

ACADEMIC COUNCIL

MINUTES

7 February 2024

2.00 p.m. – 3.25 p.m.

Zoom Meeting

Present:

C. Bohan	A. Bourke	L Boran
J. Bruton	D. Burke	PJ. Byrne
P. Clarke	E. Clinton	C. Connolly
R. Connolly	M. Coulter	E. Crossen
Y. Crotty	S. Cullen	A. Daly
B. Daly	J. Doyle	M. Efthymiou
D. Fahy	P. Flynn	J. Foster
Y. Freeney	G. French	C. Furlong
F. Gallagher	P. Gallagher	C. Gurrin
D. Hand	D. Harold	A. Intizar
R. Keegan	D. Keogh (Chair)	A. Kirwan
V. Lambert	M. Leahy	A. Looney
L. Looney	C. Loscher	T. Lynn
C. Mac an Bhaire	A. Maillot	C. McArdle
U. McCabe	K. McDonagh	S. McGovern
J. McMackin	R. McManus	P. McMorrow
P. Mooney	JP. Mosnier	N. Murphy
P. Murphy	T. Ní Mhuirthile	S. O'Brien
K. O'Sullivan	N. O'Sullivan	M. Price
P. Sharkey Scott	A. Sinnott	G. Uí Laighléis
L. Van der Werff	M. Ward	A. Whelan (Secretary)
B. White		

Apologies:

P. Admirand	J. Appleby	A. Brennan
C. Brennan	M. Brown	M. Brown
M. Butler	E. Conway	J. Doyle
M. Dunne	N. Dunne	B. Egan
D. Elliott	O. Feeney	T. Gans
B. Hayes	S. Hegarty	C. Holland

S. Keating	D. Kinahan	G. Lake
J. Lynch	A. MacNamara	A. McCarren
J. McDonough	J. McManis	SR. McGroarty
A. Morrissey	B. Murphy	K. Nolan
M. O'Brien	S. O'Brien	R. O'Dwyer
P. Robbins	M. Rocchi	G. Sinclair
T. Szecsi	P. Young	

In Attendance:

M. Howell	M. Long (for Item 8.1)	Y. McLoughlin (for Item 8.1)
P. Murray (for Item 8.1)		

The President welcomed new members of Academic Council and congratulated Dr Brenda Daly on her appointment as Chair of the Examination Appeals Board; Professor Yseult Freeney on her reappointment as Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning of DCU Business School; Dr Seline Keating on her appointment as Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning of DCU Institute of Education; and Professor Sharon O'Brien on her appointment as Dean of Graduate Studies. The President also welcomed Mr. Justin Doyle in his capacity as Acting Director of Information Systems Services.

1. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted, as circulated.

A. Minutes and related issues

2. Minutes of the meeting of Academic Council of 29 November 2023

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising

It was noted that there were no matters arising.

4. Minutes of the meetings of the Education Committee of 15 November 2023 and 13 December 2023

The minutes were approved.

5. Minutes of the meeting of the University Standards Committee of 2 November 2023

The minutes were approved.

6. Minutes of the meetings of the Graduate Research Studies Board of 19 October 2023 and 30 November 2023

The minutes were approved.

The Dean of Graduate Studies extended her gratitude to Professor Joseph Stokes for his notable contribution during his tenure as Dean of Graduate Studies, prior to her appointment. Professor O'Brien also confirmed that a Postgraduate Research nominee has joined the Graduate Research Studies Board for the remainder of the academic year.

B. Policy and strategy issues

7. President's report (oral report)

7.1 The President expressed his deepest sympathy on the death of Professor Patrick McNally, School of Electronic Engineering. On behalf of Academic Council, he extended his condolences to his family, friends, and colleagues within his School and in the wider Faculty of Engineering and Computing. Professor McNally was renowned for his research within the University and internationally, and was a valued colleague across DCU.

The President also conveyed his deepest sympathy on the death of Mr David Kelly from the Finance Office. On behalf of Academic Council, he extended his condolences to his family, friends, and colleagues. Mr Kelly was a long-standing staff member who had a positive impact through his support of and engagement with colleagues across many areas of the University.

7.2 Attention was drawn to the recent launch of DCU Press, Ireland's first fully open-access university press. This development represents a significant milestone in advancing the research profile of the University. Publications will be offered freely on a global basis, extending the reach and impact of the University's research. The President recorded his gratitude to Mr John McDonough, University Librarian, and research colleagues for their work on this project. The inaugural publication 'Statecraft and Foreign Policy: India, 1947-2023' is now available.

