

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Wednesday 2 December 2009

2.00-4.00 p.m. in A204

Present: Professor Anne Scott (Chair), Dr Claire Bohan, Dr Pat Brereton, Mr Jim Dowling, Ms Jean Hughes, Professor Eugene Kennedy, Ms Louise McDermott (Secretary), Dr Kay MacKeogh, Mr John Murphy, Professor Richard O'Kennedy, Professor Bernard Pierce, Dr Mary Shine Thompson, Professor Malcolm Smyth

Apologies: Mr Gordon McConnell

In attendance: Ms Aisling McKenna (for Item 4)
Ms Phylomena McMorrow (for Item 3.13)

SECTION A: AGENDA, MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 7 October 2009

The minutes were confirmed subject to the addition of the following sentence at the end of Item 5.3:

It was agreed also that Ms Jennifer Bruton would set up a working group to make recommendations on systems-level access to assist the work of PBERCs and PABs.

They were then signed by the Chair. It was noted that the remit of the working group referred to above would complement another task in which Ms Bruton is involved, i.e. the charring of a working group re-established by Executive to make recommendations on staff access to student data.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

- 3.1** Noted that a revised proposal on AP(E)L would be submitted to the University Standards Committee at its meeting of 4 February 2010. (Item 3.1)
- 3.2** Noted that it was possible a revised validation proposal for a BSc in Counselling and Psychotherapy would be submitted to a future meeting of the EC. (Item 3.2)
- 3.3** Noted that the extent to which specialisms should be indicated on parchments had been discussed in Faculties, and there was consensus that no change should be made to current practice. (Item 3.3)
- 3.4** Noted that a programme proposal from the School of Electronic Engineering/Faculty of Engineering and Computing would be submitted for validation and accreditation prior to being submitted for Erasmus Mundus funding. (Item 3.4)
- 3.5** Noted that the policy on due diligence had now been finalised and would be made available on line prior to the meeting of the Academic Council of 9 December 2009. (Item 3.6)
- 3.6** Ms Hughes reported on the university's contribution to date to the HEA Labour Market Activation Initiative: notwithstanding the fact that (because of the short timeframe involved) not all places made available were taken up, the university has been proactive with regard to the Initiative and is developing a good reputation in the area which it will be important to maintain. It will be very important to continue to take a strategic approach and focus on areas where there is a strong likelihood that students will avail of places, for instance by developing special-purpose or supplemental awards for lawyers and engineers. It was noted in discussion that it would be important to continue to be proactive with regard to the Initiative while also ensuring a favourable cost/benefit balance for the university. The Chair thanked Ms Hughes for the paper she had presented on the subject and encouraged the Deans to engage with all the questions posed at the end of it and submit comments back to Ms Hughes. It was agreed that the paper would be circulated to the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning/Education with a view to having it discussed at Faculty Teaching and Learning/Education Committees and that the issue would constitute an item on the agenda for the meeting of the EC of 3 February 2010. (Item 3.8)
- 3.7** Noted that suggested wording related to the responsibilities of Heads of School and Chairs of Programme Boards would be made available to the EC by Dr Noel Murphy, Head of the School of Electronic Engineering. (Item 3.9)
- 3.8** Noted that information about Irish universities obtained in the context of the 2009 Times Higher Education-QS World University Rankings had been made available

