

## **EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES**

Wednesday 6 October 2010

2.00-4.20 p.m. in A204

**Present:** Professor Anne Scott (Chair), Dr Claire Bohan, Mr Cillian Byrne, Mr Jim Dowling, Professor Eithne Guilfoyle, Ms Jean Hughes, Mr Billy Kelly, Ms Louise McDermott (Secretary), Professor Richard O’Kennedy, Professor Bernard Pierce, Professor Malcolm Smyth

**Apologies:** Dr Ciarán Mac Murchaidh

**In attendance:** Ms Aisling McKenna (for Items 4 and 5.1)

### **SECTION A: AGENDA, MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

#### **1. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda was adopted subject to the deferral of the discussion of Item 7 and the inclusion of one submission under Item 8.

#### **2. Minutes of the meeting of 8 September 2010**

The minutes were confirmed and signed by the Chair.<sup>1</sup>

#### **3. Matters arising from the minutes**

- 3.1** Noted that proposals on the Recognition of Prior Learning were being discussed both in the Faculties and sector wide and that final proposals for a University-level policy would be made to the University Standards Committee at its meeting of 3 February 2011. (Item 3.2)

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<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, an error in these minutes was noted. Ms Jean Hughes, who had been present at the meeting, had not been recorded as having been present. The minutes have now been amended appropriately.

- 3.2** Noted that the Memoranda of Understanding with partner institutions in relation to the MSc in Bioinformatics were in the final stages of completion. (Item 3.4)
- 3.3** Noted that the surveys of student opinion would be made available in all Faculties in the course of 2010/11, at a specific point in the year which would be established in due course, and that Mr Billy Kelly would report to the other Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning/Education and to Ms Aisling McKenna, Institutional Analysis and Research Officer, on the outcomes of the pilot exercise carried out in DCU Business School once a full analysis of these outcomes had been carried out. The issue will also be on the agenda of the EC meeting of 1 December 2010. (Item 3.5)
- 3.4** Noted that the issue of integrating teaching and research would be on the agenda of a meeting of the EC in the near future and that it is currently under discussion in Faculties with a view to prioritising the recommendations made to the EC by Ms Morag Munro, Acting Head of the Learning Innovation Unit, and Dr Declan Raftery, Director of Research Support Services, at its meeting of 3 March 2010. (Item 3.8)
- 3.5** Noted that the revised accreditation documentation in respect of the MSc in Bioprocess Engineering had been made available and that a small number of queries relating to it were in the process of being clarified. (Item 3.9)
- 3.6** Noted that the issues of projected student numbers, and the profile of the student body, would be on the agenda of the EC meeting of 1 December 2010. (Item 3.10)
- 3.7** Noted that the action plan following the institutional review of DCU in March 2010 is being prepared. (Item 3.12)
- 3.8** Noted that an application for Erasmus Mundus funding would be resubmitted by the School of Physical Sciences. (Item 3.16)
- 3.9** Noted that it was likely that the entire university sector would agree to award bonus points for Higher Level Leaving Certificate Mathematics with effect from 2012 entry and that the IUA Registrars were shortly due to make recommendations to the IUA Council on this matter processes that would be necessary to effect the necessary changes in the points system and in other relevant areas. It will be important to make these changes in the near future so as to facilitate application and admission in 2012 on the basis of the revised points system. (Item 3.17)

- 3.10** Noted that a short-life working group was being set up to draft new information and guidelines for Programme Chairs and that the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning/Education would be represented on this group by Mr Billy Kelly. (Item 3.18)
- 3.11** Noted that the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning/Education were in the process of revising the programme review template to take account of experience gleaned through having piloted it in Oscail and the Faculty of Engineering and Computing in 2009/10 and that discussions were in progress with Ms Barbara McConologue, Director of ISS, with a view to providing an easy-to-use online interface for those completing the template. It will also need to be modified to allow for consideration of INTRA, perhaps by means of enabling relevant parts of the annual report to Academic Council on INTRA to be included. As consideration of INTRA will form one of the new goals of the EC for 2010/11 (see Item 4 below), relevant discussions at EC meetings may help to clarify how INTRA should be included in the template. The extent to which the template needs to incorporate consideration of the year abroad (from the perspective of outgoing DCU students) will need to be established. With regard to the needs of incoming exchange students, it was agreed that the standard Erasmus form used by students should be accompanied by a cover sheet for signing by the relevant Deans so that they would be aware of what modules in their Faculties were being taken by exchange students. It was noted that management of exchange student numbers per module needed to be undertaken at Faculty rather than School level and that exchange students were made aware, in advance of arrival, that timetabling issues might arise from them if they took modules from more than one programme and/or year of a programme. The Chair noted that considerations relating to exchange student profile and numbers would need to be factored into the internationalisation strategy which is currently under development. (Item 3.18)
- 3.12** Noted that the work to establish the desired attributes of DCU graduates was being continued by Dr Claire Bohan and the other members of the working group. The Chair undertook to circulate to the EC, once it became available, a report from the Education and Training Committee of IBEC containing feedback from employers on skills displayed by graduates of Irish higher education institutions and areas in which improvements appeared necessary. (Item 4.3)
- 3.13** Noted that the revised regulations and guidelines on validation and accreditation are now available on line. (Item 7)

**SECTION B: STRATEGIC MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION****4. Agreement on EC goals for 2010/11**

**4.1** The following were agreed as additional goals for the EC in 2010/11 (with work on the 2009/10 goals also to be continued):

- consideration of INTRA in terms of its strategic significance and its effectiveness
- development of recommendations about teaching quality evaluation
- development of recommendations about a possible new MIS system.

