

ACADEMIC COUNCIL

MINUTES

Wednesday 8 December 2010

2.00-3.50 p.m. in AG01

PRESENT:

L Barry
F Blin
S Blott
M Brady
O Bree
P Brereton
J Brunton
J Bruton
C Byrne
P J Byrne
J Carroll
B Casey
J Connolly
E Cunningham
B Daly
P Donnelly
J Dowling
J Doyle
I Farragher
O Finlayson
B Flood
R Flynn

N Gathergood
S Hashmi
C Holland
G Hughes
J Hughes
S Ingle
M Kelly
P Kinsella
S Knowlton
C Long
J Loonam
C Loscher
J Lynch
C Mac an Bhaird
L McDermott (Secretary)
I McGlynn
C McGonagle
P McMorrow
D McMullin
M Molony
K Moran
A Morrissey

G Murphy
N Murphy
M Nic Giolla Mhichíl
E O'Connell
R O'Connor
P Ó Flatharta
J O'Hara
J O'Higgins-Norman
R O'Kennedy
E O'Riordan
M Parkinson
A Pearson-Evans
D Reynolds
A Scott (Deputy President/Registrar – Chair)
M Scott
P Sheehan
D Sinclair
R Tobin
X Wang
S Wickham
P Willis
P Young

APOLOGIES:

A Armstrong
J Bosak
C Brennan
L Caul
F Cavatorta

P James
B Kelly
J Kerrane
M Kirwan
A Leahy

M Munro
B Pierce
R Sadleir
A Sinnott
M Slowey

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| R Connolly | L Looney | P Smith |
| J Costello | B McConalogue | M Smyth |
| T Draper | B MacCraith (President) | A Stover |
| J Fox | C McDonagh | D Turley |
| S Fox | A McGrady | A Way |
| D Gray | C Mac Murchaidh | C Woods |
| M Humphrys | | |

1. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted.

A: Minutes and related issues

2. Minutes of the meeting of Academic Council of 13 October 2010

The minutes were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

3. Matters arising

3.1 Ms Phylomena McMorrow, Director of Registry, noted that some modifications needed to be made to the ITS Calculate programme as a consequence of both discussions with stakeholders to ascertain their needs and changes to Marks and Standards arising from decisions of the University Standards Committee in respect of resit opportunities for continuous assessment. A group involving representatives from Registry, Information Systems and Services, Faculty administration and Oscail are to meet before the end of 2010 to scope the project, agree a timeframe and identify the resources that will be needed. At a later stage, consideration will be given to making further modifications to the Calculate programme to make it more appropriate than is the case at present for use in relation to part-time and continuous programmes, and to the resource implications of these further modifications. (Item 3.1)

3.2 The Chair noted that all three linked colleges had indicated that they would operate the bonus points scheme for Leaving Certificate Higher Level Mathematics on the same basis as the University. (Item 3.4)

- 3.3** Owing to the postponement of the University Standards Committee meeting from the scheduled date of 2 December 2010 to 9 December 2010 (following inclement weather and the consequent closure of the campus), it will be necessary to notify Academic Council electronically of the decisions taken on 9 December in respect of Marks and Standards. (This will be done as soon after the USC meeting as possible). (Item 3.5)
- 3.4** The Chair noted that the President, Professor Brian MacCraith, was continuing his schedule of meetings with all Schools and Units in the University. (Item 4.1)
- 3.5** The Chair summarised the outcome of the recent discussions about collaboration between DCU, the National University of Ireland, Maynooth and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, noting that a briefing document would shortly be circulated to the staffs of all three institutions. The discussions have resulted in four working groups, in the broad areas of education, research, shared services and internationalisation. Each of these has representatives from all three institutions (including the linked colleges in the case of education) and is tasked with producing a scoping paper outlining possible areas for collaboration and how such collaboration might be operationalised. Consideration is being given, for example, to the creation of a global health institute and an institute of education similar to that in the UK and to the pooling of expertise and experience with regard to the recruitment of overseas students. (Item 4.6)
- 3.6** The Chair noted that the report of the Strategic Review of Higher Education was due to be published shortly and that, at a recent meeting with Dr Colin Hunt, chair of the Review Group, the following had been mentioned as forming part of the content of the report: the Irish higher education system is characterised by significant efficiency and effectiveness notwithstanding resource constraints, and this was noted in a 2009 report from the EU Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs¹; however, considerable challenges lie ahead, not least in relation to the projected doubling of student numbers in the sector over the next twenty years, with many new entrants being students over thirty-five who are likely to have specific needs in terms of support and online learning; while it is likely that the student grant system will be extended to part-time and distance-learning students, the resources available for grants will not increase overall. The report is also likely to emphasise governance, transparency and accountability as well as quality issues (e.g. quality assurance in respect of teaching, of teacher preparation in universities and other higher education institutions and of the external examiner system). It is intended to establish an implementation group shortly after the publication of the report. (Item 4.8)

¹ *Study on the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Public Spending on Tertiary Education*, November 2009.