- to the EC by Mr Gordon McConnell and Ms Aisling McKenna and would constitute an item on the agenda for the meeting of 13 January 2010. (Item 3.10)
- 3.9** Noted that Dr Mac Keogh would make available an updated version of the results of an exercise on student profiles which she had previously conducted at the request of Executive. (Item 4.6)
- 3.10** Noted that the first meeting of the subgroup set up to make recommendations in relation to the desired distinguishing characteristics of a DCU graduate had held its first meeting, that its work would be informed by input from the Learning Innovation Advisory Panel and the Student Experience Committee. It will also be informed by work being undertaken by Dr MacKeogh on the ideal balance in terms of numbers of students from different categories – undergraduate, postgraduate (PGT and PGR) and so forth. Initial output from the subgroup’s work will constitute an item on the agenda for the meeting of the EC of 3 February 2010. The Chair encouraged members of the EC who were not involved in the subgroup to consider joining it. Professor O’Kennedy stressed the relevance of its work to the forthcoming institutional review of the university. (Items 4.7 and 4.9)
- 3.11** Professor O’Kennedy noted that he and Ms Morag Munro, Acting Head of the Learning Innovation Unit, were in discussion with a view to integrating relevant aspects of the Enhancement of Learning and Research strategies into a formal statement on DCU quality assurance. (Item 5.2)
- 3.12** Noted that module- and cohort-level statistical data would be made available, in due course, in relation to the February 2010 Progression and Awards Boards. (Item 5.3)
- 3.13** Ms Phylomena McMorrow summarised some issues relating to Programme Board Examination Review Committees and Progression and Awards Boards, highlighting the importance both of full attendance by all relevant staff at these meetings and of the role of the Chair. Noted that, while at present the most usual procedure is that PBERCs and PABs are chaired by the Programme Chair, alternative procedures might be explored. Agreed that the issues of attendance and chairing would constitute an item on the agenda for the Heads’ meeting of 27 May 2010. Agreed that the Registry would explore with Training and Development in the Human Resources Office the possibility of providing development/information sessions for Programme Chairs and other interested parties, with a particular focus on chairing PBERCs and PABs. Noted that, to ensure that enough time was available for all September PABs, an extra day would henceforth be added at the end of the schedule. Some other timetabling issues, notably the importance of ensuring that external examiners’ time is used optimally, will be discussed between the Registry and Faculty Offices. The Chair and Ms McMorrow are to discuss procedures for reinstating the practice of taking minutes at PABs, and a report on progress in this matter will be made to a future meeting of the EC, with a request for comment. The importance of minimising the number of post-PAB amendments was noted; it is

- likely that fuller attendance at PBERCs and PABs will alleviate this problem. The importance of timely and comprehensive online information at PBERCs and PABs was also noted; the working group to be set up by Ms Bruton (see Item 2 above) will be of assistance in this regard, and the easier availability of statistical data from February 2010 onwards (see Item 3.12 above) will facilitate the identification of potentially problematic modules/areas. (Item 5.4)
- 3.14** Noted that it would be feasible for Oscail to submit programme review templates in the Spring of each year, as is also to be the case with Faculties. (Item 5.5)
- 3.15** Noted that the USC would, at its meeting of 3 December 2009, discuss procedures for making information on programmes (additional and complementary to Marks and Standards) available to students in a consistent and timely manner. (Item 5.5)
- 3.16** Noted that the outputs of the current Teaching Enhancement Cycle exercise, being piloted in DCUBS, would be reported to the EC later in 2009/10. (Item 5.7)
- 3.17** Noted that the effectiveness of the procedures and form in relation to external examiners, piloted in Faculties in 2008/09, would be discussed by the University Standards Committee at its meeting of 3 December 2009. (Item 5.8)
- 3.18** Noted that the changes to Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering programmes approved by the EC at its meeting of 4 November 2009 would be submitted for noting to the University Standards Committee at its meeting of 3 December 2009 and that similar changes in respect of Electronic Engineering programmes would be submitted for approval to the EC later in 2009/10. (Item 11.1)
- 3.19** Noted that procedures for amendments to programmes not requiring (re)validation/(re)accreditation would be discussed by the University Standards Committee at its meeting of 3 December 2009 and that the USC would subsequently make recommendations on this issue to the EC. (Item 11.2)
- 3.20** Noted that the Validation Subgroup of the EC had, at its meeting of 11 November 2009, recommended the proposed BSc in Horticulture for further development towards accreditation, although the *curricula vitae* of the proposed members of the Accreditation Board would first need to be approved (electronically) by the Subgroup. (Item 7)
- 3.21** Noted that the Validation Subgroup of the EC had, at its meeting of 11 November 2009, recommended the proposed Graduate Diploma/MSc in Materials Engineering (to be offered jointly with Athlone Institute of Technology) for further development towards accreditation later in 2009/10. (Item 8)
- 3.22** Noted that the Validation Subgroup of the EC had, at its meeting of 11 November 2009, recommended Science Studies (as an additional subject on the Bachelor of

Arts and Bachelor of Education programmes in St Patrick's College) for further development towards accreditation later in 2009/10, although the *curricula vitae* of the proposed members of the Accreditation Board would first need to be approved (electronically) by the Subgroup. (Item 9)

SECTION B: STRATEGIC MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

4. Report on progress of EC goals 2009/10

4.1 Student surveys

Dr MacKeogh reported that work was in progress to prepare for the surveys to be carried out in March 2010, noting that, while a questionnaire would be used, many other methods were available to ascertain students' opinions.