7.3 The President informed members that DCU has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Accenture, a leading global professional services company. Although DCU has worked with Accenture on numerous projects previously, such as DCU Futures and Women on Walls, this MoU represents a commitment to continue working in partnership and deepening the relationship for mutual benefit. The President observed that Accenture is a significant employer of DCU graduates, with many graduates occupying senior roles within the company.

7.4 The President also informed Academic Council that he had recently signed the Higher Education Authority's Anti-Racism Principles for Irish Higher Education Institutions on behalf of the University. He cited the need to model the values and behaviours within the University that we want to see in Irish society, shaping our graduates accordingly.

- 7.5 The President noted that DCU Business School is currently undergoing a review for EQUIS accreditation. EQUIS is a highly regarded institutional accreditation system that, if awarded, would place DCU Business School in the top 1% of business schools worldwide. The President commended the depth of effort and excellent engagement of colleagues in the process to date, which displays a strong sense of mission and ambition within the Business School.

8. Strategic academic initiatives

8.1 Response to Developments in Artificial Intelligence

Maeve Long, Head of INTRA Internships, Yvonne McLoughlin, Head of Careers Service and Paula Muray, Director of Placement joined the meeting for this item.

The Vice-President for Academic Affairs / Registrar and the Dean of Teaching and Learning presented to Academic Council on DCU's response to recent developments in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The Vice-President for Academic Affairs / Registrar noted that there is a range of technologies that constitute AI, some of which are already in use and some that are still under development. As a university, it is imperative that we are aware of these tools, how they operate, and how they will impact on our teaching and learning, our assessment of students, and the potential shift in graduate and work placement opportunities that will be available to DCU students. Based on the rapidity of developments in AI, it is likely that students who join DCU in 2024 or 2025 will, upon graduation, enter a workplace which has been significantly impacted by AI. It was remarked that although the rate of change in the field of AI is rapid, the level and nature of change experienced will vary by subject discipline.

The European Parliament's Special Committee on Artificial Intelligence in a Digital Age (AIDA) has adopted a report on artificial intelligence (AI) which emphasises that the digital transition in the EU must be human-centric and compatible with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. Attention was drawn to the AIDA report as a useful resource for defining AI and outlines how these tools can be regarded as a positive development. The Vice-President for Academic Affairs / Registrar noted that regulating the provision of AI is being explored internationally. In the United States of America an Executive Order has been issued by President Biden on 'the Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Development and Use of Artificial Intelligence'. In Europe, the 'AI Act' is making its way through Parliament. The focus within the proposed AI Act is a human-centric approach to AI which may help serve in gaining competitive advantage, rather than viewing it solely as a threat. It was noted that the proposed AI Act categorises education as a high-risk area.

The Government of Ireland published a Progress Report on the National AI Strategy in 2021 and since then Ireland's first AI Ambassador has been appointed. The Artificial Intelligence Advisory Council was established in 2023, to provide independent expert advice to Government on AI policy. In January 2024, Professor Alan Smeaton, Faculty of Engineering and Computing was appointed to the Artificial Intelligence Advisory Council. National guidance regarding Generative AI (GenAI) has been published for educators by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) through the National Academic Integrity Network, and internationally by the United Nations Education, Scientific Cultural Organization.

The Vice-President for Academic Affairs / Registrar highlighted that as well as conducting leading research in AI, DCU is actively supporting education about it, and the University's expertise in this area is extensive. The University has already activated a number of initiatives to respond to developments in AI. The Faculty of Humanities and Social Science recently advertised PhD Scholarships, all related to the theme of AI and Society;; the Teaching Enhancement Unit is taking the lead on guidelines on GenAI and its impact on assessment design, as well as how teaching approaches can be enriched using AI; and DCU Careers Service is using virtual reality to gather feedback on mock interviews. In addition to these initiatives, the DCU Quality Improvement and Development (QuID) Fund Call for 2024 was based on the theme of 'Transitioning AI from a Threat to a Tool: Empowering and Supporting a 21st Century University'. The Director of Quality and Institutional Insights confirmed that 11 projects have been partially or fully funded by this Call across a range of disciplines. She noted that upon completion these projects will be showcased due to the currency of and interest in this area.

