

EDUCATION COMMITTEE**MINUTES**

Wednesday 23 September 2020

2.05 p.m. – 3.25 p.m. via Zoom

Present: Dr Claire Bohan, Professor Mark Brown, Ms Jennifer Bruton, Professor Michelle Butler, Professor John Doyle, Professor Barbara Flood, Dr Yseult Freeney, Ms Margaret Irwin-Bannon (Secretary), Mr Billy Kelly (Chair), Professor Anne Looney, Professor Lisa Looney, Ms Aisling McKenna, Ms Pauline Mooney, Dr Joseph Stokes and Mr Lucien Waugh-Daly

In attendance: Mr Martin Grehan

Apologies: Professor Eithne Guilfoyle and Professor Greg Hughes

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed Professor Barbara Flood to her first meeting of Education Committee as Acting Dean of DCU Business School.

SECTION A: AGENDA, MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**1. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda as circulated was adopted.

2. Minutes of Extraordinary meeting of Education Committee, 8 July 2020

The minutes of 8 July 2020, were approved and it was noted the final version would be signed once on-campus activity resumes.

3. Matters arising from the minutes of 8 July 2020

3.1 It was noted, arising from a previous discussion on the cycle of presentations and provision of statistical reports to Education Committee by the Institutional Research and Analysis Officer, that consideration would be given to the cycle of reporting to the Committee and to establishing the most effective model that would add value to the Committee's strategic decision-making. It was noted that the Head of Quality Promotion would consult with the incoming Vice President Academic Affairs (Registrar) in this regard and prepare a proposal for the consideration of Education Committee (Item 3.3)

3.2 It was noted that an update would be provided on the Quality, Integrity and Reputation working group under Item 4 (Item 3.1).

- 3.3 It was noted that work on a position paper on double and dual awards will be ongoing over the coming months (Item 3.4).
- 3.4 It was noted that *Employability Statements*, would be considered at a later meeting of Education Committee (Item 3.5).
- 3.5 It was noted that teaching effectiveness, one of the key priorities of the Teaching and Learning Strategy will be discussed by the Director of Quality Promotion and the Chair (Item 3.6).
- 3.6 It was noted that work is ongoing on adaption of the PPR process with a view to ensuring there is a process for the quality assurance of the creation of 'new programmes' where the existing programme has changed substantially since its initial accreditation (Item 3.7).
- 3.7 It was noted that a memo was due to be sent to Senior Management outlining the University-level issues raised through the Faculty APR summary reports (Item 3.9).
- 3.8 It was noted that an external review of the newly approved programme, Graduate Diploma in Web Technologies, had not yet been completed and some concern was expressed in this regard, given that students were currently being recruited (Item 5.3).
- 3.9 It was noted that the newly proposed MSc in Computing (FinTech and Technology Innovation) had been reviewed by an external examiner, as requested by Education Committee (Item 5.1).
- 3.10 It was noted that the name of the external examiner who had reviewed the proposed Higher Diploma in Engineering Analysis and Technologies had been provided, as requested by Education Committee (Item 5.2).
- 3.11 The Chair noted that he had been requested by the Head of School of Computing to raise an issue with respect to the approval of changes to programmes proposed as a result of the change to hybrid delivery of programmes, and approved at the 8 July 2020 meeting of Education Committee. In particular, the Head of School wanted to draw attention to the changes made to the MSc in Electronic Commerce (Business) which, it was felt, should have been discussed in detail in advance with the School of Computing before they were proposed. The Chair noted that this served as a reminder, where there are programmes shared across schools or faculties, consultation on structure changes should take place in advance of consideration by Education Committee. He noted too that the proposed changes would be for the academic year 2020-2021 only, and reflect the particular circumstances of this year (Item 4.1).
- 3.12 It was noted that work on the update of the Revised Academic Offering form to take account of the creation of new major programmes as a response to funding calls will be completed in the context of a more in-depth review of academic approval processes (Item 5).

SECTION B: STRATEGIC MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION/NOTING**4. Update on strategic activities undertaken within the IUA/sectoral updates**

The Chair reported on behalf of the Vice President Academic Affairs (Registrar) on the IUA Registrars' meetings. He reported that the IUA Registrars' Group has continued to meet regularly to deal with the crisis brought about by Covid-19 and more recently to focus on CAO entry to undergraduate programmes.

The Chair briefed the Committee on the Quality, Integrity and Reputation working group set up by the Department of Education and Skills in April 2020. He noted that QQI has produced an extensive report on the experience of Higher Education institutions on their responses to Covid-19 and its impact on their stakeholders. DCU had shared results of a survey which had been completed by students and staff, reviewing their experience through the Covid-19 changes from March 2020. He noted that QQI is continuing with this work and the next phase of work would be future-focused.

5. Update on DCU strategy implementation

The Chair reported that Senior Management had recently attended an away-day which focused on the DCU strategic plan. They had reviewed progress on the plan to date and engaged in an exercise to identify elements that should be prioritised. He indicated that a revised report on prioritisation would be completed over the coming months.

