

## Royal College of Science Union Recommendations for SSCs in the Faculty of Natural Sciences



Abhijay Sood (RCSU Academic Affairs Officer) and Shervin Sabeghi (RCSU Welfare Officer)

The first round of departmental SSCs have taken place for the academic year 2017-18. Faculty SSC is a suitable forum for sharing good practice, and encouraging consistency between departments where appropriate. The implementation of the Wellbeing Representation Network (WBRN) gives us an opportunity to review existing department practices, while accommodating the new network.

### The Current Situation

Faculty student representatives were present at each departmental SSC. The meetings were well attended, and broadly speaking student reps felt comfortable raising issues and engaging in reasonably productive and professional conversations.

However, there was some room for improvement. In most meetings, the majority of time was spent discussing very specific issues that were not necessarily directly relevant to most of those present (e.g. issues with specific lecture courses or deadlines). Partly for this reason, items later in the agenda could not always be discussed in sufficient detail, and in some meetings large, significant, department wide items (such as the NSS) were not explicitly discussed. There was also some confusion both between and within departments as to whether the new wellbeing reps should attend the departmental SSCs, and no clear guidance on this matter has been provided by the Union.

### Our suggestions

On Monday November 6<sup>th</sup>, Becky Neil (RCSU Vice President Operations), Shervin Sabeghi (RCSU Welfare Officer) and Abhijay Sood (RCSU Academic Affairs Officer) met with Rebecca Middleton (Faculty Education Coordinator), Anita Hall (Faculty Senior Tutor) and Emma McCoy (Faculty Vice Dean Education) to discuss the WBRN. During the meeting, department SSCs were raised, both considering how to improve existing practices and how best to integrate wellbeing reps into departmental structures. The following suggestions are advisory, and could be changed as a result of staff and rep input before being tailored to specific departments (considering department specific structures and time constraints).

### Sub-SSCs

To improve focus in departmental SSCs, it would be advisable to hold separate, smaller meetings between reps and relevant staff members. For example, in Physics, the Heads of Year and relevant year reps hold meetings in any month without a departmental SSC. Such meetings could help rebalance the departmental SSCs so that more time can be spent focussing department-wide issues during the meetings. These meetings should be minuted, but otherwise could be more informal than full SSCs.

As a general rule, dealing with issues "further down" (e.g. raising issues directly with a lecturer or experiment head rather than waiting to raise it at an SSC) tends to be more efficient and effective, and this should be encouraged where appropriate on the part of both staff members and student reps.

## WBRN and SSCs



Since the departmental SSCs are rather large meetings already, and the supposed purpose of having a separate rep network is to address oft-overlooked issues, we would suggest holding separate “wellbeing SSCs.” We envision these meetings being smaller and briefer than the academic SSCs, though this is open to change.

In order to ensure these meetings are not just a rerun of academic SSCs, chairs would be encouraged to focus agenda items on issues that are ordinarily overlooked at SSCs (such as financial and accommodation concerns, mental health support and so on). Wellbeing SSCs would be attended by the wellbeing Rep Team, as well as the academic Dep Rep. This is a small enough number to keep things productive, and by inviting the academic Dep Rep we can ensure that inconsistencies and repetition are avoided. The corollary of this is that the wellbeing Dep Reps should be invited to academic SSCs, for the same reasons. On the staff side, attendance would only be required on the part of certain staff members (e.g. the Senior Tutor, the student experience/liaison officer), though others would be welcome to attend.

We would propose the adoption of a similar structure at Faculty level, with the Welfare Officer being invited to the current “academic” SSCs, and the creation of a parallel “wellbeing” SSC involving the FoNS wellbeing Dep Reps, led by the RCSU Welfare Officer and Faculty Senior Tutor, to which the RCSU Academic Affairs Officer should be invited.

The aforementioned “Sub-SSCs” are better tailored to academic issues. The corresponding structure for wellbeing Representation would likely comprise the meetings between individual wellbeing Reps and a relevant staff member - generally the Senior Tutor, the Student Experience/Liaison Officer, or both.

### Proposal Table

For clarity, here is a table summarising our suggested approach.

Faculty	<b>FoNS Academic SSC</b> – remains as is, but RCSU Welfare Officer invited.	<b>FoNS Wellbeing SSC</b> – involves FoNS wellbeing reps, RCSU Academic Affairs Officer and relevant staff. Again, a forum for general issues that may have been hitherto overlooked.
Department	<b>Academic SSC</b> – involving academic reps, the wellbeing Dep Rep, and currently invited staff. Specific issues may be raised, but mostly a forum for department-wide academic issues.	<b>Wellbeing SSC</b> - involving wellbeing reps, the academic Dep Rep, and relevant staff. Focuses on wellbeing issues that may have been hitherto overlooked.
Sub-Department	<b>Sub-SSC</b> – between relevant academic reps and staff for a particular course/year. Focuses on specific issues in detail.	<b>Informal Meetings</b> – between a department’s wellbeing reps and staff, could be regularly scheduled. More sensitive issues, and those specific to e.g. only certain years can be discussed.

We appreciate that scheduling additional meetings could be inconvenient, however in the long run, improving efficiency by formalising structures as above could save time. Separate meetings would be more productive than joint ones; only inviting the academic Dep Rep to the wellbeing SSC and vice versa means the meetings are kept streamlined, and helps limit repetition. Going forward, it will be important to agree on steps departments can take ahead of Spring term, and what the aim is for SSCs in the next academic year. **If there are any concerns, please let us know.**