

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Wednesday, 9 October 2024

2.00 p.m. – 3.30 p.m.

AG01, Glasnevin Campus

Present: Dr Claire Bohan, Dr Jennifer Bruton, Ms Aoife Butler, Professor Dominic Elliott, Professor Anne Looney, Professor Lisa Looney (Chair), Dr David Mc Carthy (Secretary), Dr Ruth McManus, Ms Pauline Mooney, Professor Sharon O’Brien, Dr Monica Ward, Professor Blánaid White and Dr Paul Young

Apologies: Professor Mark Brown, Professor John Doyle, Professor Derek Hand and Dr Rachel Keegan

In attendance: Ms Margaret Irwin-Bannon and Dr Jing Burgi-Tian

The Chair welcomed Dr David Mc Carthy and Dr Ruth Mc Manus to Education Committee. Dr Mc Carthy assumes the role of Secretary to the Committee, while Dr McManus joins as the representative of the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning.

SECTION A: AGENDA, MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

2. Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee of 18 September 2024

The minutes of the meeting of Education Committee of 18 September 2024 were **approved** and signed by the Chair.

3. Matters arising from the minutes of 18 September 2024

- 3.1 It was noted that the approval process for the DCU Futures programmes is now being formally closed out. A review of all ten programmes will take place over the next three meetings of Education Committee and is expected to be completed by December '24. The programmes will be submitted in three separate tranches and submission one of three is on the agenda (Item 6).
- 3.2 The draft terms of reference for the working group on the design and use of teaching spaces is on the agenda (Item 4.1).
- 3.3 It was noted that the creation of a Graduate Diploma in Work and Organisational behaviour as an exit award from the MSc in Work and Organisational Behaviour was **approved** by Chair's Action on 25 September 2024.
- 3.4 An addition to 'Report on Devolved Decisions (2022-23)', a change in programme title of 'BSc Science Education' to 'BSc Science and Mathematics Education', was noted by the Chair on 27 September 2024.
- 3.5 It was noted that the template for 'Report on Devolved Decisions (2024-25)' was updated to include the addition of a January intake to a programme and circulated to Faculties.
- 3.6 The revised documentation for the Revised Academic Offering for MSc in Finance was submitted to the Secretary and is currently being reviewed by the Chair.
- 3.7 An overview of achievements relating to the Teaching and Learning Strategy is currently being prepared by the Chair.

SECTION B: STRATEGIC MATTERS

4. Strategic academic initiatives

4.1 *Design and use of teaching spaces: Working Group*

The Chair provided the context for the establishment of a working group to consider the design and use of teaching spaces, noting discussions that had taken place at the Education Committee meeting of 20 March 2024 in this regard. These discussions at Education Committee took place in response to the emergence of three related items, namely discussions at Information Systems (IS) Governance Committee regarding student computing resources and supports for computer-based examinations; submission of a number of requests to the Space Management Committee to reconfigure specific rooms for flexible teaching purposes; and the HEA Space Utilisation Survey and resultant considerations.

The Academic Secretary, Ms Pauline Mooney, introduced the draft terms of reference, emphasising the importance of establishing the scope of the Working Group and sought the views of Education Committee on the approach to be adopted so that it could discharge its functions effectively.

It was proposed that the remit of the Working Group encompasses general teaching spaces only and does not extend to specialist teaching spaces, and that consideration be given to adopting a phased approach to the work to be discharged by the Working Group, and suggested that the terms of reference and membership could be adjusted if and as needed to take account of the different phases. Ms Mooney sought the views of Education Committee and the following points were raised by members:

- There is an immediate need to address the operational pressures encountered when running assessments, including end-of-semester assessments or examinations, in general access computing facilities such as determining who is responsible for scheduling, invigilating and providing technical support for these examinations. The movement to different assessment methods means computer-based examinations will become more common, which makes clarifying roles and addressing any operational challenges all the more pressing.
- Proposals for the reconfiguration of teaching spaces are currently being made on an individual basis. There is a need to provide a context within which decisions

regarding the reconfiguration of teaching spaces can be more fully aligned to the University strategy.

- In the context of constraints on financial resources, the scope for the Working Group to consider what should be prioritised when deciding on proposed reconfigurations of existing teaching spaces, for example, increasing capacity, creating technology-enhanced teaching spaces, facilitating innovations in teaching, learning and assessment, etc., was raised.
- The Working Group should consider what kind of changes can be made to existing spaces to facilitate developments in teaching and learning with minimal capital outlay.
- It would be useful to identify instances where faculties used their own resources to pay for the maintenance and/or reconfiguration of particular spaces to support specific developments in teaching and learning practices, and whether access to these spaces is managed at faculty or university level.
- Considering the design and use of existing teaching spaces is a complex task, and there is a need to articulate a number of pedagogically driven and strategically aligned principles/parameters that will underpin and inform University decision-making as it relates to the design and use of these spaces.
- The availability of collaborative and informal learning spaces across all campuses should be considered. It was noted that these are included in the HEA space utilisation survey.
- The Working Group must remain cognisant of, and avoid overlaps with, the work of the Space Management Committee and other units.
- It was noted that there should be clear lines of communication to the Working Group and specific individuals should be co-opted at particular times and/or for particular purposes.