- 3.7** The Chair noted that since, at its meeting of 3 November 2010, the Education Committee had agreed that its membership should include the Director of Quality Promotion, Dr Sarah Ingle is now a member of the EC. (Item 5.2; see also Item 15 below.)
- 3.8** The Chair noted that, at its meeting of 9 December 2010 (rescheduled from 2 December 2010), the University Standards Committee would note the recommendations of Academic Council in respect of shared teaching. (Item 6.4)
- 3.9** It was noted that a query which had arisen between the School of Education Studies and the Teaching Council about the recognition, for teaching purposes, of the BSc in Education and Training had been resolved satisfactorily. (Item 11)
- 3.10** It was noted that, from now on, a yearly report from the Disciplinary Committee would be made to Academic Council. In respect of the report already submitted (see Item 13 below), it may be possible to get additional detail. The Chair invited the members of Council to let her know of any matters that they might find it helpful to have included in reports. (Item 15)

4. Minutes of the meetings of the Education Committee of 8 September 2010 and 6 October 2010

4.1 Approved.

- 4.2** With respect to the issue of student persistence and progression on programmes (Item 4.1 of the minutes of the meeting of 8 September 2010 and Item 5.1 of the minutes of the meeting of 6 October 2010), the Chair noted the results of the tracking exercise which had been undertaken in respect of students identified as being at risk of failure/withdrawal following poor performance in the Semester 1 examinations in 2008/09: of the 193 students so identified, 60% (116) had remained in DCU, with 41% of these having progressed to Year 2 of the original programme, 57% having undertaken to repeat Year 1 of the original programme and 2% having transferred to Year 1 of a different programme. The Chair alluded to the findings outlined in the recent HEA report entitled *A Study of Progression in Irish Higher Education*, including the fact that a weak performance in Leaving Certificate Mathematics appears to be an indicator of weak overall academic performance in higher education. She also noted the position of the University relative to other universities with regard to retention rates and emphasised that her e-mail of 2 December 2010 to Programme Chairs, requesting them to provide additional supports for students prior to the Semester 1 examinations, was part of a range of actions being undertaken to tackle the problems arising from weak academic performance and poor attendance at lectures and other academic activities, and the consequences of these issues for retention rates. Progression figures on a per-programme basis have been made available to the Deans of Faculty, and the

Chair undertook to request the Deans to make these available to Programme Chairs. The following were also noted: the HEA report deals only with students on the first years of programmes, but the work will be extended annually with the result that future reports will cover all years; the report stresses the importance of the role of the school Guidance Counsellor in helping students to make appropriate choices of programme; work being undertaken by the Students' Union and Student Support and Development to ascertain students' reasons for withdrawing from the University indicates that inappropriate programme choice is a major factor, and this is borne out by the HEA report.

- 4.3** With respect to the issue of INTRA (Items 3.18 and 6 of the minutes of the meeting of 8 September 2010 and Items 3.11, 4.1 and 4.2 of the minutes of the meeting of 6 October 2010), the Chair noted that, while the system was working satisfactorily, it would be most important to ensure that the University retained its competitive advantage with respect to it, given that other institutions were, increasingly, introducing their own work placement systems. There is also the likelihood that it will become necessary to provide placements on programmes in discipline areas where this has not been traditional (e.g. in the Arts and Humanities), and indeed this is recommended in the recent IRCHSS/HEA report entitled *Playing to our Strengths: the Role of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Implications for Public Policy* and may also be recommended in the report of the Strategic Review of Higher Education (see Item 3.6 above). The discussions about INTRA by the Education Committee at its meetings of 3 November and 1 December 2010 had led to recommendations that INTRA should have learning outcomes associated with it, and that these should be articulated in the light of the new graduate attributes which have been developed by the cross-University working group under the direction of the Education Committee. One outcome of this work would be that INTRA would, in future, be likely to be graded. Dr Derek Molloy of the School of Electronic Engineering has undertaken to share with colleagues in the University the experience of his School and the School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering in terms of awarding marks for INTRA (though these marks do not, at present, contribute to the overall precision mark), and Ms Jean Hughes, Director of SIF programmes, has indicated her willingness to advise on the development of learning outcomes. A number of related issues were noted: some employers tend to prefer to take on only students who are very high achievers in an academic sense; some employers prefer not to take on non-EU students (the problems associated with visas for such students cannot be tackled by the University alone, and are being addressed by government); the newly-established Enterprise Advisory Board is to advise on the setting up of an 'enterprise track' as an alternative to INTRA; where School-based projects are made available as a result of the unavailability of INTRA placements, it would be desirable for Heads of Schools and Units to identify ideas for such projects well in advance of the INTRA period; such projects tend to be labour-intensive from a staff point of view,

though the development of learning outcomes should help to streamline the work in this regard.

- 4.4** The Chair noted that the recommendations on the desired attributes of a DCU graduate had been approved by the Education Committee at its meeting of 1 December 2010 and by Executive at its meeting of 7 December 2010 and that the consequent developmental work would be undertaken in Faculties from early 2011.
- 4.5** The Chair emphasised the importance, for members of Council, of paying close attention to the minutes of the Education Committee so as to keep abreast of the discussions on the above matters and other matters related to the progress of the EC goals 2010/11.

