

ACADEMIC COUNCIL MINUTES

**7 April 2021
2.00 p.m. – 3.25 p.m.**

Zoom Meeting

Present:

B. Anderson	SJ. Belton	F. Blin
S. Blott	L. Boran	M. Brown
J. Brunton	J. Bruton	M. Butler
PJ Byrne	P. Cahill	E. Costello
M. Coulter	S. Cullen	R. Devery
T. Downes	H. Esmond	O. Feeney
Y. Freeney	G. French	C. Furlong
S. Giordani	C. Grant	P. Guasoni
C. Gurrin	G. Jones	J. Kearney
R. Keegan (Secretary)	W. Kelly	E. Kennedy
D. Keogh (Chair)	D. Kinahan	P. Landais
M. Leahy	A. Logan	T. Lokot
A. Looney	L. Looney	C. Mac Murchaidh
M. McAdam	C. McArdle	K. McDonagh
E. McDonald	J. McDonough	E. McGlynn
P. McGorman	J. McManis	P. McMorrow
P. Meleady	P. Mooney	A. Morrissey
G.-M. Muntean	R. Murphy	F. Murphy
C. Ni Mhurchú	B. Nolan	P. Ó Duibhir
S. O'Brien	C. O'Gorman	K. O'Sullivan
N. O'Sullivan	D. Robbins	P. Rosati
P. Sharkey Scott	J. Stokes	M. R. Sweeney
T. Szecsi	J. Travers	G. Uí Laighléis
J. Usher	L. Van Der Werff	L. Waugh-Daly
B. White		

In attendance:

V. Cooke

Apologies:

P. Anandarajah	C. Bohan	P. Gallagher
A. McKenna	J.-P. Mosnier	P. Robbins
A. Sinnott		

1. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted.

A. Minutes and Related Issues**2. Minutes of the meeting of Academic Council of 3 February 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of 3 February 2021 were approved. It was noted that formal minutes would be signed once on-campus activity resumes.

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Minutes of the meetings of the Education Committee of 13 January 2021 and 10 February 2021

The minutes were approved.

It was noted that work relating to further education entry routes is progressing. The Faculties are working to ensure that the application routes for further education graduates are streamlined. It was noted that A. Looney would be leading the work to explore bespoke pathways and DCU's broader relationship with further education colleges.

It was noted that M. Brown recently presented to the Education Committee on microcredentials and the ECIU university agenda in that regard. It is anticipated that the ECIU university initiative will become a more regular item at Academic Council and other University fora. It was noted that microcredentials present an opportunity for DCU to realise some of its ambitions relating to internationalisation. The President informed Council that he has had several meetings with ECIU partners, to explore other opportunities that may arise through the consortium.

5. Minutes of the meeting of the University Standards Committee of 7 January 2021

The minutes were approved.

6. Minutes of the meeting of the Graduate Research Studies Board of 14 January 2021

The minutes were approved.

It was noted that a subgroup of the GRSB has met on two occasions to consider some of the longer term, pandemic-related issues for PGR students.

B. Policy and Strategy Issues**7. President's report**

- 7.1 It was noted that the Crisis Management Team (CMT) continues to meet at least weekly, to address immediate issues and to plan for the year ahead. Planning considerations continue to prioritise the health and safety of students and staff while delivering the best possible student experience. Planning for the next academic year will take cognisance of ongoing health advice and the progress made in the vaccine rollout.
- 7.2 The President informed Council that DCU continues to work with IUA partners, to ensure the Government provides appropriate support for universities through the pandemic and as we begin to return to a level of normality. The IUA has requested that the Government provides early guidelines around re-opening, to offer as much certainty as possible.
- 7.3 The President advised Council that DCU, through the IUA, is working to influence the revision of the National Development Plan, to ensure appropriate funding for the university sector. Specifically, the IUA is campaigning for €3.5 billion investment over the next ten years. The request includes a multi-annual scheme similar to the PRTL scheme, the establishment of a sustainability fund to promote green campuses, the improvement of national digital infrastructure and a growth fund that will provide for the demographic growth to come through the system over the next decade.
- 7.4 The President noted his thanks to staff for engaging in the revised strategy meetings in recent weeks. Another is planned in May.
- 7.5 The President informed Council of Minister Simon Harris's recent presentation to the Teachers Union of Ireland, in which he highlighted the need for an integrated third level sector in Ireland. It was noted that the Minister has also emphasised widening participation as a national priority and highlighted the need for enhanced progression from further to higher education. It was noted that widening participation has been identified as a priority for DCU and this is being advanced through the work of the Education Committee. The President also noted the Minister's commitment to appropriately fund the higher education sector and restated his intention to address this issue within the current calendar year.
- 7.6 The President noted revisions to the Higher Education Authority Act intended to reform university governing authorities. These plans will see Governing Authorities significantly reduced in scale. Under this reform, the balance of representation will come from external members, with a minority of internally nominated representatives. The President welcomed the move to a smaller, skills-based, Governing Authority, but identified challenges inherent in the reduced membership, particularly the necessity to secure an appropriate range of expertise. It was noted that a new DCU Governing Authority will be appointed this summer, in advance of any new legislation. It is expected that new proposed legislation may provide for a winding down of existing governing authorities within a specific timeframe.
- 7.7 The President noted the recent feature in the Irish Times, detailing the new programmes offered under DCU Futures. The development of these programmes has been made possible by DCU's success in the Human Capital Initiative call and the creativity and enthusiasm of colleagues across the University.

