

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE****MINUTES**

Wednesday 10 March 2021

2.00 p.m. – 3.40 p.m. via Zoom

**Present:** Dr Claire Bohan, Professor Mark Brown, Professor Michelle Butler, Dr Brian Corcoran, Professor Derek Hand, Ms Margaret Irwin-Bannon (Secretary), Mr Billy Kelly, Professor Anne Looney, Professor Lisa Looney (Chair), Dr Ken McDonagh, Ms Pauline Mooney, Professor Colm O’Gorman, Professor Joseph Stokes, Mr Lucien Waugh-Daly and Dr Blanaid White

**Apologies:** Dr Sarahjane Belton, Professor Greg Hughes and Ms Aisling McKenna

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

The Chair welcomed Professor Colm O’Gorman, Acting Executive Dean, DCU Business School, and Dr Ken McDonagh representative of the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning. She extended her thanks to Professor Barbara Flood, outgoing Acting Executive Dean in DCU Business School for her contribution to Education Committee. The Chair also extended her thanks to Dr Blanaid White for her contributions to Education Committee in her capacity as representative of the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning.

**1. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda as circulated was adopted.

**2. Minutes of the meeting of Education Committee, 10 February 2021**

The minutes of 10 February 2021, were approved and it was noted the final version would be formally signed at a later date.

**3. Matters arising from the minutes of 10 February 2021**

3.1 It was noted that the proposed paper on Dual and Joint Awards would be submitted for the consideration of Education Committee at its April 2021 meeting (Item 3.2).

3.2 It was noted that the employability statements currently being progressed by the Deputy Registrar/Dean of Teaching and Learning with the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning

would be submitted for the consideration of Education Committee at its May 2021 meeting (Item 3.3).

- 3.3 It was noted that the Chair and Director of Student Support and Development had met to discuss widening participation, and further discussions are ongoing (Item 3.9).
- 3.4 It was noted that work is ongoing on a process by which Education Committee would maintain oversight of its strategic commitments and activities and would be on the May 2021 agenda (Item 3.8).
- 3.5 It was noted that a discussion paper to examine ways to strengthen Further Education (FE) partnerships and attract motivated students through the FE route was on the agenda of this meeting (Item 3.9).
- 3.6 It was noted that a guidance document for the DCU Futures accreditation process was completed by the Deputy Registrar/Dean of Teaching and Learning and circulated to relevant colleagues.

The Chair requested that the DCU Futures Accreditation Boards would be provided with additional contextual information on the vision for the DCU Futures programmes, in addition to guidance documentation provided to programme proposers, and the outline of approach to accreditation.

- 3.7 It was noted that Faculties had submitted details of the FE Essential Components for entry to DCU and the requirements had been collated. Some recent updates had been submitted and once those changes were integrated into the master document it would be placed on the Education Committee shared drive (Item 3.7).

In a brief discussion which followed on the change to Further Education DCU Entry requirements, it was agreed that the new entry requirements would apply from September 2021.

- 3.8 It was noted that the minor correction to the affiliation of one of the nominees to the Accreditation Board for the MSc in Elite Sport Performance was completed (Item 10).

## **SECTION B: STRATEGIC MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION/NOTING**

### **4. Widening Participation**

#### *4.1 Stronger Connections with Further Education: a strategic priority for DCU*

Professor Anne Looney made a brief presentation on the document as circulated. She outlined why making stronger connections with Further Education institutions would be advantageous to DCU in the current context of the new national Further Education strategy.

Three key areas of action for DCU were identified as follows:

1. To streamline DCU's Further Education requirements. It was noted that this is now completed.
2. To develop a Bachelor of Education specific initiative.
3. To explore advanced programme entry. (Students take a year of their programme in a further education setting and where successful could progress to an advanced year of a programme in DCU).

Professor Looney proposed that DCU would hold a round-table launch event to announce the FE entry changes and signal widening participation as a strategic initiative of the University. She suggested that key stakeholders from the Department of Education and SOLAS would be invited.

The Chair thanked Prof Looney for her work on this initiative.