The Chair acknowledged the immediate need to consider how general access computing facilities are used for the purpose of conducting computer-based examinations. The Chair welcomed the proposed approach and terms of reference in the context that capital investment for new teaching spaces will likely conclude for the foreseeable future, which means a more strategic approach to planning for and supporting developments in teaching, learning and assessment through the reconfiguration of existing spaces is needed. The Chair also emphasised the importance that any plan for reconfiguring existing spaces is driven by the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy.

It was agreed by Education Committee that:

- the name of the group be changed to ‘Working Group on the Design and Use of Teaching and Learning Spaces’.
- the Working Group include a student representative in its membership.
- a phased approach be adopted as proposed, with the Working Group convened in the first phase to consider the University’s current and future needs as they relate to general access computing facilities for the purpose of conducting computer-based examinations and making recommendations to Education Committee based on its findings. Membership of the Working Group during this initial phase will reflect this focus.
- members should give further thought to how the principles/parameters that underpin and inform the workings of the group will be developed. Education Committee needs to decide whether the formulation of principles/parameters should fall within the remit of the Working Group itself or be completed through an exceptional meeting of Education Committee or a facilitated session involving members of Education Committee and a wider range of colleagues who have particular expertise and/or interest in this area.

The Chair thanked Ms Mooney for her work in preparing the draft terms of reference and informed members that she would share them with those stakeholders who will be asked to support the activities of the Working Group and with relevant colleagues outside of Education Committee, including in the Office of the Chief Operations Officer.

SECTION C: PROGRAMME AND MODULE-SPECIFIC MATTERS

5. DCU Business School

5.1 *Revised Academic Offering: MSc in Strategic Learning and Development*

The Revised Academic Offering for MSc in Strategic Learning and Development, proposing the creation of a Graduate Certificate in Strategic Learning and Development as an exit award only, was **approved**.

6. DCU Futures: Completion of the approval process

The Chair informed the Committee of the context for completing the approval process for the DCU Futures programmes. A bespoke approval process for the DCU Futures programmes was approved by Education Committee on 21 October 2020 and subsequently by Academic Council on 13 January 2021. This bespoke process allowed for an agile and experimental approach to be adopted for the development and approval of the DCU Futures programmes, and included a formal closing out of the approval process following the first iteration of the programmes.

Professor White, speaking in her previous capacity as Dean of Strategic Learning Innovation, acknowledged that this approach to the development and approval of programmes represented a transformational change to existing practice for the University. The bespoke approval process provided a structure that accommodated the ambitions of faculties while also ensuring that academic quality assurance standards were consistently met. This structure allowed programmes to evolve during their first iteration as programme teams reflected on how the programmes were being delivered and prioritised the student experience with respect to the various innovations in teaching, learning and assessment.

Professor White recognised the critical role played by the International Pedagogy Advisory Panel (IPAP) and thanked members for appreciating the unique nature of the bespoke approval process and respecting its significance in the context of DCU's existing practices. Their feedback proved critical to the success of the process and the programmes more generally.

Professor White recognised the importance of reaching this important milestone, and of realising an excellent student experience while also upholding the DCU Futures philosophy. The Committee recognised the contribution of staff involved in the development and delivery of the DCU Futures programmes, especially how they continuously adapted to uncertainty and utilised the opportunity to innovate.

The Chair informed the Committee that the information provided in the documentation submitted will not be identical across all programmes, as the extent to which programme proposers availed of the flexibility afforded by the bespoke approval process varied across the suite of programmes. The Chair recognised that while the DCU Futures programmes were not always fully developed at the initial point of approval and continued to evolve

during their first iteration, the degree of scrutiny was higher for these programmes than would have been the case if they were approved through the standard approval process.

6.1 BA in Climate and Environmental Sustainability

The Committee agreed to formally close out the approval process for the BA in Climate and Environmental Sustainability, which was approved by Academic Council as a new programme on 14 June 2021. The principal changes to the programme since its accreditation are amendments to the modules in the curriculum for the final year and the calculation of award classification, which will change from 100% Year 3 to 15% Year 2 plus 85% Year 3 from the 2025-26 academic year onward.

It was acknowledged that the BA in Climate and Environmental Sustainability has adopted an exemplary approach to Teaching & Learning, while Dr Ward called particular attention to the numerous innovations in assessment design and how the programme has a positive reputation with respect to the student learning experience.

The Chair observed that there was good engagement from IPAP with this programme and the programme team provided considered responses to the feedback they received. She reiterated the importance of the next stage in the delivery of the BA in Climate and Environmental Sustainability as the programme team builds on their achievements to date and works to further embed the DCU Futures philosophy in the curriculum.

