

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Wednesday 4 November 2009

2.00-3.40 p.m. in A204

Present: Professor Anne Scott (Chair), Dr Claire Bohan, Dr Pat Brereton, Mr Jim Dowling, Ms Louise McDermott (Secretary), Dr Kay MacKeogh, Mr John Murphy, Professor Bernard Pierce, Professor Malcolm Smyth

Apologies: Ms Jean Hughes, Mr Gordon McConnell, Professor Richard O’Kennedy, Dr Mary Shine Thompson

In attendance: Dr Françoise Blin, Ms Jennifer Bruton, Mr Billy Kelly,
(for Items 4, 5 and 6) Dr Sheelagh Wickham

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 following:

- The replacement, in Item 3.10, of a reference to ‘factors which influence students’ decision to remain on a programme’ by a reference to ‘factors which influence students’ success on a programme’
- The deletion of the fourth sentence in Item 6.3.

They were then signed by the Chair.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

- 3.1** Noted that work on the development of policies and procedures in relation to AP(E)L was ongoing. (Item 3.2)
- 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 3.3)
- 3.3** Noted that the extent to which specialisms should be indicated on parchments was under discussion in Faculties. (Item 3.4)
- 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 3.5)
- 3.5** Noted that discussion about the timing of the publication of examination results following Progression and Awards Boards had been subsumed into the more general ongoing discussion about the academic calendar which is taking place as a result of a recommendation by Academic Council at its meeting of 14 October 2009. (Item 3.11)
- 3.6** Noted that the policy on due diligence had been approved by Executive at its meeting of 13 October 2009, subject to a small number of amendments, and had also been approved (again subject to these amendments) by Academic Council at its meeting of 14 October 2009. The amendments will be incorporated, and the policy made available on line. (Item 3.12)
- 3.7** Noted that the Programme Board for the Graduate Diploma/MA in Translation Studies had expressed a preference, in relation to a new title for a proposed new pathway, for 'Graduate Diploma/MSc in Translation Technology' over the alternative title suggested by the EC. The title 'Graduate Diploma/MSc in Translation Technology' was approved. (Item 3.13)
- 3.8** Noted that work on the HEA Labour Market Activisation Initiative was ongoing. (Item 5)
- 3.9** 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 6.3)

- 3.10** Noted that information about Irish universities obtained in the context of the 2009 Times Higher Education-QS World University Rankings would be made available to the EC by Mr McConnell and Ms Aisling McKenna, Institutional Research and Analysis Officer. (Item 9)

SECTION B: STRATEGIC MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

4. Education Committee: final agreement on goals for 2009/10

- 4.1** The Chair welcomed the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning/Education, who had been invited to participate in the meeting for this and the following two items, noting that their presence during discussion on matters covered in these items, as well as during discussion on programme review, had the potential to be very helpful.
- 4.2** Agreed that the goals of the EC for 2009/10 are as follows:
- to tackle student progression issues, with particular reference to problem areas in the first year of undergraduate programmes and to the budgetary implications of non-completion
 - to implement the policy and procedures on teaching quality evaluation (see Item 5 below)
 - to introduce a programme ‘health check’ to identify programmes in relation to which problems (e.g. of viability) were emerging
 - to consider and make recommendations on the DCU student profile and define the unique qualities of the DCU graduate
 - to determine measures to enable the university to identify new or emerging subject areas at both undergraduate and postgraduate level
 - to define the ways in which outputs of cutting-edge research could inform teaching on undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes.
- 4.3** The Chair noted that Ms Jean Hughes had mapped the above goals on to aspects of the university’s Enhancement of Learning strategy and shown that considerable synergy existed between the two areas.
- 4.4** The Chair noted that, in the submission made by the Learning Innovation Advisory Panel about what the remit of the EC should be, the recommendation that the EC monitor developments with regard to HEA policies was particularly apposite in the light of the current changing environment for higher education. With regard to the LIAP’s recommendation that the EC support the mainstreaming of the Academic Framework for Innovation, she noted that this priority informed much of the EC’s work generally and that it was also being progressed by means of regular reports on AFI to Academic Council and Heads’ meetings.

