committee of that society.
8. Grant awards for course based societies will continue to not be subject to budget release dependent on membership numbers.

For example a student studying JMC will derive automatic membership of JMCSoc for no cost, but is welcome to then join any other course based society. They may wish to join MathSoc or DoCSoc, for which those societies may charge a fee. Once a member of MathSoc or DoCSoc they are free to stand for election to a committee position in those societies.

**Operational note:** All courses which straddle departments have a host department; it is this host department which will continue to be used to establish which Management Group a course based society is placed into. For example JMC is hosted by the maths department – it is therefore placed under RCSU.

**Governance note:** The electorate within the constitutions of the Faculty and Constituent Unions are based upon students' membership of a faculty, department or campus, which are derived from the course of study, not the membership of a Club or Society managed via that Faculty or Constituent Union. Standing for election to an officer position in a Faculty or Constituent Union is therefore restricted to those studying on a defined list of courses. For example while a bioengineering student could join the surgical society, they could not stand as ICSMSU Clubs & Societies Officer.

**For discussion**

Is this a good idea?

Are there any potential problems?

There will follow a proper policy from whatever is agreed.