- 7.8 Recent ransomware cyber-attacks against the Irish higher education sector were noted. Members were reminded to be vigilant and exercise caution with emails from unknown sources.

8. COVID-19

- 8.1 Prof Lisa Looney informed Council that Semester 1 results have been analysed and students have performed in line with pre-COVID expectations. The indicators are positive, showing that there was no significant increase in the number of students who have disengaged. Results show a slight reduction in the failure rate of first-years, reflecting the huge effort by students. L. Looney also noted the significant work of academic colleagues who have ensured appropriate assessments were designed and delivery was effective despite restrictions.
- 8.2 L. Looney advised Council that DCU continues to accommodate small cohorts of students, who need to attend campus to complete particular activities. This will ensure these students are in a position to complete all the academic requirements to progress or complete their programme. It is anticipated that the vast majority of students will finish out the academic year within the normal timeframe.
- 8.3 L. Looney drew attention to the supplemental examination regulations under item 10 of today's agenda and reminded colleagues that formal examinations must be scheduled centrally. These are being hosted on a particular instance of Loop in order to ensure stability and security, so no rescheduling should be done locally as this can cause clashes or issues with the platform performance.
- 8.4 L. Looney informed Council that the CMT is starting to look at a timeline for when decisions need to be made in relation to particular activities for the next academic year. It was noted that a cautious green light has been given to planning for international mobilities for 2021-22. This will be kept under review as guidance on travel restrictions continues to develop. It was noted that re-starting mobilities will also see an increased number of international students coming to DCU. This will have implications for capacity and it was noted that programme structures need to remain set once approved to avoid additional complexity caused by late changes.

It was noted that guidance on academic structures has been issued to Faculties and this includes a focus on a programmatic approach to assessment. This programme-level approach will prove particularly important in ensuring student workload is appropriate and distributed across the full semester.

It was noted that postgraduate taught programmes will be considered by the CMT next, as information for incoming, international postgraduate students will become important in the coming weeks.

The CMT will also be considering places for undergraduate 2021-22 entry. In light of decisions made around the Leaving Certificate and other factors, it was noted that there will be significant pressure for places in 2021-22 and conversations locally and with the HEA have commenced to address this. Clarity on the timing of Leaving Certificate results is not yet available but will improve when the exams have taken place.

9. Strategic Academic Initiatives

9.1 Curriculum approval and Management and related QA—Future Model

L. Looney provided a presentation on the document as circulated, summarising the proposed, future operating model for curriculum approval, management and quality assurance.

The paper sets out a proposed future model of operation as it relates to curriculum, in the context of an overall University Operating Framework. The paper focuses on our curriculum service, namely, the policy, quality assurance framework, procedures and processes that enable us to develop, design, approve and manage our curriculum.

The proposed model for curriculum sits within an overall new DCU operating framework which will provide a bridge between DCU strategy and operations, enabling the translation of our strategic intent into operational capability. It was noted that the proposed model focuses on how we work, on academic-related operations, and not what or how we teach. It takes into consideration the significant growth in student numbers from when many of our approaches were originally designed, the increased complexity in our portfolio of programmes, the maturity of our faculty structures and ongoing and future operational needs. The ultimate objective of the proposed model is to put in place the platform to enable a more modern, progressive approach to academic-related operations that takes account of the scale and maturity of the organisation. It provides a blueprint for how our curriculum service will be delivered in the future.

It was noted that curriculum is the next service area to be focused on under the SIS project and, if approved, the operating model for curriculum will be used to progress work in this regard. The next phase will involve the detailed design and configuration of new business processes with the objective of developing a more modern, progressive approach to curriculum design and management. The approach will focus on the maintenance of standards and quality, will ensure the integrity and accuracy of data, will be agile and responsive and will have at its core a single version of the truth. This framework will ensure we have coherence across the design solutions agreed upon, under the SIS project.

The proposed model will see Executive Faculties being facilitated in being agile and innovative in their offerings. Under this model, the design and re-design of curricula will be owned and driven by the Faculties, with enhanced support from central units, within an effective, centrally managed QA framework that includes accountability protocols. The proposed approach will see the validation stage sitting centrally, as per current practice, with accreditation being progressed locally, with Academic Council the ultimate approving body.

It was noted that resource requirements and capabilities will be considered, in the round, as the services are implemented. It was noted that, in the context of the curriculum service, while some activities will move to the Faculties, academics will receive additional support from central units with specific expertise in areas such as market research, business development etc. It was noted that the impact of each service implementation will be considered as part of the SIS project and this will be captured in a systematic way.

It was noted that stand-alone elements/modules, including those completed by research students, will be considered as part of the new model.

It was noted that the new model does not preclude cross-Faculty programmes that may have rotating Faculty leads.

It was noted that annual and periodic programme reviews will also be considered under the new model and will be Faculty-driven.

It was noted that implementation of the operating framework, via SIS, will draw on lean process principles. It was noted that efficiency is a fundamental principle of all of the work within SIS.

The Curriculum approval and Management and related QA—Future Model was approved.

C. Items for Formal Approval/Noting

10. DCU Online Examinations Supplemental Regulations

Approved

11. Accreditation Report: MSc in Elite Sport Performance

Approved

12. Report from Quality Promotion Office 2019-20

Noted

13. Report on INTRA activities 2019-20

Noted

14. Any other business

There was no other business.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Date of next meeting:

2 June 2021
2:00 pm
Zoom