6.2 BEng in Mechanical and Sustainability Engineering

The Committee agreed to formally close out the approval process for the BEng in Mechanical and Sustainability Engineering, which was approved by Academic Council as a new programme on 14 June 2021. There have been no major changes to the programme since its accreditation, other than those made in response to the recommendations of the Accreditation Board.

The constraints involved in developing a new programme within the parameters of existing engineering programmes and professional recognition requirements was acknowledged by the Committee. The challenge and reward posed by fully embedding CBL content into the curriculum and sustaining industry partnerships was also recognised.

Professor Bruton informed the Committee that the BEng in Mechanical and Sustainability Engineering will continue to evolve as the programme team establishes and further strengthens industry engagement in order to better support the integration of CBL content into the curriculum. Professor Bruton also indicated that perceptions regarding the workload associated with the DCU Futures programmes is being impacted by a combination of CBL content alongside a project in the final year and this will be addressed going forward. It was recognised that class sizes during the first iteration of the programme allowed for close relationships to develop between students and academic staff and it is hoped that this will continue as the programme grows and evolves over the coming years.

The Chair confirmed that the integrated BEng/MEng in Mechanical and Sustainability Engineering was approved separately under the Revised Academic Offering mechanism and is not included in the formal closing out of the approval process for the DCU Futures programmes.

6.3 Bachelor of Business Studies (Business Analytics)

The Committee agreed to formally close out the approval process for the Business Analytics specialism in Bachelor of Business Studies, which was approved through the Revised Academic Offering process on 9 March 2022. There have been no major changes to the specialism since its approval.

Professor Elliott emphasised the importance of this particular specialism to the Bachelor of Business Studies and informed the Committee that there has been strong industry engagement and multiple innovations in teaching and learning activities during its first iteration.

It was acknowledged that the Bachelor of Business Studies (Business Analytics) provides a useful template for embedding the DCU Futures philosophy in existing programmes. Professor White called particular attention to the programme as an example of how a diversity of offerings can be achieved using existing programmes as the DCU Futures philosophy can be fully realised in a final year specialism.

The Chair emphasised the importance of the Periodic Programme Review (PPR) process for the Bachelor of Business Studies (Business Analytics) as the Faculty works to determine the extent to which the DCU Futures philosophy can continue to evolve and explore how it can be further embedded within existing programmes.

SECTION D: OTHER MATTERS**7. Any other business****7.1 *Exam Results Analysis***

Dr Jing Burgi-Tian informed the Committee that the Quality and Institutional Insights Office (QIO) has completed its analysis of exam results for the 2023-24 academic year and will make the report available to the Deans and Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning following the conclusion of today's meeting.

The Chair acknowledged that while no trend or outliers requiring immediate attention may be apparent from an initial, university-level analysis of the data, areas of concern may emerge following closer study of trends within a Faculty or School and consideration of particular cohorts of students.

Dr Burgi-Tian observed that, generally speaking, students' exam results have returned back to pre-COVID levels, recognising that while some faculties are still slightly elevated due to a small gradual upward trend after normalizing the COVID years, others are back to the same level as 2018. It was also explained that the distribution spread of students' exam marks has widened, meaning there is stronger differentiation among students. Dr Burgi-Tian explained that while the distribution of grades is returning to pre-Covid norms, the changes in precision marks do not closely match changes in grades.

The Chair asked the Deans to prepare brief updates for the next meeting of Education Committee on what analysis of the data at faculty level reveals and the possible actions that can be taken to address any localised trends. The Chair thanked Dr Burgi-Tian for her work on analysing the exam results data and for preparing the report.

7.2 *Supports for Online Learners*

Dr Claire Bohan, the Dean of Students, informed the Committee that she recently met with a small group of online learners and it was apparent that their experience lacked the benefit of a systematic approach to the provision of supports for them. Navigating those supports which are provided, seemed to be a particular challenge for students learning predominantly online.

It was recognised by the Committee that the understanding of a DCU student as a full-time undergraduate may be prevalent and not all University systems, processes or supports are designed to accommodate expectations and requirements of other students.

The Chair reminded members that 'Threshold Expectations of Academic Experience' applies equally to online and in-person learners and that 'Principles for Quality Assurance of DCU E-learning & Blended Provision' should inform the design and delivery of online programmes. It was agreed that the Chair would share with QIO a list of programmes approved to be delivered predominantly online with a view to QIO forming a comprehensive list.

7.3 *Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SATLE) Funding*

Dr Ward informed the Committee that she met with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education on 2 October 2024, during which the future SATLE funding model was discussed. The model will now involve rolling funding to allow for multi-year planning, with less emphasis on individual projects, which is reflective of more general changes within the sector with regard to funding.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday, 13 November 2024
at 2.00 pm

G401, St. Pat's Campus