**4.2** It was agreed that briefing papers on INTRA (in respect of which a meeting will shortly take place between the Chair, Mr Byrne and Mr Dowling) and on the MIS system would be drawn up for consideration by the EC at its meeting of 3 November 2010. With respect to the MIS system, it was noted that work was progressing on the roll-out of the pilot system and that, while no single system would be capable of meeting every requirement of the University, it would be important to ensure that any system selected would meet requirements relating to issues identified by the University as priorities. It would also be important that consultation on the issue be comprehensive and well planned and would leverage the considerable degree of expertise available in the University, especially to the extent that those consulted might be in a position to act as ‘superusers’, capable of both using systems and understanding them from a technical perspective.

**5. Reports on some of the 2009/10 goals:****5.1 Student persistence/progression on programmes (update)**

**5.1.1** Discussion took place about a number of current and planned initiatives to support students who may be experiencing difficulties in engaging with, and succeeding in, their programmes, and it was noted that a recent ‘brainstorming’ meeting of relevant staff members and student representatives had yielded a number of ideas. It was noted also that, while initiatives to support students might require considerable deployment of resources in the initial stages, it was likely that fewer resources would be required in the longer term as problems would have been tackled in their early stages.

**5.1.2** Mr Byrne outlined current and planned developments with regard to ‘drop-in clinics’ for students at which queries could be answered and concerns aired, noting that they are scheduled to take place both before examinations and following the publication of results and that different types of issues feature on each occasion. It was noted that it would be important to have sufficient numbers of students on hand

to run the clinics (taking account of the fact that Students' Union representatives might risk having a very considerable workload if they undertook all the work themselves) and that these students would need to be appropriately briefed, particularly in relation to Faculty- and programme-specific issues. It was noted that support and advice in relation to the clinics is available from Student Support and Development as required and also that the clinics could provide advice as to where students might source more detailed information on the issues of concern to them. Mr Byrne and Dr Bohan intend to undertake further work to determine the most effective ways of responding to student queries (the most common of which, in recent weeks, have related to academic structures and module choice, transfer possibilities, and feelings of apprehension about one's ability to achieve learning outcomes in all modules).

- 5.1.3** It was noted that the system of sending weekly e-mails to students, developed by SS&D, appeared to be quite effective in terms of providing information but that Dr Bohan intended to get further information on this by conducting a poll among the students. The e-mails will, at the appropriate times, include reminders to students to avail of consultation days with staff following the publication of examination results.
- 5.1.4** A discussion took place about the extent to which current and prospective students find the University website user friendly. It was noted that previous consideration of this issue by Dr Bohan and other staff members in consultation with students had resulted in restructuring designed to facilitate ease of use by students. It was agreed that Ms Hughes would convene a group (to include, *inter alia*, Mr Byrne) to consider the extent to which any further development might be advisable.
- 5.1.5** With regard to the re-orientation sessions to be held on 20 October 2010, it was agreed that Dr Bohan would e-mail Programme Chairs to alert them to the most common queries and concerns highlighted by students in recent weeks (as listed in 5.1.2 above) so that these could be addressed at the sessions.
- 5.1.6** It was noted that the effectiveness of the personal tutor system had been discussed by Executive at its meeting of 5 October 2010 and would feature on the agenda for Executive again after the Deans of Faculty and Heads of School conduct an exercise to establish the strengths and weaknesses of the system as it is currently operated. Feedback from the Students' Union will also be made available to Executive through the SU President, Ms Megan O'Riordan. Agreed that, if considered appropriate following the Executive meeting at which the issue of personal tutors will again be discussed, the Deans would liaise with the Heads of School with a view to facilitating communication, via the Heads, to academic staff members on the importance of implementing the system. The Deans may also circulate information as provided by Ms Aisling McKenna in relation to students deemed to

be at risk (see Item 5.1.8 below). The importance of benchmarking the personal tutor system against international best practice was noted. Other, related, initiatives were also referred to: student-to-student mentoring is difficult to operate, except in the case of the Access programme where it works successfully; peer-assisted learning has the potential to be very helpful, but is resource intensive and perhaps likely to appeal more to students taking Education and related subjects than to others. It was suggested that the student ambassador scheme, operated by Access and Student Recruitment, be expanded.