5. President's report

Covered under Items 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 above.

B: Policy and strategy issues

6. Proposals on the Academic Calendar 2011/12

- 6.1** The proposal to shorten the study period prior to the May 2012 examinations was not approved.
- 6.2** The proposal to combine the meetings of Programme Board Examination Review Committees and Progression and Awards Boards in June 2012 was approved. It was noted that the implementation of the combined meetings would be more challenging in some Faculties than in others, and agreed that the necessary supports would be made available to forestall difficulties. It was agreed that, to take account of the fact that there will now be no gap between two sets of meetings in June 2012, an absolute deadline by which marks must be submitted by academic staff would be identified, and that this would need to fall within the period 26 May-11 June 2012. Ms McMorrow will liaise with the Programme Chairs on this issue, and the date, once agreed, will be included in the calendar.
- 6.3** It was agreed that the consultation days for students, following the publication of the examination results, would be Monday 25 and Tuesday 26 June 2012.
- 6.4** The possibility of shortening the period allowed for the submission of appeals from fourteen to ten days was discussed. It was agreed that Ms McMorrow would conduct a

consultation process with Heads of School, Programme Boards, Faculty Managers and the Students' Union and that the Chair would take a decision on the issue on the basis of the outcome of the consultation.

- 6.5** The Academic Calendar was approved subject to the inclusion of the proposals approved and outlined at Item 6.2 and 6.3 above and subject to the inclusion of the deadline, as mentioned at Item 6.2 above, and the submission date for the lodging of appeals, following Chair's action as mentioned at Item 6.4 above.

7. Proposals on teaching quality evaluation

- 7.1** The Chair and Professor Richard O'Kennedy, Vice-President for Learning Innovation, outlined the background to the proposals, noting that a prior version of them had been discussed at the November 2010 Heads' and Deans' meeting and that the issue of evaluation of teaching, and prior versions of the proposal, had also been discussed in detail at both the October 2010 and December 2010 meetings of the Education Committee. Professor O'Kennedy pointed out that both the Institutional Review of the University in 2010 and the EUA review of 2005 had strongly recommended the establishment of an evaluation mechanism and that the report of the Strategic Review of Higher Education (see Item 3.6 above) was likely to contain similar recommendations.
- 7.2** It was agreed that any such system adopted would be based on respect for, and support of, academic staff and their teaching and that no endorsement would be forthcoming for an adversarial or punitive approach. Workshops and other support mechanisms will be made available to academic staff prior to the introduction of the system.
- 7.3** In the ensuing discussion, the following were noted:
- it will be important to identify very clearly the criteria on which evaluation will be based
 - where weaknesses in performance are identified, it will be very important for Heads of School to ensure that appropriate support mechanisms are put in place
 - the University has the resources to provide teaching preparation modules and is beginning to do so, and they are designed to assist academic staff with both teaching and assessing
 - the fact that relatively few new staff are being appointed at present, owing to the very difficult economic climate and the Employment Control Framework, increases the scope for monitoring the effectiveness of such modules
 - the possibility exists that the evaluation system, once established, will yield valuable information about different teaching styles which may be used to match staff appropriately with different sizes and types of group

- as modules may be taught by more than one person, consideration might be given to submitting individual modules for periodic evaluation from the perspective of the effectiveness of the teaching.

7.4 The Chair requested the members of Council to submit any additional comments they might have to Professor O’Kennedy as soon as possible.

7.5 Professor O’Kennedy thanked Ms Jean Hughes, Mr Billy Kelly, Professor Gerry McNamara and Dr Joe O’Hara for their work in preparing the proposals.

8. Report on projected student profile and numbers

8.1 The Chair summarised recent trends in CAO applications, acceptances and registration, noting that, while a number of these were positive from the University’s perspective (e.g. the share of first preferences had remained steady at 11% and the number of total mentions had risen in the period 2007-10 and now stands at 14%), other trends are a cause of concern (e.g. the proportion of students registering who indicate the University as their first, second or third preference is falling relative to the proportion of students registering who indicate the University as a lower preference, and the University accepted the lowest number of first-year students through the CAO in 2010 of any university in the system). She undertook to ensure that the presentation on these matters which had been made to the Heads and Deans group by Ms Aisling McKenna, Institutional Research and Analysis Officer, was made available to the members of Council.

9. Proposal in respect of the Learning Innovation Advisory Panel

Approved.

C: Items for formal approval/noting

10. Matters from the University Standards Committee and the Education Committee

Approved.

11. Accreditation recommendation: BSc in Nursing (re-accreditation)

Approved.

12. Report from the Winter 2010 Examinations/Progression and Awards Boards

Approved.

13. Report from the Disciplinary Committee (calendar year 2009)

Noted.

14. Reports from Appeals Boards: St Patrick's College and Mater Dei Institute of Education

Noted.

15. Report on the outcomes of the nomination processes for Academic Council representation on the Academic Promotions Committee and the Education Committee

Noted.

16. Any other business

None.

Date of next meeting:

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| <p style="text-align: center;">Wednesday 9 February 2010 2.00 p.m. in AG01</p> |
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Signed: _____
President

Date: _____