

**ACADEMIC COUNCIL****MINUTES**

**14 October 2020**  
**2.00 p.m. – 3:35 p.m.**

**Zoom Meeting****Present:**

SJ. Belton	F. Blin	L. Boran
M. Brown	J. Brunton	J. Bruton
M. Butler	PJ Byrne	B. Corcoran
M. Coulter	M. Crane	R. Devery
T. Downes	J. Doyle	H. Esmond
L. Fitzsimons	B. Flood	Y. Freeney
G. French	C. Furlong	P. Gallagher
R. Gillanders	K. Goodman	C. Grant
P. Guasoni	D. Hand	S. Hegarty
G. Hughes	J. Kearney	R. Keegan (Secretary)
B. Kelly	E. Kennedy	D. Keogh (Chair)
D. Kinahan	P. Landais	A. Logan
T. Lokot	A. Looney	L. Looney
C. Mac Murchaidh	M. McAdam	C. McArdle
A. McAuley	K. McDonagh	E. McGlynn
A. McKenna	J. McManis	P. McMorrow
M. McSharry	P. Meleady	P. Mooney
E. Morgenroth	J.P. Mosnier	G.M. Muntean
R. Murphy	F. Murphy	E. Nastase
C. Ni Mhurchú	P. Ó Duibhir	M. O'Brien
S. O'Brien	A. Parle-McDermott	D. Robbins
P. Robbins	P. Rosati	P. Sharkey Scott
A. Sinnott	J. Stokes	M. R. Sweeney
T. Szecsi	G. Uí Laighléis	P. Van Kampen
L. Waugh-Daly	B. White	

**In attendance:** V. Cooke, M. Grehan

**Apologies:**

B. Anderson	S. Blott	C. Bohan
D. Collings	C. Gurrin	P. Flynn
E. McDonald	J. Usher	

The President welcomed all members of Academic Council to the first meeting of the 2020-2021 academic year noting, in particular, the presence of:

Prof Anne Sinnott as the new Deputy President

Prof Lisa Looney as the new Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar

Prof Barbara Flood as the Acting Dean for DCU Business School

Prof Brian Corcoran as the Acting Dean for the Faculty of Engineering and Computing

Mr Lucien Waugh-Daly as the Student Union Vice President for Academic Affairs

**1. Adoption of agenda**

The agenda was adopted.

**A. Minutes and Related Issues**

**2. Minutes of the meeting of Academic Council of 22 June 2020**

The minutes 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 8 July 2020**

Approved. It was noted that this was an extraordinary meeting to facilitate the oversight of changes that were being made to programmes to allow for hybrid delivery for 2020-2021.

**5. Minutes of the meeting of the Graduate Research Studies Board of 14 May 2020 and 18 June 2020**

Approved. It was noted that the GRSB considered several COVID-19 related matters at these meetings, including online supports for research students during the summer months, arrangements regarding PGR form submissions and guidance and protocols for the conduct of *viva voce* examinations.

**B. Policy and Strategy Issues****6. President's report (oral report)**

- 6.1** The President expressed his gratitude to staff for their efforts during recent, unprecedented times. He acknowledged the significant work of the Students Union in welcoming students to DCU and helping learners to make sense of the new normal. He drew attention to the importance of education and investment in young people and highlighted DCU's uniqueness as a university focused on transforming lives and societies.
- 6.2** The President summarised his aspirations for DCU as a university of impact, highlighting the quality of our research, our positive impact on Irish life, our focus on innovation and creativity and our sustainability goals. The President also highlighted his ambitions for DCU to be known as a 'People First' university. He informed Council that Senior Management is in the process of reviewing and revising the Strategic Plan in light of COVID-19.
- 6.3** The President welcomed the appointment of the first dedicated Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. He informed Council that the Minister has indicated his ambitions to reform the core funding model and to create a coherent strategic plan for higher and further education in Ireland. The President welcomed the securing of €168 million to alleviate the impact of COVID-19 on the sector. He acknowledged that the additional funding secured in the October budget was welcomed as emergency funding but recognised this is not the funding model transformation the system requires urgently.
- 6.4** The President drew attention to the recent decision to retain teaching activities as they are for the remainder of semester 1, meaning we will predominately be delivering teaching online. The President acknowledged the uncertainty caused by COVID-19 and expressed his hopes that this decision would provide some stability to students and staff in planning for the weeks ahead. The President highlighted that the measures in place are consistent with at minimum level 4 in the Plan for Living with COVID. The President advised Council that DCU will continue to look at ways to maximise campus-based activities for students including additional facilities for independent study. The President acknowledged the many units involved in facilitating campus-based activities and expressed his thanks to Clubs and Societies, the Students Union, the Office of Student Life, the office of the COO, the Health and Safety Office and Sports and Wellbeing, for their Trojan efforts in recent months.
- 6.5** Technical issues which saw Loop being taken down last week were addressed by the President. He informed Council that these issues were caused by problems with an external provider. He expressed his gratitude to staff in ISS and the Teaching Enhancement Unit who have worked tirelessly to resolve the issues and move to a new provider in recent days.
- 6.6** The President highlighted recent success in securing funding under the HCI Pillar 3 call which saw DCU's solo bid (DCU Futures) being awarded just under €20 million. This funding is a confirmation of DCU's commitment to its students to deliver a transformative student experience. The IUA-led sectoral microcredential bid was also successful and is worth over €12 million. The President expressed his thanks to those involved in developing the HCI bids including the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning, Mr Billy Kelly and Ms Aisling McKenna.