**5.1.7** Discussion took place about the importance of encouraging students to engage fully with their programmes from the outset. In this context, Dr Bohan outlined the concept of a standard, generic orientation package as used in many North American universities, usually on a compulsory and credit-bearing basis. (It was noted that a version of this system is being used in the School of Nursing at present.) Dr Bohan is to set up a working group including academic staff (particularly those responsible for modules in the area of personal and professional development) and staff from SS&D, ISS and relevant administrative areas to make recommendations as to how University-wide orientation might be approached in future. It was noted in discussion that, while making an activity compulsory would be likely to increase the level of student engagement, the idea of attributing credits to orientation raises the issue of where these could be found given that programmes already have full credit ratings. The importance of maintaining the advantages of Faculty- and programme-specific orientation, as is often undertaken at local level in the University, was emphasised. Reference was also made to the importance of establishing the extent to which students meet the learning outcomes of orientation sessions. The relevance of all these issues to the ongoing work to identify desirable graduate attributes (see Item 3.12 above) was noted.

**5.1.8** With regard to the work being undertaken by Ms Aisling McKenna to track the progress of 'at risk' students, it was noted that, while the current exercise involves students in Year 1 of programmes, ongoing work would track these into the higher years and that this pattern of tracking would be developed to ensure that all years of programmes were routinely covered. It was noted also that weak academic performance is visible in the higher years of programmes as well as in Year 1. One reason for this may be that the considerable efforts often devoted to supporting weaker students in their aim of passing Year 1 lead to a situation in which they struggle in the higher years when presented with more challenging learning outcomes. Another reason may be the high assessment load experienced by students. It was agreed that Ms McKenna would ascertain from Faculties what measures had been taken to support 'at risk' students and the extent to which these had been successful. Ms McKenna provided additional information on some of the data she had made available about attendance and success rates at resit examinations from 2006 to 2010 inclusive. It was agreed that, with respect to the

students failing in the final years of their programmes, she would track their progress back to their first year with a view to establishing what patterns might emerge.

## **5.2 Developments relating to AFI, flexible learning and emerging subject areas**

**5.2.1** An oral presentation on these issues was made by Professor O’Kennedy and Ms Hughes. In the ensuing discussion, it was noted that it is very important to ensure that module learning outcomes are of the highest possible quality, from a variety of perspectives including the fact that good outcomes are likely to be an indicator that detailed consideration has been given to the content and purpose of the module and the fact that perusal of module descriptors is often a means by which potential applicants to the University evaluate the quality of programmes.

**5.2.2** A discussion took place about the extent to which module learning outcomes, as revised in the context of the introduction of AFI, are now fit for purpose. It was noted that there appeared to be considerable variation in standards and agreed that it would be important to ensure that, on an ongoing basis, module co-ordinators took cognisance of their responsibility to develop module descriptors, including learning outcomes, to the highest possible standard. It was agreed that the Deans of Faculty would indicate to the Heads of School that further work needed to be done to improve some module descriptors and would ask them if they considered that the guidance provided by the OVPLI on how to do this met their needs and those of the module co-ordinators. The outcome of these discussions will be communicated to the OVPLI by the Deans.

**5.2.3** Professor O’Kennedy reported that the recent technical problems with Coursebuilder had been resolved. He thanked all those who had worked to achieve this resolution.

## **5.3 Proposals on teaching quality evaluation**

Agreed that detailed consideration of a number of issues relating to teaching quality evaluation needed to be undertaken and that, as a means of initiating discussion, the Chair would speak to the issue at the meeting of Academic Council of 13 October 2010 (it is already on the agenda).

**6. Development of IUQB national guidelines of good practice for the approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards in Irish universities**

The Chair outlined the background to the proposed development of these national guidelines, noting that the IUA Registrars had agreed that details about practices across the sector should be fed into the IUQB discussions. It was also felt, by the Registrars, that an expert group comprised of both university and IUQB representation was likely to be the best way forward in terms of helping to shape and focus the development of these proposed guidelines. This Expert group has been established and has met once to date. The DCU representation on the group is Ms Louise McDermott with Ms Phylomena McMorrow as shadow. Ms McDermott noted that requests for information relating to some of the queries posed by the IUQB in the context of this exercise would shortly be made to relevant offices and groups including the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning/Education, Faculty Administration, Student Support and Development and the Learning Innovation Unit.

**SECTION C: PROGRAMME- AND MODULE-SPECIFIC ISSUES**

**7. CVs of the proposed members of the electronic Accreditation Board for the re-accreditation of the BSc in Nursing**

Deferred. The CVs will shortly (when available) be circulated electronically to the EC.

**8. Any other business**

Following a proposal from the Chair, the members agreed that it would be appropriate and helpful for Ms Aisling McKenna to be in attendance for the full duration of future meetings of the Education Committee.



**Date of next meeting:**

**Wednesday 3 November 2010, 2.00 p.m. in A204**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Chair

Date: \_\_\_\_\_