- 4.5 The Chair noted that Dr MacKeogh and Ms Aisling McKenna were working together to identify the optimum list of metrics for use in the ‘health check’ document and that Faculty Teaching and Learning/Education Committees and the Learning Innovation Advisory Panel would be consulted on this also. (See also Item 6.2 below.)
- 4.6 With regard to the DCU student profile, the Chair noted that Dr MacKeogh had previously carried out, for Executive, a comparative exercise between DCU and other institutions. It was agreed that Dr MacKeogh would revise and expand the outputs of this exercise, with particular reference to such issues as profiles in institutions outside Ireland and the UK (for example, in the US), and optimum balance between groups such as the following: undergraduate and postgraduate students; postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students; Irish, other EU and non-EU students; postgraduate students who are graduates of DCU vis-à-vis postgraduates who completed undergraduate degrees in different institutions. (See also 4.9 below.) Dr MacKeogh will then circulate the output to the EC members. Noted that orientation to DCU was particularly important for postgraduate students coming from other institutions and that Professor O’Kennedy was considering this issue in the broader context of the recent quality review of the postgraduate student experience.
- 4.7 With regard to the unique qualities of the DCU graduate, it was noted that, while a number of such qualities might be identified on an individual basis, considerable value might be added by linking them in a coherent fashion, ensuring that they were embedded in programmes and publicising programmes on this basis. Noted also that it would be important to establish not just what qualities were desirable but how students might most effectively be enabled to develop them. Agreed that the Chair would establish a subgroup of the EC to examine these issues.
- 4.8 It was noted that the identification of new and emerging topics as the basis for new programmes would be facilitated by the outcomes of the Teaching Quality Evaluation exercise, to be made available to the EC later in 2009/10, the results of the Foresight Exercise and discussions at a wider level such as those which had taken place at the Global Irish Economic Forum in September 2009. The importance of ensuring that the information yielded by all these exercises was communicated to Schools and Faculties so as to inform their discussion of possible new initiatives was noted.
- 4.9 It was noted, with regard to the synergy between research and teaching, that groundwork on this had already been done by means of the preparation for the Enhancement of Learning and Research strategies and that the issue would also be considered at the NAIRTL conference to take place on 11 and 12 November 2009 (at which Dr Blin and Dr Wickham are to present a poster). It was agreed that the

LIAP would be asked to comment on the issue of optimum balance between taught and research students and to communicate on this matter with Dr MacKeogh. (See also 4.6 above and 5.2 below.)

5. Revised proposal on teaching quality evaluation

- 5.1** The Chair thanked Dr MacKeogh for her considerable work in preparing this proposal, noting that it was closely integrated with the relevant sections of *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. It also provided a useful framework for the EC to work with in rolling out an evaluation of teaching quality.
- 5.2** With regard to the first proposal, i.e. to prepare a formal statement on DCU quality assurance, it was noted that Professor O’Kennedy and Ms Morag Munro, Acting Head of the Learning Innovation Unit, were working to bring together the relevant sections of the Research Strategy and the Enhancement of Learning Strategy to inform such a statement. (See also 4.9 above.) Input should also be sought from Dr Declan Raftery, OVPR, on this issue.
- 5.3** It was agreed that, to facilitate the implementation of the second proposal, i.e. to evaluate each module following each presentation, the forthcoming automated system of providing basic statistical data per module would be essential. The extent to which access to module-specific information would be shared might usefully be discussed on a local basis. It would however be essential, as a matter of priority, to agree steps to be taken about modules which the data identified as being problematic. It would also be useful to identify very successful modules and disseminate good practice that might be recognised as contributing to their success. Consideration should be given to similar data for student cohorts within a programme, all taking the same group of modules. Ms Aisling McKenna will work on cohort-level data with colleagues in the Registry. They will work towards piloting this with the one or two Progression and Awards Boards scheduled for February. 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.
- 5.4** The Chair indicated that, in the context of identifying and remedying problems with modules, it would be desirable to resume the practice of taking detailed minutes at Progression and Awards Boards, and that she would discuss mechanisms for doing this with relevant staff members. More broadly, it would be useful to look at the current structure of PABs to determine its fitness for purpose; a similar exercise might be conducted with respect to Programme Board Examination Review Committees. The exercise currently being undertaken by the Registry to categorise the post-PAB amendments from 2009, and the intention to review the first full

