

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Wednesday 8 September 2010

2.00-4.00 p.m. in A204

Present: Professor Anne Scott (Chair), Dr Claire Bohan, Mr Cillian Byrne, Mr Jim Dowling, Professor Eithne Guilfoyle, Mr Billy Kelly, Ms Jean Hughes, Ms Louise McDermott (Secretary), Dr Ciarán Mac Murchaidh, Professor Bernard Pierce, Professor Malcolm Smyth

Apologies: Professor Richard O’Kennedy

In attendance: Ms Aisling McKenna (for Items 3, 4.1 and 4.2)

The Chair welcomed Mr Cillian Byrne, Deputy President – Education and Welfare of the Students’ Union, and Dr Ciarán Mac Murchaidh, Dean of Research and Humanities in St Patrick’s College, to their first meeting of the Education Committee.

SECTION A: AGENDA, MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted subject to the deletion of the submission under Item 8, which will be noted by the University Standards Committee.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 5 May 2010

The minutes, which had been confirmed electronically on 24 May 2010, were signed by the Chair.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

- 3.1 Noted that the template Memorandum of Understanding document, aimed at guiding staff members preparing MoUs, had been finalised and made available on line. (Item 3.1)
- 3.2 Noted that discussion was in progress in the Faculties with a view to the development of a University-level policy on Recognition of Prior Learning and that this matter would be discussed by the University Standards Committee at its meeting of 3 February 2011, by which time the broad sectoral developments in relation to it would very likely be known. (Item 3.1)
- 3.3 Noted that a meeting planned between the Chair of the EC and Professor John Carroll, the Chair of the Examination Appeals Board, had taken place and that Professor Carroll had also mentioned the relevant issues at the preparatory meetings for Programme Chairs held in May 2010, prior to the Programme Board Examination Review Committee meetings and the Progression and Awards Boards. (Item 3.2)
- 3.4 Noted that the Memoranda of Understanding with the external partner organisations in respect of the restructured MSc in Bioinformatics were being completed. (Item 3.5)
- 3.5 Noted that the surveys of student opinion carried out in Oscail and DCU Business School in 2009/10 had proved very useful in both areas in terms of yielding information both on current good practice and on areas requiring improvement. Agreed that the surveys should be conducted in all Faculties in 2010/11. Further discussion will be needed as to the optimum timing, though it is possible that March/April will prove suitable in 2010/11 as was the case in 2009/10. The importance of ensuring that the process, and the software used, make the information available to Programme Chairs and other relevant staff members on as simple and effective a basis as possible was noted. The survey, modelled on that used by the University of Sydney, contains a small number of core questions that can be used to bench mark DCU internationally, as these same questions are also used in the UK, US and Canadian surveys of student experience. The need to ascertain ways of avoiding excessive surveying of students generally was also noted. The experience of DCU Business School may prove to be somewhat more representative of the student experience in other Faculties than the experience of Oscail; Mr Kelly will report in October/November to the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning/Education in the other Faculties and to Ms Aisling McKenna on the detailed analysis of the DCUBS survey results, and the issue will be discussed by the EC again at its meeting of 1 December 2010. (Item 3.6)

- 3.6** Noted that the meeting of the subgroup to discuss the financial model for validation had taken place on 12 May 2010. (Item 3.9)
- 3.7** Noted that the issue of flexible provision of programmes/modules would be on the agenda for the meeting of the EC of 6 October 2010. (Item 3.11)
- 3.8** Noted that the issue of teaching/research integration would be on the agenda of a meeting of the EC in the near. (Item 3.12)
- 3.9** Noted that the revised accreditation documentation in respect of the MSc in Bioprocess Engineering was nearing completion. (Item 3.13)
- 3.10** Noted that the issue of projected student numbers would be discussed by the EC at its meeting of 1 December 2010 and that Dr Bohan was pursuing the issue of projected international student numbers in the context of the internationalisation strategy. (Item 4.2)
- 3.11** Noted that Information Systems and Services is in the process of setting up the infrastructure to facilitate a pilot Management Information Systems project which will run over Semester 1 2010/11. It is aimed at addressing issues identified by the President's Office, the OVPR and the Faculties. (Item 6)
- 3.12** Noted that the Quality Improvement Plan arising from the recent Institutional Review of the University is being prepared. (Item 7)
- 3.13** Noted that the MA in Ecology and Religion and the MA in Sexuality Studies had both undergone accreditation. The recommendations of the Accreditation Boards (which were, in both cases, that the programme be launched) had been approved by Academic Council at its meeting of 28 June 2010. (Items 8 and 9)
- 3.14** Noted that the due diligence process in respect of the external partner agency had been completed for stand-alone modules in Archaeology to be made available in St Patrick's College. (Item 15)
- 3.15** Noted that the EC had approved electronically, on 10 August 2010, the Special-Purpose Award in Innovation and New Business Development to be made available in the Ryan Academy. (Item 16)
- 3.16** Noted that an application for Erasmus Mundus funding for a proposed programme in the School of Physical Sciences had not been successful, but it had been commended and a resubmission would be made in 2011. (Item 18.1)

