

Croquet Club closure appeal

Eugene Chang, RCC Croquet Club Treasurer

Background:

About the club

RCC Croquet club ('the club') has been in existence since 2003 as a (predominantly) summer club, in line with the regular croquet playing season. In each of the last 3 years at least (since the new online eActivities records started), the club has reached its 20 members following late surges during each summer term.

In each of the past few years, the RCC have made the club dormant in its December review only to have the club come out of dormancy come the summer. This academic year, the club was made dormant at the RCC General Meeting of 8 December 2011 and was effectively dormant for only 2 months when the closure decision was made.

The club has a small SGI of around £130, two complete croquet sets and a number of club mallets purchased through the 4-5 years.

The club receives half a dozen requests each year regarding the possibility of commercial lawn and equipment hire. It has entered local croquet leagues and entered the UK inter-university croquet student championships nearly every year since 2005, reaching semi-finals and finals in almost all years.

The club membership is £2, which is significantly lower than any other Croquet club in SW London (£150 at Parsons Green, £44 at Ealing).

This year there were a modest number of sign-ups at Freshers Fair, with a subsequent email out to the croquet club mailing list informing that the club would carry out the majority of its activities in the summer and to look out for emails then.

The Croquet club committee at the time consisted of Joseph Rumer (chair), Eugene Chang (treasurer) and Scott Heath (secretary). Of these committee members, the club treasurer is the longest-serving member on the committee and most experienced in the sport. Following the turn of events in the last month, Joseph has since resigned his position as club chair.

About the closure

Clubs and Societies Board (CSB) voted to close RCC Croquet club at the general meeting of Monday 27th February, 2012, following a paper presented by the Deputy President (Clubs and Societies) titled 'Clubs for Closure'. The RCC Chair and club secretary were present and did not present any arguments against the decision. The RCC Chair has since made clear that he will support this closure appeal.

The DPCS cited a lack of 20 members, and a need for clubs to make a valid use of Union resources, as the primary reason for Croquet Club being tabled in the paper. The club had 3 members when the paper was presented. Other specific points raised were that certain committees members had not completed Financial Responsibility forms or completed training quizzes.

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The DPCS claims to have contacted the club regarding the low membership numbers and stated that the club should contact her or the RCC Chair to discuss how to remedy the situation. The DPCS had informal discussion with the club secretary about the closure, and had also emailed the club chair.

Internal miscommunication between the Croquet Club committee meant that this threat of closure was not communicated to all by the club chair.

There was no formal communication from the DPCS to the club email account (croquet@imperial.ac.uk), its paid up club members or to the rest of the club about the fact that the club was being presented for closure. I found out about the closure through other means and would not have found out otherwise.

Arguments for the appeal:

Unfairness

The club has a history of late membership surges as a summer club – previous RCC chairs of the last 6 academic years know this, and the DPCS did not carry out enough research about this before bringing about this closure.

According to C&S Policy, clubs that have been dormant for 12 months can be closed by the relevant Management Group or through other means. The club had only been dormant for 2 months and thus I believe it was a very harsh decision to flag the club for review in February.

I believe that the DPCS did not give the club a fair chance of defending its position before bringing it to CSB for club closure. Club members were not notified of the potential closure action at all and the subsequent decision was not communicated through official channels. I believe the Union has a duty of responsibility to provide written warnings to first the club committee, then the club members about any potential club closure to allow the club a suitable chance to defend its position.

Inexperience and unfair penalty

Several members of this year's club committee are inexperienced at running a croquet club and were unaware that most of its activities take place during the summer.

There was no club committee meeting called this year to discuss prospective activities for the club and so it was unclear to all whether the club was intending to carry out activities for the year.

Not taking relevant online training and financial responsibility should only penalise the club financially, not in terms of its regular activities. In this case the trainings/forms were not undertaken by the then club chair Joseph Rumer and I don't think that, in itself, is a good enough reason to close a club, just because a club officer has not complied with Union rules to complete necessary paperwork.

Resources and activities

The club receives a small budget (<£50) from the Union each year, and has two boxes of equipment in Union stores. Other than that, there are no significant demands on Union resources other than for a standard club. The combined value of club equipment, while not top of the range, exceeds £500, and is difficult to sell to existing croquet clubs or to casual croquet players. I believe disposing of it would be a waste of Union resources.

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Furthermore, the club receives multiple requests regarding commercial hires and coaching, and is affiliated to the National Governing Body (providing representation, discounts to equipment, and opportunities for tournament play/coaching). The club is a regular competitor at the Student croquet championships each year in June. Closing the club would deny existing Imperial students the opportunity to take up the sport cheaply and have direct access to competition play.

Summary

Overall, I don't see why there was a good reason to close the club, given its dormancy status was set recently, the previous history of the club as a summer club and the relative insignificant cost to Union resources. Furthermore, I believe that the failure of the DPCS to contact all club members/committee was unfair, and that the club should not be penalised for individual failings of a single club committee member.

Decision required:

To reinstate RCC Croquet club.