- implementation of anonymous marking, are also likely to identify issues that might need to be addressed with respect to specific modules.
- 5.5** It was noted that the proposed new template for use as part of the Programme Review exercise (the proposals for which are currently being discussed by Faculties with a view to being resubmitted for consideration by the EC) could be submitted, completed, alongside the academic structures to meet the normal annual Spring deadline for the latter. Discussions are in progress as to whether this would be feasible for Oscail. The submission of structures might be further developed and formalised by the simultaneous submission of specific programme information for students, complementary to and designed to supplement Marks and Standards (this issue of programme information is currently under discussion by the University Standards Committee).
- 5.6** The related issues of annual programme reports and annual reports on module and programme results, which inform proposals three and four in relation to teaching quality evaluation, are under discussion between Dr MacKeogh and Ms McKenna, the intention being to formalise the system of presenting examination result statistics three times a year (after the February, June and August Progression and Awards Boards). The Chair is to request Ms McKenna to set up a mechanism whereby these can be sent to the EC and to Faculties at the same time, with comments from the Faculties being made available to the EC a month after they have been sent.
- 5.7** Noted that the outputs of the current Teaching Enhancement Cycle exercise, being piloted in DCUBS, would, in due course, yield useful information as to what might be included in module and programme review exercises.
- 5.8** On the issue of external involvement in module/programme review, it was noted that professional bodies already accredit programmes in many cases; however, the issue remains of external involvement in degrees which are not subject to professional accreditation. Consideration might be given to enhancing the role of alumni in reviews, re-establishing the concept of external advisory panels (though it is recognised that there can be difficulties in progressing the work of such panels beyond the initial meetings) or seeking potential reviewers through the Dublin Centre for Academic Development. Noted that the timescale for programme review might be integrated into the timescale for the five-yearly quality review of Faculties; however, it would be necessary to conduct separate review exercises because the limited time available to conduct a review of a Faculty precludes detailed consideration of programmes. Noted that the fact that detailed consideration was to be given to the effectiveness of the external examiner system (the next opportunity for this being the University Standards Committee meeting of 3 December 2009) and that it was becoming more common to have electronic

recourse to external experts for commentary on proposed changes were both positive developments.

6. Student retention/progression/experience

- 6.1** The Chair noted the introduction in the university of ‘Your Voice Heard’, the initiative to gather student feedback and inform students of the changes that had been made on foot of it. She also noted that it would be desirable to move the pilot student experience survey, due for completion in April 2010, to March 2010. Dr MacKeogh will lead this pilot with input from Ms McKenna. Dr MacKeogh and Ms McKenna also intend to conduct focus group discussions with groups of students who repeated modules in August 2009 having failed them in May (and who may either be repeating in this academic year or have progressed into the next year). Noted that it would be very important to get feedback from students who had withdrawn from the university; the difficulty of doing this, notwithstanding the willingness of the Students’ Union to assist in locating and obtaining the permission of such students, was noted; it was agreed that Dr MacKeogh would ask the School of Computing for advice on this, on the basis that the School had conducted exit interviews with students who had expressed their intention to terminate their studies. The possibility was raised of conducting telephone interviews as well as, or instead of, focus group discussions with students who had left the university. Noted also that a certain amount of information could be gleaned from completed withdrawal forms submitted to the Registry. Dr Bohan indicated that SS&D would also be in a position to help with data on exit interviews as SS&D had already conducted a number of such interviews.
- 6.2** It was agreed that Ms McKenna, in consultation with Dr MacKeogh, would draw up a list of variables (e.g. demographic variables) that it is thought might influence first-year student persistence or otherwise on programmes. (See also Item 4.5 above.)
- 6.3** The Chair noted that, as indicated in the agreed goals (see Item 4.2 above), consideration of student progression/retention/experience would be a feature of the discussions of the EC in the course of 2009/10.

SECTION C: PROGRAMME- AND MODULE-SPECIFIC ISSUES

7. Validation proposal: BSc in Horticulture

- 7.1** Agreed to submit this proposal for consideration by the Validation Subgroup of the EC at its meeting of 11 November 2009.