It was stated that the potential impact of AI has been added to DCU's Strategic Risk Register, referring to a number of dimensions of activity in the University. Current programme offerings and curricula will need to be reviewed to ensure the impact of AI is considered, both positive and negative. The Vice-President for Academic Affairs / Registrar noted that the University needs to work towards preparing our students for a workforce that will be impacted by AI. The World Economic Forum and the International Monetary Fund have recently published reports regarding AI and the influence it will have on the workforce, including what types of roles will be lost, changed, or created. Professional and pattern-based roles have been identified as being at the forefront of change based on the nature of their work, as opposed to manual roles. This is due to the capability AI possesses to analyse large volumes of data and automate repetitive tasks. She illustrated that professions are beginning to map future impacts, citing examples from Public Relations, Accountancy and Software Engineering.

The goal for 2024 is to ensure that we can advise prospective students that our programmes have been reviewed in light of developments in AI and that any necessary changes are being implemented, assuring them that they will be provided with the types of skills and knowledge frameworks needed to live, work and lead in an AI-infused future.

The Dean of Teaching and Learning highlighted the importance of building knowledge and understanding of AI on an institutional level. A White Paper on Curriculum Renewal in the context of Artificial Intelligence was adopted by Education Committee. This Paper articulates the need for DCU to establish a baseline regarding AI awareness and knowledge across the university. It was noted that discipline specific reviews should be undertaken by each Faculty, to begin to surface on the varying impact AI will have across different subject areas. The desirability to maintain oversight of this review, and of staff upskilling needs was emphasised. She reiterated the need to develop DCU's response to developments in AI to include reviewing our teaching and learning strategies, as well as an ongoing review of assessment practices. The Dean of Teaching and Learning stated that, based on the rate of change in this area, sources of information will update frequently, and academics will need to proactively upskill regularly.

The Head of DCU Careers Service and the Head of INTRA indicated that employers are calling out a need for applicants to have AI related skills. It was noted that AI can be used by students in their search for employment by using tools for CV building and developing their

interview skills. While it was noted that AI can be used by students, employers have emphasised the importance of authenticity and evidencing this in employment applications.

Maeve Long, Head of INTRA Internships, Yvonne McLoughlin, Head of Careers Service and Paula Muray, Director of Placement left the meeting after this item.

C. Items for formal approval/noting

9. Aegrotat Award: Posthumous BSc in Computer Applications for Suhyb Mohammed

Approved.

10. Proposed Changes to A Level Equivalencies

A National Working Group was established by Universities Ireland, seeking to lessen barriers for students with A levels securing a place in institutions in the Republic of Ireland by reviewing A Level Equivalencies (in terms of CAO points). Using an agreed methodology, the group has proposed a changed allocation of points. The Vice-President for Academic Affairs / Registrar advised that the proposed changes have been approved by University Standards Committee. If approved by Council, and accepted by other institutions using the common points scale, the changes will be implemented systematically via CAO for the 2025 intake and thereafter. It is anticipated that the proposed changes may not have a significant impact on the number of A Level students recruited to DCU in the short term. The new equivalencies will be kept under review.

Approved.

11. Recommendations from Progression and Awards Boards for Spring 2024 Conferring

The Report from Spring 2024 Progression and Awards Boards was approved. Academic Council conferred awards on those candidates who demonstrated the required standard, and were duly approved for award by relevant Progression and Awards Boards.

12. Recommendations from Faculty Awards Boards for Research Degrees for Spring 2024 Conferring

The Report from Spring 2024 Faculty Awards Boards for Research Degrees was approved. Academic Council conferred awards on those candidates who demonstrated the required standard, and were duly approved for award by relevant Faculty Award Boards for Research Degrees.

13. Proposed Changes to the Academic Calendar 2023-2024 and 2024-2025

The Vice-President for Academic Affairs / Registrar outlined that a change to the academic calendar is required for 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years. In both years, were resit examinations to take place from early August, this would not allow sufficient time for the

processing and promulgation of results to students before the start of the next academic year. This issue will occur on a cyclical basis. The Director of Registry informed Council that a number of approaches had been explored and on foot of this a twofold proposal is being made, namely:

- To change the commencement of resit examinations from 6 August 2024 to 29 July 2024
- To amend the Council Approved Parameters regarding the academic calendar with the caveat that resit examinations will commence in August, where possible.

Approved.

14. Report from Research Committee 2022-2023

Noted.

It was noted that the remit of the Committee would be revised in the report, to align with its remit in the year period referred to in the report.

15. Any other business

There was no other business.

Date of next meeting:

<p style="text-align: center;">3 April 2024</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2:00 pm</p> <p style="text-align: center;">B103, St Patrick's Campus</p>
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