4.2 Variables affecting students' persistence on programmes

The documentation presented by Ms Aisling McKenna indicates a recent increase in withdrawals in the later years of programmes. Discussion with students also reveals increasing financial stresses and, in some cases, a mismatch between the perception of a programme prior to entry and the reality of undertaking the programme; in this latter connection, the Chair stressed the importance of ensuring that potential applicants had a realistic understanding of what programmes entail.

Agreed that Ms McKenna would supplement the documentation with data relating to postgraduate students and data from both interviews with students already conducted by Student Support and Development and interviews to be held with students who had occasion to repeat modules in the Autumn diet of examinations (and who may or may not have progressed to the next year). Agreed also that Ms McKenna would identify the point in time to which the Oscail data relate, as this may affect their accuracy. She will also develop a system for identifying students deemed to be at risk, e.g. through having failed two or more Semester 1 modules in the first year of an undergraduate programme. The Chair emphasised the importance of using all available means to track, and communicate with, such students (e.g. by using recommendations from the former Student Retention Working Group, the personal tutor system, the resources of the Students' Union, and communication systems made available by Student Support and Development including direct communication with students and the recently-introduced Student Relationship Management system). She also stressed the importance of taking a nuanced approach, taking into account the possibility that different methods may be required for different groups of students. Mr Murphy undertook to involve the class representatives and Faculty convenors in this work. They might also be in a position to advise on methods of contacting students who had withdrawn from the university, formally or informally, in order to ascertain their reasons for leaving. The Chair also noted the role of the Associate Deans for Teaching and

Learning/Education in leading discussions on the issue; it was agreed that the documentation should be circulated to them to facilitate discussion in Faculties. She noted also that the Faculties had been asked by Executive to give consideration to the desirability, or otherwise, of continuing to hold Semester 1 examinations for first-year undergraduate students, and had been asked to come back with proposals.

4.3 ‘Health Check’ document

Ms McKenna made available detailed information on the pilot system being proposed to enable a ‘health check’ to be carried out on every programme, and explained that the alerts built into the system were based on trends over a number of years rather than on information from any one year. The importance of taking cognisance of data from the June as well as the September PABs was noted. It was agreed that the information would be circulated to the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning/Education with a view to having it discussed at Faculty Teaching and Learning/Education Committees in the near future. The Chair also requested EC members to submit comments on it to Ms McKenna before the meeting of 13 January 2010. Ms McKenna undertook to ascertain whether or not it would be useful to incorporate into the document data from the HEA’s surveys of graduate destinations.

5. Proposal relating to Oscail

5.1 Ms Hughes outlined recent developments in respect of Oscail, including the fact that a number of university structures and procedures had by now been replicated within Oscail.

5.2 In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- it will be important to ensure that there are ongoing suitable mechanisms for developing and approving new programmes and other initiatives relating to Oscail; different mechanisms may be required for different subject areas
- there is considerable scope for building on the complementary strengths of Oscail and other areas of the university and the linked colleges, and in doing this the importance of maintaining the highest academic standards and developing appropriate mechanisms to facilitate engagement by students in a distant and/or blended mode must be borne in mind at all times
- among the collaborative activities to which consideration might be given are undergraduate programmes in Business, subjects (e.g. English) in the Humanities and areas in Engineering and Science (e.g. Biomedical Diagnostics).

5.3 Professor O’Kennedy stressed the importance of ensuring that optimum use was made within the university of revenue generated from Oscail activities.

- 5.4** Ms Hughes thanked the Deans for the co-operation and assistance provided to her by Faculties with regard to work in Oscail as well as other, related, university-wide developments such as the ongoing work to develop AP(E)L policies and procedures. It was agreed that she would meet each Executive Dean to discuss possibilities for collaboration/development between Faculties and Oscail.

SECTION C: PROGRAMME- AND MODULE-SPECIFIC ISSUES

No items.

6. Any other business

None.

Date of next meeting:

<p>Wednesday 13 January 2010, 2.00 p.m. in A204</p>
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Signed: _____
Chair

Date: _____