- 3.17** Noted that Academic Council had, at its meeting of 9 June 2010, agreed in principle that bonus points should be awarded for Higher Level Mathematics in the Leaving Certificate. (Item 18.2)
- 3.18** A report on the piloting of the annual programme review template in the Faculty of Engineering and Computing and in Oscail was noted. The importance of linking this work with the surveys of student opinion (see Item 3.5 above) and with the ongoing work on graduate attributes (see Item 4.3 below) was emphasised. It was agreed that the template should be revised to take account of the experience of the recent reviews. The revised template should be used by the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning/Education and made available to the Director of Quality Promotion given the importance of linking with the work undertaken by this staff member also. It was noted that it might be helpful to include a review of INTRA and the year abroad, where relevant, in the annual rather than the five-yearly review process. On the basis that reviews and surveys should be as quick and simple as possible to operate (see Item 3.5 above), it was agreed that Mr Kelly would discuss with Ms Barbara McConalogue, Director of Information Systems and Services, the possibility of using online entry for completion of the template. The importance of having a comprehensive Management Information System which would, *inter alia*, facilitate the integration of data from all reviews was noted (see Item 3.11 above).

It was noted that clarification of the role of Programme Chairs would be helpful, particularly in view of the fact that it tends to evolve over time. The Chair indicated that she was in discussion with Ms Phylomena McMorrow, Director of Registry, with a view to agreeing steps by which this would be achieved. It was agreed that the paper prepared by Dr Noel Murphy, Head of the School of Electronic Engineering, on the role of the Head of School and responsibility for programmes, and made available to the EC at its meeting of 3 March 2010, would be recirculated. Discussions on programme management which are currently taking place within the context of the Academic Framework for Innovation will also be factored into relevant future discussions by the EC.

(The issue of programme review is a matter arising from the majority of meetings of the EC in 2009/10.)

SECTION B: STRATEGIC MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

4. Report on progress of EC goals 2009/10

4.1 Student persistence/progression on programmes

- 4.1.1** Ms McKenna provided updated information on this issue which incorporated the results of the Summer 2010 examinations. She noted that students who had

- performed poorly in the January 2010 examinations also tended to perform poorly in the Summer examinations. She recommended that, for future reference, it should be ensured that results for all relevant students were followed up so that the focus would not mainly be on those who had had only one or two modules to resit. It will also be ensured that the data for the students in question will be compared with data for students generally.
- 4.1.2** The importance of intervention early in the academic year, to facilitate the transfer process for students who may conclude that they have chosen the wrong programme, was noted. Dr Bohan outlined the various methods used by Student Support and Development to alert students to the possibilities, noting that while text messaging might be an additional option the issues relating to its use would need further discussion.
- 4.1.3** It was agreed that the information provided by Ms McKenna would be monitored on an ongoing basis and that, to the extent possible, specific tracking of mature students would be undertaken. In this latter connection, the difficulties that sometimes exist in terms of communicating with mature students as a discrete group were noted. It was also agreed that other actions would be undertaken: commencing with this particular group (from 2009/10) students deemed ‘at risk’ will be tracked all the way through their academic career; students deemed somewhat less so, but potentially in need of some level of intervention none the less, will also be tracked; Dr Bohan and Mr Byrne will give further consideration to the development of additional methods of alerting students to the options available to them in terms of changing programmes; the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning/Education will discuss with their Faculties the issues relating to the use of Moodle to track student engagement; Dr Bohan will give consideration to the means by which personal tutors and/or year heads and/or Programme Chairs might be included in the refresher orientation sessions for students on 20 October 2010; Dr Bohan and the Chair will discuss with Professor O’Kennedy the issues relating to communication between personal tutors and students (taking account of the proposals on notification of staff availability to students which Professor O’Kennedy submitted to Academic Council for its meeting of 10 February 2010 and which were approved.) Reference was made to the issues surrounding student learning agreements and the importance of achieving a balance between proactive communication on the part of the personal tutor and the fostering of a sense of personal responsibility on the part of the student.
- 4.1.4** The issue of student persistence and progression will be on the agenda of the meeting of the EC of 6 October 2010, with the results of the Autumn 2010 examinations (including data on absenteeism from the examinations) being available by then. The issue was noted as one that merits ongoing discussion at a variety of levels including Faculty, School and Heads’ meetings.