- 7.2** The following were noted as being among the issues to be noted and/or discussed by the Subgroup:
- some rewriting of the document prior to submission might have been helpful
 - it will be important to ensure that any future documentation is written from a university perspective as well as from the perspective of Teagasc, the proposed partner organisation
 - the relationship between the proposed programme and the existing programmes in Horticulture in the Institute of Technology in Blanchardstown will need to be outlined clearly in any future documentation
 - it would be helpful to have additional detail as to which of the various student activities will take place in each of the proposed venues: DCU, the National Botanic Gardens and the Teagasc Horticultural Research Centre in Kinsealy
 - it would be helpful if transfer opportunities were made clear (e.g. for students who had not taken Common Entry into Science) and if it could be specified whether or not the upper limit on student numbers results from the availability of placements.
- 7.3** The Chair requested that any other observations on the proposal be submitted to Ms McDermott prior to the meeting of the Validation Subgroup so that they could be factored into the deliberations of the Subgroup.
- 7.4** It was noted, not specifically with respect to this proposal but more generally, that even where costs were not incurred by the introduction of a significant number of new modules there were still costs inherent in the introduction of a new programme, e.g. additional requirements made of a range of services in the university.

8. Validation proposal: MSc in Materials Engineering

- 8.1** Agreed to submit this proposal for consideration by the Validation Subgroup of the EC at its meeting of 11 November 2009. Noted that a revised version of the proposal would be circulated prior to this meeting.
- 8.2** The following were noted as being among the issues to be noted and/or discussed by the Subgroup:
- it would be very helpful to establish the extent to which attendance in alternate years in DCU and in Athlone Institute of Technology, the proposed partner organisation, is actually necessary for students
 - the list outlining practical issues to be covered (such as registration arrangements for students in relation to the two institutions) is useful; it will be necessary to ensure that discussions about these matters are well advanced by the time the proposal is submitted for accreditation (if it is successful at validation)

- two members of one institution were nominated to the Accreditation Board; there should be a limit of one member per institution, and therefore only one of these individuals may (if approved by the Subgroup) serve if the programme is submitted for accreditation.

8.3 The Chair requested that any other observations on the proposal be submitted to Ms McDermott prior to the meeting of the Validation Subgroup so that they could be factored into the deliberations of the Subgroup.

9. Validation proposal: Science Studies as a subject on the BA and BEd programmes in St Patrick's College

9.1 Agreed to submit this proposal for consideration by the Validation Subgroup of the EC at its meeting of 11 November 2009.

9.2 The following were noted as being among the issues to be noted and/or discussed by the Subgroup:

- if it is intended that graduates of the BA programme who have taken Science Studies as a subject will be in a position to teach Science at second level (having obtained a Postgraduate Diploma in Education or equivalent), then this would need to be specified in the documentation and the learning outcomes would need to reflect it
- it would be helpful to have information about the extent to which, nationally and internationally, there is a concern about the level of preparedness of primary teachers to teach Science
- it would be helpful to consider using DCU expertise to meet the staffing challenges inherent in making Science Studies available
- more detail would be desirable about the overall impact of the introduction of Science Subjects on the relevant departments and on the other BA/BEd subjects.

9.3 The Chair requested that any other observations on the proposal be submitted to Ms McDermott prior to the meeting of the Validation Subgroup so that they could be factored into the deliberations of the Subgroup.

10. Request for approval of nominees to two electronic Accreditation Boards, All Hallows College

Approved. Noted with approval that a wide range of very senior academics had been nominated.

11. Proposals from the Faculty of Engineering and Computing in relation to programmes in Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering

- 11.1** Approved. Noted that the broad outline of the proposals, including the intention to extend three current four-year Level 8 programmes to five-year Level 9 programmes but with an exit possibility at Level 8, the lowered Mathematics entry requirement for the proposed BSc in Manufacturing Engineering with Business

Studies and the change of title from BEng/MEng to BSc/MSc, would be submitted for noting to the University Standards Committee at its meeting of 3 December 2009. Noted that it would be very important to make clear, in all programme and marketing documentation, that transfer from the new BSc to existing BEng programmes would not be possible other than in limited circumstances which would involve lengthening the time for completing the BEng to five years. Noted that similar proposals in respect of programmes in Electronic Engineering would be submitted to a future meeting of the EC.

- 11.2** Noted that procedures for amendments to programmes that did not require full (re)validation/(re)accreditation were under discussion in Faculties and that the outcome of the discussion would be submitted to the University Standards Committee for consideration at its meeting of 3 December 2009. Noted that the proposals in respect of the Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering programmes provided a good example both of the types of issues likely to emerge for approval and of a straightforward submission procedure to the EC (though, in certain instances, the information submitted might need to be less detailed than in the current instance).

12. Any other business

Agreed that the January 2010 meeting of the Education Committee would be rescheduled from 6 to 13 January.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 2 December 2009, 2.00 p.m. in A204

Signed: _____
Chair

Date: _____