In the discussion which followed the following points were raised:

- For DCU's existing direct entry programmes, students all enter with 390 points and are chosen by random selection because there are only three types of classification (distinction, merit or pass) and students are clustered on the same points. It was suggested that the grading and points system should be reviewed however, this would be in the remit of the QQI.
- There should be a coherent institutional approach with respect to Further Education across the University so that information is shared.
- The FE pathway should not necessarily be only in one direction, e.g. where students choose not to complete programmes, they could consider the possibility of following the FE route.

The Chair indicated that in preparing for the launch and DCU's announcement she would consider what DCU's internal structures might be in terms of ensuring an institutional approach.

## **5. Teaching delivery post-Covid-19 restrictions, 2021-2022**

The Chair introduced this item, noting that Faculties had been asked to reflect on the adaptations to new methods of teaching delivery brought about by the Covid-19 restrictions. They were also asked to provide feedback on what adaptations they would consider maintaining and what the future delivery might look like as a result of the changes. She noted that a lot of work had been done in providing this feedback and this was an initial first step in taking stock and beginning to plan DCU's future direction. Given the remaining uncertainty of the impact on semester 1 2021, she noted that a more rigorous review should take place but probably no earlier than this time next year.

The Deputy Registrar/Dean of Teaching and Learning provided an outline summary of the key points coming through the feedback and noted that he would circulate a summary document to Education Committee.

## Assessment

The following feedback was highlighted by the Deputy Registrar/Dean of Teaching and Learning:

- With respect to assessment he noted that there were mixed outcomes across all Faculties and he found that there were also some significant differences within Faculties.
- The change to continuous assessment had introduced some academic staff to new methods of assessment which they found useful. For some academic staff, the switch from examinations to continuous assessment would be permanent and for others, they would want to return to campus-based examinations.
- The difficulty of co-ordinating the scheduling of assessments across programmes was a universal issue. The Deputy Registrar/Dean of Teaching and Learning suggested using Loop to provide visibility on all the continuous assessment elements that students have to complete and noted it was his view that this should be done at an early as stage as possible. He asked Education Committee to consider endorsing a proposal that programme continuous assessment schedules would be agreed at the time of the approval of academic structures each year as it would be more feasible to make changes to schedules then, rather than in September each year.

Following a discussion on this recommendation, there was general agreement that the suggestion to co-ordinate the scheduling of continuous assessment within and across programmes and to input all continuous assessment on Loop for the visibility of all partners should be actioned. It was noted that further discussions would have to take place around the practicalities of when it would be feasible to gather this data.

## Delivery

The Deputy Registrar/Dean of Teaching and learning reported that feedback with respect to modes of delivery was very varied, and because of timing, was based on anecdotal evidence. He indicated that there was no single message yet on delivery methods.

He noted the following:

- Some academic staff recognised that synchronous online delivery led to greater attendance than there would have been on-campus, but there was uncertainty about the level of engagement
- It is likely that there would be increased use of the 'flipped classroom' approach, using asynchronous material in the future
- There were big differences within Faculties on views of remote delivery and its impact.

It was noted from the Faculty reports that there would be a value in developing a "Student Workload Calculator" as part of the module design process, as decisions about the blend of content and delivery have implications for student (and staff) workload. The danger of the new digital environment is adding more content, such as videos, without applying the principle of substitution.

## Timetabling

The following points were noted:

- It was suggested in the feedback that the 12 two-hour lecture model should not be a default for module delivery, but one option among many
- Where there were larger class groups that would normally be timetabled in different groups, their coming together online enabled the different discipline backgrounds to learn from each other
- Consolidated laboratories sessions did not necessarily work.

The Deputy Dean/Dean of Teaching and Learning drew the Committee's attention to the fact that staff in the DCU Institute of Education have flagged that they would like to re-introduce their summer schools in summer 2021, in advance of the beginning of the 2021-22 academic year.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Registrar/Dean of Teaching and Learning for the outline summary and reiterated that these feedback documents reflect an unscientific check of the views of colleagues of the current situation and do not necessarily reflect the strategic positioning of the university. She indicated that the next steps would be to seek student feedback and at a later point there would be time for more considered reflection on these experiences.