6. Student Survey.ie update

The Institutional Research and Analysis Officer reported the following with respect to the 2020 survey:

- The student survey data has been received by DCU and analysis is ongoing.
- DCU is involved in a pilot for an institutional login to a dashboard that i-graduate has developed for studentsurvey.ie and the Institutional Research and Analysis Officer indicated that he would provide updates in this regard.
- He is involved in the editorial board for the national survey report due out in November 2020. Next year's results will allow for a retrospective analysis, as the data in 2020 would have been predominately gathered before the March 2020 shut-down of third-level institutions.

7. Analysis of semester two examination performance 2019-2020

This report presented the major points of analysis of the DCU Semester two examinations results for the academic year 2019-2020. Trends in the data were analysed for semester two of academic years 2015/2016 through to 2019/2020. The key focus of the report was to analyse whether this year's data was different to last year's, due to the change in assessment modes.

The Institutional Research and Analysis Officer highlighted the following from the report:

- There was a marked increase in pass rates this year, up 2% amongst all faculties.
- For new entrants the pass rate increased by over 3%, more than any other study period and more than the overall pass rate.
- The general pattern was that student final marks and individual module marks have increased, but the range of marks used has reduced.
- In analysing the data, the key factor examined was where the marks are increasing, in terms of general mark distribution. In examining the deciles of the students' distribution of marks, although each year the trend would normally be stable, this year all deciles have increased but the most marked increase was at the bottom of the distribution.

It was noted that one of the limitations of the data is that it cannot be directly linked to the assessment methodology used and therefore it was not possible to extrapolate the causative effect of different forms of assessment.

In the discussion which followed on the survey the following points were noted:

- It would be reasonable to expect that those at the lower end of the mark spectrum would increase because of the substantial reduction in the number of closed book examinations.
- Due to the circumstances of the lockdown, students had less distractions and class attendance improved substantially from mid-March onwards. In addition, some external examiners noted that standards had improved, possibly because students were more focussed.
- It could be deduced that there was a greater leniency due to the circumstances and a reluctance to fail students, however marks were not necessarily increased at the higher end of the range.
- Assessment activities were reduced and very focused on the learning outcomes and it was suggested it would be useful to complement this data with some qualitative data from staff and students and eliciting their responses to it, so that it might inform assessment development in the future. Also as it was such an historical event it would be interesting to observe its impact. It was suggested that this work could be commissioned.

There followed discussion on the future impact of the hybrid delivery model and its likely impact on students, and items that would be of concern over the coming semester. The following points were noted from the discussion:

- It would be important to communicate to incoming students the level of engagement and attendance that is expected of them, against the backdrop of a considerably changed timetable.
- In addition to the levels of attendance and engagement, it should also be made clear to students what they should be learning on a week-by-week basis. It was noted that it would be possible to create checklists on loop that have key points of learning and would indicate what is expected of students to successfully complete a specific module.

- It was noted that the experience of staff had been one of increased engagement by students during the lock-down and this may be reflected in the overall results. Conversely from the student experience survey of the learning experience during the national lockdown, one of the biggest challenges students mentioned was self-motivation and the struggle with a loss of structure.
- The Director of QPO drew the attention of the Committee to institutional research being conducted by Student Support and Development (SS&D), aimed primarily at first year entrants. An app will be used to ask students to complete a short survey once a week, linked to student belongingness, student self-confidence and student engagement. It was noted the Quality Promotion Office will be working with SS&D over the coming months on the survey. It was noted too that those three factors were identified as essential for retention and progression.
- The Director of Student Support and Development expressed concern about maintaining the engagement of students where they have taken up employment and see an opportunity to work full-time, when it is not necessary to attend lectures on a full-time basis. She noted that if timetable slots are not grouped for student cohorts then it would make it difficult for students not to make a direct choice between work and attendance at lectures.
- It was noted that an issue has arisen in that students on education placement are now working in schools as substitutes due to the ongoing impact of Covid-19. It was felt that the more online teaching there is, the more students perceive they can access the teaching in their own time, without realising that there is a high proportion of synchronous activity which requires live interaction. Although there is some asynchronous teaching the issue of recording sessions, particularly where students who are present contribute, is an issue in terms of permissions and GDPR.
- It was acknowledged that some faculties can group activities and provide a coherence to the timetable but for the large and complex programmes where there is a large matrix of choice it is not possible to provide coherent timetables. It was noted too that for these large programmes there is not sufficient time or space to be able to have students on campus with any level of frequency.
- It was noted that once the timetable is finalised to a point, there may be an opportunity to review it and ascertain if anything can be done about the concerns expressed in relation to student engagement. However, it was anticipated that the timetable would continue to change and evolve.
- It was noted that data could be taken from Loop which could measure the relative engagement of a cohort. The Chair indicated that he would consult with the Head of TEU to establish what data could be extracted and review after a month of operation. At this point DCU may have to reconsider engagement for this semester.
- It was noted that most straightforward lectures are being recorded and this will assist students, however it was noted that a policy is being drawn up by the TEU and the Data Protection unit on recording activities where there is student contribution.