4.2 Updated health check procedure

Noted that trends across three and, if necessary, five years would be factored into the procedure. The information to be made available, per programme, would consist of a dashboard outlining the main features and a more detailed analysis of the trends. Noted that the procedure would be integrated into the programme review process (see Item 3.18 above). Ms McKenna requested feedback from Faculties on the fitness for purpose of the metrics used to date, the ‘traffic light’ method used to indicate levels of concern, and any other issues that might arise. Agreed that the matter would be discussed in the Faculties on an ongoing basis.

4.3 DCU graduate attributes

Dr Bohan summarised the progress made to date by the working group on graduate attributes, noting that, in the preparation of the proposed matrix, account would be taken of the vision for the University as articulated by the new President, Professor Brian MacCraith. She noted that among the attributes that employers tend to list as characterising graduates of the University are openness to technology and a sense of commitment and energy. She requested feedback from the EC on the appropriateness or otherwise of the overarching attributes and skills/competencies as identified to date by the working group. It was agreed that that consideration might be given to rewording the references to self-awareness and to interpersonal and intercultural skills in the paper prepared by the working group. While the usefulness of referring to graduate attributes in the present rather than the future tense was noted, it was agreed that consideration would need to be given to emphasising that the University creates an environment which fosters desirable attributes rather than guaranteeing that such attributes will invariably be present in graduates. The importance of having a set of metrics to identify the presence of attributes was noted, and it was agreed that Dr Bohan and the working group would engage in discussion with employers as to the best methods of doing this. The Chair and other members of the EC congratulated Dr Bohan and the working group on the extensive work carried out to date and on the broad range of activities envisaged in the section of the paper headed ‘Next Steps’. It was agreed that the work would continue with a view to completion as early as possible (by the end of 2010, if this proves feasible).

5. Teaching quality evaluation

- 5.1 Ms Hughes summarised issues relating to teaching quality evaluation, noting the relevant recommendation of the Institutional Review of the University undertaken in March 2010, the relevance of the Teaching Enhancement Cycle undertaken by some staff members, the surveys of student opinion, and the fact that the Dublin

Region Higher Education Alliance has given priority to the development of teaching quality instruments.

5.2 It was noted that, while it is known informally that good teaching is widespread in the University, it is very difficult, in the absence of an evaluation system, to demonstrate this or refute charges that the opposite might be the case; the absence of a system also poses challenges for academic staff who wish to demonstrate teaching excellence for promotion purposes. It was noted too that the issues of whether or not evaluation should be mandatory, and whether or not formal accredited training should be mandatory for new academic staff (while being encouraged for others) are core ones. The importance of developing training on a structured yet flexible basis, of taking a developmental and supportive approach and of making full use of online options was noted. With regard to the possibility of peer evaluation, it was noted that the DRHEA might prove helpful in terms of identifying suitable peers. The importance of ensuring training for peers and of agreeing methods and criteria in advance was noted, as was the importance of getting advice on this matter from Training and Development in the Human Resources Office.

5.3 It was agreed that Ms Hughes and Mr Kelly, in consultation with Professor Smyth, would draft a paper, for consideration by the EC at its meeting of 6 October 2010, outlining a range of options with regard to evaluation. It was agreed that it would be important to factor considerations of the cost of operating a system into the discussions.

6. Planning EC goals 2010/11

The Chair indicated that one of the EC's tasks for 2010/11 would be the tracking of the progress in relation to the goals identified in 2009/10. The list of goals would be added to with reference to 2010/11 and would include consideration of INTRA, of teaching quality evaluation (including relevant sections of the surveys of student opinion) and of identifying/developing an appropriate MIS. She noted that the list of goals for 2010/11 would be finalised at the 6 October 2010 meeting of the EC and requested members to let her know, in advance of this meeting, of any other important issues that they considered might need to be the subject of goals.

SECTION C: PROGRAMME- AND MODULE-SPECIFIC ISSUES

7. Revised validation and accreditation regulations and guidelines

Approved. They will now be made available on line and publicised.

8. Any other business

None.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 6 October 2010, 2.00 p.m. in A204

Signed: _____
Chair

Date: _____