- 6.7** DCU has been awarded the Athena SWAN Bronze Award for the second time. The President thanked Professor Greg Hughes and the Steering Committee for their work in leading this initiative. He acknowledged recent reports of harassment in other higher education institutions and reiterated DCU's zero-tolerance policy and its culture of respect and dignity for all staff and students.
- 6.8** The public health restrictions continue to apply and impact on our normal mode of operation. The President informed Council that *force majeure*, the impact of the pandemic applies in 20/21. In that context, the Vice President for Academic Affairs/Registrar may replace aspects of our regulations with alternative arrangements.

A list of arrangements put into place in 19/20 is being reviewed by Professor Lisa Looney and the Executive Deans of Faculty, and those applying in 20/21 relating to 1) Marks and Standards, 2) the conduct of Progression and Awards Boards, 3) examination regulations and appeals procedures and 4) the Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis, will be reported here at our next meeting.

## **7. COVID-19**

There were two presentations to Academic Council, given in the context of a look back on the closing out of the last academic year amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **7.1 2019/20, Semester 2. Student Performance Analysis: Presentation by Martin Grehan**

Mr Martin Grehan provided Council with a summary presentation on the trends in 2019-2020 semester 2 undergraduate examination results. In summary, the following points were noted by Council:

- There was an increase in both pass rates and final marks in semester 2, with a decreased variability across same. The pass rate increased by 1.83% across all students. For new entrants, this pass rate increased by circa 3%.
- Fewer very low marks were scored by both new entrants and final year students.
- Overall, marks at the top end of the distribution did increase compared to previous years, but less than marks at the lower end of the distribution.

### **7.2 Staff and Student Experiences of Teaching and Learning During COVID Restrictions - Summary Survey Results: Presentation by Aisling McKenna**

Ms Aisling McKenna presented some of the key findings from the student and staff teaching and learning during COVID-19 surveys. The following points were noted by Council:

- 66% of staff respondents reported they had 'rarely' or 'never' created or delivered an online lecture before restrictions. 31% found adapting to tools and technology required for teaching and learning to be a challenge.

- 58% of student respondents reported feeling overwhelmed with their studies during the 'stay at home' period and 50% found structuring their study time in an online environment to be challenging.
- Staff respondents highlighted supports from colleagues and the TEU as helpful, as well as the flexibility and responsiveness of students to engage and adapt to the new reality quickly.
- Staff respondents reported informal discussions with colleagues and their Head of School as important sources of information. Student respondents indicated their module lecturers and class reps and other students as most important.
- Regarding priorities for 2020-2021, staff respondents indicated the developing of digital learning resources and materials for online learning as most important. Student respondents indicated having full information on assessments early in the semester as the most important.

## **8. DCU Empower academic initiatives**

### **8.1 Academic Calendar Implementation**

Mr Billy Kelly updated Council on the mobilisation of the Academic Calendar Implementation Group which met for the first time in September. The Group will continue to meet monthly to consider the broad parameters in which the academic calendar will operate for at least the next three years. Updates will be forthcoming during the year.

There were some concerns expressed about the practicality of introducing a new calendar in 2021-2022, particularly when uncertainty remains in the context on an ongoing pandemic. Concerns raised were noted. Mr Kelly highlighted that the work to be undertaken by the Group will prove useful irrespective of when any change is introduced.

### **8.2 SIS – CRM Recruit Phase 1**

Professor Lisa Looney provided a brief update on the first initiative of the SIS Programme that is due to launch later this year – CRM Recruit Phase 1. CRM Recruit will replace PAC from November 2020 and a full update will be provided to Heads and Deans in the coming days. It is hoped that this initiative will transform the applicant experience and help with reporting functions for Heads of Schools and Programme Chairs.

## **C. Items for Formal Approval/Noting**

### **9. Register of Academic Council Members of 2020-2021**

Noted

- 10. Register of members of the Education Committee, the University Standards Committee, the Graduate Research Studies Board, Standing Committee of GRSB to consider appeals and the Examination Appeals Board 2020-2021**

Noted

- 11. Academic Calendar Implementation Group, Terms of Reference and Standing Orders**

Approved

- 12. Report on committee activities 2019-2020**

Noted

- 13. Reports from Autumn 2020 examinations, Progression and Award Boards**

- 13.1 Examination Report: DCU**

Approved

- 13.2 Examination Report: Ballyfermot College of Further Education**

Approved

- 14. Report from DCU Autumn 2020 Faculty Awards Boards for Research Degrees**

Approved

- 15. Report on completion of accreditation process 2019-2020**

Noted

- 16. Proposed Aegrotat Award: Bachelor of Arts (Joint Honours)**

Approved

**17. Any other business**

There was no other business.

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

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

**Date of next meeting:**

9 December
2:00 pm
<b>Zoom</b>