SECTION C: PROGRAMME AND MODULE-SPECIFIC ISSUES**8. DCU Business School: Amendments to the Bachelor of Business Studies International programme**

It was noted that this amendment was being proposed in the context of students being unable to travel abroad for their third year in 2020-2021. Education Committee approved the 180-credit version of the Bachelor of Business Studies International, as proposed.

There was discussion and differing views on the name of the programme and whether or not it should be distinguished from the existing 240-credit version of the programme. However, as the programme change is a temporary one, in the context of very specific circumstances, it was agreed that the title of the 3-year programme and the 4-year programme would remain the same. It was acknowledged also that this model already exists for the Bachelor of Business Studies programme.

9. Faculty of Science and Health: New exit award: Graduate Certificate in Psychology and Wellbeing

A decision on the proposed exit award of Graduate Certificate in Psychology and Wellbeing for part-time students was deferred.

There were a number of items of feedback as follows, which Education Committee requested would be addressed in advance of resubmission of the proposal to its next meeting:

- It was requested that the number of credits to exit with the graduate certificate would be specified (the documentation provided gave a range) and the modules that make up the award should also be specified. It appeared from the documentation that the proposal was creating a programme rather than an exit. It was emphasised that an exit award would be for those who cannot complete the master's programme.
- It was the view of Education Committee that the exit should be available to all cohorts of student, and not just part-time students, even if the likelihood of take-up from the full-time students was low.

10. Faculty of Science and Health: Graduate Diploma for Specialist Skills in Industrial (Bio)Pharmaceutical Analysis

It was noted that this new programme was funded as part of the Human Capital Initiative, Pillar 1: Graduate Conversion call and announced in July 2020. It will commence in semester two. It was in this context that approval was being sought from Education Committee.

There was a general discussion on the approval of funded new major awards at short notice and the following points were noted:

- That it should be flagged that adequate notice for the quality assurance of newly funded programmes should be provided
- That a better process should be put in place to manage this particular category of proposals so that Education Committee can stand over not approving a programme which is funded but which does not reach adequate levels of quality assurance
- Although DCU has a good validation and accreditation process, the incidence of last minute funding calls has forced a tweaking of process rather than a structured best-practice approach
- It would be proposed to have a more in-depth review of academic approval processes more generally, in the medium term, rather than adjust this process to deal only with newly funded programmes
- That the definition of the requirement to undergo validation and accreditation should be more clearly defined.

The quality and clarity of the documentation was commended and the proposed programme was approved.

The following feedback was noted:

- There was not adequate time to ensure that the external reviewer was approved by the Vice President Academic Affairs (Registrar), however this was not seen as an impediment to the approval of the programme.
- The programme consists of entirely new modules, as required by the funding call, however it was queried if those new modules might have a place in other offerings in terms of the resources required and the short-term funding of the programme.

11. Faculty of Engineering and Computing: Direct entry to Graduate Certificates (July 2020 Stimulus package application)

In response to the July 2020 stimulus call, the Faculty of Engineering and Computing proposed five entry certificates based on existing exit routes from existing accredited master's programmes as follows:

- Graduate Certificate in FinTech and Technology Innovation comprising 30 credits from the existing MSc in Computing (with Majors Options)
- Graduate Certificate in Data Protection and Privacy Law comprising 30 credits from the MA in Data Protection and Privacy Law
- Graduate Certificate in Electronic and Computer Engineering comprising 30 credits from the MEng in Electronic and Computer Engineering
- Graduate Certificate in Secure Software Engineering comprising 30 credits from the MSc in Computing (with Majors Options)
- Graduate Certificate in Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering comprising 30 credits from the MEng in Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering.

The direct entry graduate certificates as named above were approved.

12. Any other business

The Chair extended a sincere thanks to those who were departing Education Committee.

He thanked Professor Anne Sinnott in absentia for her contribution as Dean of DCU Business School to Education Committee.

He noted that Professor Eithne Guilfoyle would complete her term of office at the end of September 2020 and that Professor Lisa Looney would take up the role of Chair of the Committee from October 2020.

He noted that this was the last meeting for Ms Jennifer Bruton (Academic Council representative) and Dr Yseult Freeney (representative of the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning), who he thanked most sincerely for their valuable contributions to the Committee and its decision-making.

Professor Lisa Looney thanked Mr Billy Kelly on behalf of Education Committee for his chairmanship of Education Committee over the last period. She noted the Committee's appreciation that he had stepped into the role, which he had done with professionalism and skilled judgement.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Date of next meeting:

21 October 2020
at 2.00 pm
Via Zoom