In the brief discussion that ensued the following were noted:

- The Director of Student Support and Development informed Education Committee that the most positive feedback from students was having the ability to look back on lectures which were recorded. The most stressful part was the continuous assessment deadlines, which all came around the same time and which were not always flagged far enough in advance
- Alternatives to the INTRA experience are not as effective as INTRA, which should be maintained in its current format
- Laboratory sessions should be retained as an important aspect of DCU delivery
- Asynchronous teaching, without back up support, does not work for students. It was noted that there was strong feedback in this regard
- The support provided by teaching assistants was invaluable and Faculties would like to see this continue.

5.1 DCU Business School  
Noted

5.2 Faculty of Engineering and Computing  
Noted

5.3 DCU Institute of Education  
Noted

5.4 Faculty of Science and Health  
Noted

5.5 Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Noted

**6. Curriculum Approval and Management and related QA - Future Model.**

The Chair provided a brief presentation on the document as circulated, highlighting that the need for a new operating model had developed to provide a basis for the new student information system and redesigning DCU's operational processes, with the service recipient as one of the key drivers. In this context the University set about the development of an Operating Framework 'that would provide an overarching blueprint for DCU's future model of operation that would in turn, provide the coherent context within which DCU's processes would be (re)designed, making optimal use of the affordances of the technology DCU had acquired'.

She defined the operating framework as 'the bridge between our strategy and our operations', 'translating our strategic intent into operational capability'. With respect to the Student Information System (SIS) development, the DCU operating framework will provide a blue print for the 'end-to-end version' of particular services areas which can be used to help design the SIS solution.

The next key area to be considered along the SIS programme map will be the curriculum (curriculum design and curriculum management). The Chair noted that the document circulated is the blue print which was approved by Senior Management and if approved by Education Committee and Academic Council, would become the blue-print for the SIS design team and the design panel to underpin the design of business processes.

It was highlighted that the changes proposed in the document, aim to 'enable a more modern progressive approach to academic-related operations that takes account of the scale and maturity of the organisation':

- The responsibility and principal ownership for the curriculum service will sit at Faculty level.
- Alignment of responsibility and authority, with approval/decision-making taking place as close as possible to service drivers to better enable agility
- Remove duplication of effort by bringing greater clarity to roles and responsibilities
- Modernise practices in line with technology
- Develop and enhance new capabilities and skills

In summary 'the spirit of the DCU Operating Model in respect of curriculum is that Executive Faculties<sup>1</sup> are facilitated to be agile and innovative in service of the University strategy. Faculties are charged with responsibility for delivering the service, while the University assures and supports high standards of student and wider service-recipient experience, programme and module quality and relevance and data driven strategic decision-making.'

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<sup>1</sup> Taken to include Open Education

'The high level curriculum service blueprint also includes an effective central quality assurance framework and accountability protocol to address approval, review and updating of curricula'.

The Chair noted that SIS project would take a number of years and the roll-out of the operating framework as it relates to curriculum would also take time.

The Chair thanked Ms Pauline Mooney for preparing the documentation for today's meeting. She proposed that the document *Curriculum Approval and Management (related QA) – Future Model* would be submitted to Academic Council as DCU's 'direction of travel' and it would then become the basis on which the SIS Design Panels would undertake their work as it relates to curriculum. This was agreed.

It was noted, based on the proposed transfer of some functions from the centre to faculties and introduction of new functions centrally that resourcing would need to be considered. The Chair indicated it would be important, as the full impact of the SIS project becomes clear that resourcing is reviewed in the broader context, including that of efficiencies gained.

