

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Wednesday 7 December 2011

2.00-4.30 p.m. in A204

Present: Professor Eithne Guilfoyle (Chair), Dr Claire Bohan,
Mr Cillian Byrne, Professor John Costello, Dr Sarah Ingle,
Mr Billy Kelly, Dr Lisa Looney, Ms Louise McDermott (Secretary),
Dr Ciarán Mac Murchaidh, Mr Martin Molony, Dr Anne Sinnott

Apologies: Mr Jim Dowling, Dr Jean Hughes, Professor Richard O’Kennedy,
Professor Anne Scott

In attendance: Mr Seamus Fox (for Item 5)
Ms Jennifer Bruton

SECTION A: AGENDA, MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted subject to the inclusion of one submission under Item 10.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 2 November 2011

The minutes were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

3.1 It was noted that work is in progress to ascertain both the proportion of deferred students who subsequently take up their places and the views of students who withdrew from the University some years ago. (Item 3.1)

3.2 It was noted that information and guidelines for Programme Chairs would shortly be updated and made available. (Item 3.2)

- 3.3** It was noted that the testing of Business Intelligence, with respect to the fitness for purpose of the twenty-two reports identified as forming the first phase of the roll-out, was ongoing. Discussions with respect to access levels to BIS are ongoing also. (Item 3.3)
- 3.4** It was noted that the work in respect of DCU Online, including the ascertaining of the resources that would be available to support it, was ongoing. The Deputy President/Registrar had made available to the EC details of the resource implications of the planned projects (see also Item 5.2). (Item 3.4)
- 3.5** It was noted that a report on the possibilities for wider use of the METIS system would be made to the EC at the earliest opportunity. (Item 3.6)
- 3.6** A template for mapping Graduate Attributes on to learning outcomes for proposed undergraduate programmes will be included in the regulations and guidelines for validation proposals. Employer feedback on the Attributes will be analysed in detail in due course. (Item 3.8)
- 3.7** Mr Kelly reported on the discussions of the Working Group on Non-major Awards and noted that a more detailed report would be made available to the EC at its meeting of 11 January 2012. (Item 3.9)
- 3.8** It was noted that the latest data on 'at risk' students would be analysed in detail as soon as possible. (Item 3.14)
- 3.9** It was noted that the optimum student profile was under consideration by Senior Management. (Item 3.15)
- 3.10** With respect to the HEA's consultation document on the proposed National Academy for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, it was noted that the University response had been submitted by the due date. (Item 3.17)
- 3.11** It was noted that work to develop the national student survey was ongoing (see also Item 4.2). (Item 3.18)

SECTION B: STRATEGIC MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

4. Programme review

- 4.1** Dr Ingle noted that the exercise she had recently conducted with Faculties indicated that, currently, the majority of programmes are subject to an annual review, though the potential exists for introducing greater consistency of approach than is the case

at present. Approximately one third of programmes are subject to periodic review with external input.

4.2 In the ensuing discussion, the following were noted:

- some unevenness of practice with respect to the existence of periodic review derives from the fact that certain programmes are subject to mandatory review by an external professional body (normally with specifications for what the review must consist of being made available in advance) and others are not
- conducting periodic programme reviews by means of quality reviews of Schools carries the risk that cross-School and cross-Faculty programmes will not be reviewed, though the potential exists to manage this issue with a view to ensuring review of all programmes (however, account must also be taken of the need to ensure that Schools or programmes are not subject to multiple review)
- online availability of statistical information, such as will be forthcoming once Business Intelligence has been fully developed, is essential
- the development of the national student survey is of significance to programme review (see also Item 3.11).

4.3 It was agreed that the system of annual reviews should be continued for all programmes and that, in principle, all programmes should be subject to periodic review, normally every five years (though local decisions on the cycle could be taken, e.g. with a view to maximising the use of resources within a Faculty).

4.4 It was agreed that the work involved in such periodic reviews should be undertaken at a local level but on the basis of a set of guiding principles to be approved by the EC. Dr Ingle undertook to draft such a set of principles for the consideration of the EC at its meeting of 11 January 2012. It was noted that allowance should be made, in terms of the guiding principles, for the fact that different Faculties might need to take different approaches to periodic review; it was noted also, none the less, that a template for periodic review would be helpful. The potential was noted for conceptualising periodic review as smaller-scale version of the process used for validation and accreditation (to determine both ongoing viability and appropriate academic standards); also noted was the possibility that programmes which had never, or not recently, been subject to periodic review might require a more thoroughgoing review on the first iteration than would be necessary in later cycles.

5. Presentation on strategic issues in respect of DCU Online

5.1 Mr Seamus Fox made this presentation, noting in particular the following:

- the rapid evolution of technology has very significant implications for teaching and learning and is changing the context even for areas such as Oscail which have long experience of online and blended delivery

- one aspect of the above is the move away from institution-specific resources to openly available resources
- another is the fact that it is becoming easier to design online and blended programmes
- there is a growing convergence in terms of the student experience for on-campus students and off-campus students
- careful consideration needs to be given, when online/blended programmes are being designed, to the strategic reasons for delivering content in these ways
- staff/tutor quality is the key driver in terms of the success of online/blended programmes
- marketing and promotion are crucial to success also.

5.2 In the ensuing discussion, the following were noted:

- an increasing proportion of students will be mature/lifelong learners
- it is important that students be prepared for the experience of online/blended learning (perhaps by means of a compulsory introductory module)
- it is important to maintain a balance between consistent and easily recognisable publicity material and independence, as appropriate, for programme developers
- clear policies on issues such as ownership of material are essential
- the initiatives involved in DCU Online are very welcome notwithstanding the fact that they will require considerable resources (see also Item 3.4).

6. University readiness

- 6.1** The resources outlined in the paper submitted for consideration were noted, as was the fact that the evidence suggests that strong support for students in their first year, and particularly in their first semester, is a key driver of student retention and achievement. Research indicates also that it is preferable that support be largely embedded in academic activities rather than being made available solely or primarily on a stand-alone basis.
- 6.2** It was noted that, for undergraduate programmes generally, many of the supporting mechanisms desirable for students are already available to them by means of the modules they take and that these are generally helpful in facilitating students to understand their individual learning styles and how they can be correlated with programme content.
- 6.3** The synergies between supporting mechanisms for students and ongoing initiatives such as the roll-out of the Graduate Attributes and the development of programme review systems were noted.

- 6.4** It was agreed that Dr Bohan would make the resources available on the Student Support and Development web pages with a view to assisting Programme Chairs and university staff generally and enabling them to guide students as appropriate.
- 6.5** The importance of feedback to students, particularly with regard to assessment, was noted, as was the fact that the formulation of recommendations and guidelines on this issue is one of the EC goals for 2011/12 and that the working group on feedback, set up under the auspices of the University Standards Committee, would report both to the USC and the EC.

7. Feedback from Faculties:

7.1 Teaching Quality Evaluation and Enhancement

The feedback on the recommendations of the working group which had been received from Faculties and Oscail was noted. In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made: it will be essential for the University to develop its own system for teaching quality evaluation and enhancement in a timely fashion; external input into the process will be important, though the means of operationalising this will require further discussion; resource implications will also need careful consideration. It was agreed that a set of recommendations, based on the feedback, would be made to the EC at its meeting of 11 January 2012 with a view to having recommendations (incorporating EC comments) for Academic Council at its meeting of 8 February 2012. The recommendations will be formulated, on behalf of the EC, by a subgroup consisting of Professor Costello, Mr Kelly and Dr Ingle; the Head of the School of Education Studies, Dr Joe O'Hara, will be invited to join this group also.