## SECTION C: PROGRAMME AND MODULE-SPECIFIC ISSUES

### 7. Progress Updates: HCI Pillar 3 funded programmes

#### 7.1 *New programmes*

- 7.1.1 MEng/BEng in Sustainable Systems and Energy
- 7.1.2 BSc in Digital Business and Innovation
- 7.1.3 BSc in Global Challenges
- 7.1.4 BSc in Psychology and Disruptive Technologies
- 7.1.5 BA in Climate and Environmental Sustainability
- 7.1.6 BSc in Psychology and Mathematics

#### 7.2 *Existing programmes with new specialisms*

- 7.2.1 BSc in Chemistry with Artificial Intelligence
- 7.2.2 BSc in Bioprocessing
- 7.2.3 BSc in Physics with Data Analytics
- 7.2.4 Bachelor of Business Studies (new specialism in Business Analytics)

Education Committee commended the extraordinary amount of work completed to date on the programmes as named above, which was reflected in the detailed update reports submitted. It was acknowledged that the DCU Futures undertaking is ambitious and unparalleled across the sector. It was noted too that this will be a four-year project, and it had been recognised at this point the Faculties would not have fully formed programmes but would have a clear vision for the programmes, and the teams in place to work on the development.

Education Committee did not discuss the specifics of any particular programme (as listed above) and decided, given the detailed submissions, that each programme (with a focus on those programmes due for accreditation) would be considered at Education Committee Standing Committee, which would take place on Tuesday 16 March at 3.30 pm. The discussion which

took place at Education Committee focused more broadly on the vision and the expectations of DCU Futures development more generally, and how it was reflected in the progress updates submitted for consideration.

Education Committee was reminded that what was radical about DCU Futures was ‘a transformation of the student learning experience, reconceptualising learning opportunities, creating authentic connections between the classroom and enterprise, and embedding digital literacies and transversal skills’. The Futures proposal promised ‘a deep blending of innovative pedagogies which will transform student learning’.

Education Committee recognised that the programme teams are at the initial stages of development and planning of these new programmes. However, it was noted that, as presented, the programmes, for the most part are logical developments and extensions of existing programmes rather than radical restructures. While it was not expected that programme teams would have fully developed plans as to **how** the programmes will be delivered over the life cycle of the programme, Education Committee indicated that it wanted to see programme proposers show ambition to push the boundaries in terms of how they will make the learning experience of students on these programmes different to those of current programmes. Education Committee recommended that programme proposers be prepared to experiment, because as the programmes were currently articulated the innovation was not particularly apparent.

It was highlighted, given the scale of ambition of transformation, that it appeared that the number of ‘new modules’ in some programmes was quite low.

It was noted that the list of modules and the learning approaches require more detail in order to make a judgement about what the programme is about and what will make them so radically different.

It was recommended that the distinctiveness of the programmes--what makes the programmes different to DCU’s other level 8 programmes that are also creative and innovative—would be clearly articulated. In addition, it was requested that the following questions would be answered: what makes the graduates of DCU Futures programmes different and what is different about their learning experience?

It was noted that the Conceptual Framework that underpins DCU Futures was absent from many of the proposal updates and recommended that it would be embedded in all programmes.

It was recommended that common definitions for terms should be agreed across the programmes and reflected throughout the proposals. Examples discussed were, challenged-based learning and innovative pedagogical approaches. It was noted too that some programmes had Challenge Based Learning (CBL) as a more integrated concept than others.

It was reiterated that as yet the transversal skills have to be defined, and therefore it would be essential that each programme leaves space for them to be embedded within the curriculum, as this was one of the core goals of DCU Futures.



It was clarified that the question on the 15% online delivery was included because DCU Futures would enable DCU to respond to the upcoming demographic bulge and the fact that DCU won't have an increased physical footprint, but there will be an expectation of accepting additional numbers of students. The question posed for programme proposers was, how they will incorporate 15 % online and what physical infrastructure might be released in so doing?

In addition, the following was noted with respect to the DCU Futures project:

- That the work of the ECIU University and transversal skill micro-credentials particularly in data literacy could be aligned with the DCU Futures developments
- Meetings have taken place already with respect to a bespoke module on data literacy and analysis

#### 8. Any other business

There were no items of business.

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

**Date of next meeting:**  
Wednesday, 31 March 2021  
at 2.00 pm via Zoom