7.2 Mapping of Graduate Attributes

Dr Bohan undertook to make the PowerPoint presentation she had prepared available on the Graduate Attributes web pages to provide guidance for Programme Chairs and other staff in the University. She noted that, by the beginning of February 2012, these web pages would contain a range of links to online resources that would be likely to be of assistance in demonstrating how the Attributes might be developed, and that these resources would be added to over time. With respect to e-portfolios, she noted that it would be important to take account of the fact that their development was potentially very resource intensive, and suggested that she would draw up a list of guiding principles in respect of e-portfolios for the consideration of the EC at its meeting of 11 January 2012, as a means of assisting those who wished to develop e-portfolios in the future or help others to develop them.

7.3 Academic Calendar

- 7.3.1** It was noted, with respect to the alternative calendar for 2012/13, that two mandatory reading weeks, one per semester, as well as a reduction in the number of days in each diet of examinations were necessary features of it (the rationale for the mandatory reading weeks being that, overall, students' study time prior to examinations would be reduced, hence they would require reading weeks).
- 7.3.2** The implications of the above were discussed in the context of the outcome of the exercise that had been conducted by the Registry to construct a mock examination timetable, based on the alternative calendar and using real student data. This exercise had indicated that the alternative calendar would entail a considerable number of examinations on consecutive days with no flexibility to change dates and, for some students, more than one examination per day; these changes would obtain for all years of programmes including final years.
- 7.3.3** It was noted that, for the two Faculties that make extensive use of laboratory work, i.e. the Faculty of Engineering and Computing and the Faculty of Science and Health, mandatory reading weeks would be inoperable. It was therefore agreed to recommend to Academic Council, at its meeting of 14 December 2011, that as the implementation of the alternative calendar would not be practical at this time the standard rather than the alternative calendar for 2012/13 should be approved.
- 7.3.4** It was also noted that it would be undesirable to make changes to the calendar pending broader discussions, from a strategic perspective, about the optimum organisation of the academic year.
- 7.3.5** On the desirability or otherwise from a student perspective of having Semester 1 examinations finish before Christmas, were that to be considered at a future date, it was noted that student opinion is divided.

7.4 Management of independent modules

- 7.4.1** The feedback from Faculties and Oscail on this issue indicates that, in all cases, modules should be associated with a Faculty (or Oscail) and no new modules should be developed outside such a context on the basis that to do so would risk jeopardising the rigour currently associated with module approval. The EC endorsed this view. The fact that the launch of an independent module carries significant resource implications, notwithstanding the fact that a member of a Faculty may act as a champion, was noted, as was the desirability of associating any and all such modules with an award, as far as possible. It was agreed that the issue needed to be kept under review.

- 7.4.2** It was noted that a decision as to academic responsibility for the Uaneen module might be required at a future date.
- 7.4.3** The importance of ensuring robustness of approval of Graduate Training Elements, on an ongoing basis, was noted.

8. Issues relating to the Teaching Council

The Chair summarised recent developments in terms of Teaching Council recommendations for the management of both concurrent and consecutive teacher education programmes. She noted that these recommendations, if implemented, would have significant implications for the University and all other providers of teacher education, and that dialogue about them was under way between the higher education sector and the Council. It was noted too that a recent meeting (5 December 2011) of relevant University staff had taken place and that the recommendations and the ongoing dialogue would be mentioned to Academic Council at its meeting of 14 December 2011.

SECTION C: PROGRAMME- AND MODULE-SPECIFIC ISSUES

9. Proposal to specify two named pathways on the MSc in Computer-aided Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering

Approved.

10. Tribute to outgoing members

On behalf of the Education Committee and of Professor Anne Scott, Deputy President/Registrar, sincere appreciation for their contribution to the work of the EC was expressed to Professor Eithne Guilfoyle, who will no longer be a member as her term of office as Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences has come to an end (it was noted too that Professor Guilfoyle had also contributed significantly to the work of the EC's predecessor committee, the Academic Strategy Committee), Professor Richard O'Kennedy, who will no longer be a member as his term of office as Vice-President for Learning Innovation has come to an end, and Dr Jean Hughes, who is also leaving the EC as her term as Director of SIF Programmes has come to an end.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 11 January 2012, 2.00 p.m. in A204

Signed: _____
Chair

Date: _____