

**ACADEMIC COUNCIL  
MINUTES**

**8 February 2023**

**2.00 p.m. – 3.40 p.m.**

**Zoom Meeting**

**Present:**

C. Bohan	L. Boran	A. Bourke
A. Brennan	Mark Brown	Martin. Brown
J. Bruton	D. Burke	M. Butler
P.J. Byrne	P. Cahill	A. Castillo Villaneuva
E. Clinton	B. Corcoran	M. Coulter
E. Crossen	J. Doyle	B. Egan
D. Fahy	O. Feeney	P. Flynn
G. French	C. Furlong	S. Giordani
D. Hand	S. Hegarty	C. Holland
A. Intizar	M. Irwin-Bannon (Secretary)	J. Kearney
D. Keogh	A. Kilroy	M. Kirwan
V. Lambert	P. Landais	A. Logan
L. Looney (Chair)*	C. Mac an Bhaird	A. Maillot
U. McCabe	K. McDonagh	J. McDonough
P. McGorman	A. McKenna	E. McLoughlin
J. McMackin	R. McManus	P. McMorrow
P. Mooney	P. Murphy	B. Murphy
N. Murphy	C. Ní Mhurchú	M. O'Brien
S. O'Brien	K. O'Sullivan	N. O'Sullivan
P. Sharkey Scott	A. Sinnott	J. Stokes
G. Uí Laighléis	M. Ward	B. White
P. Young		

**Apologies:**

R. Connolly	M. Leahy	E. McGlynn
M. Pryce		

**In Attendance:**

V. Cooke	J. Burgi-Tian (Item 9)	D. McCarthy
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\*It was noted that the President was not in a position to Chair the meeting of Academic Council. He provided his report, as recorded under item 7. The meeting was chaired by the Vice President for Academic Affairs (Registrar).

**1. Adoption of agenda**

The agenda, as circulated, was adopted.

It was noted that item 12 would be discussed.

**A. Minutes and related issues****2. Minutes of the meeting of Academic Council of 30 November 2022**

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 16 November 2022 and 14 December 2022, and minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Learning Innovation Project Steering Group of 21 November 2022**

The minutes were approved.

**5. Minutes of the meeting of the University Standards Committee of 3 November 2022**

The minutes were approved.

**6. Minutes of the meetings of the Graduate Research Studies Board (GRSB) of 20 October 2022 and 1 December 2022**

The minutes were approved. The Chair of GRSB drew the attention of Academic Council to the approval by the board of the outcome of three recent research appeals.

**B. Policy and strategy issues**

**7. President's report (oral report)**

- 7.1 The President expressed his deepest sympathy on the death of Dr Greg Foley, School of Biotechnology. He extended his condolences to his family, friends and colleagues within his School and in the wider Faculty of Science and Health, where he had served as Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning. He was an extraordinary character and committed educator who had made a huge contribution to the University. The resilience and endurance he had shown through his illness was an inspiration to us all.

The President noted too that there had been a message of sympathy to the University on the loss of Greg, from Mr Simon Harris, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

- 7.2 The President noted the very recent cyber-attack on the Munster Technological University and the lesson to be learned on the vulnerabilities that exist for universities and businesses. He asked Council members to remain vigilant in this regard.

- 7.3 The President reported that he had had two meetings with Mr Simon Harris, the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in January 2023 to discuss plans for additional student accommodation.
- 7.4 The President reported that following the first round of a HEA call for expressions of interest to build capacity in Dentistry, Pharmacy, Medicine, Nursing and Veterinary, DCU was invited to submit applications for Nursing and Pharmacy. The Pharmacy application was led by the School of Chemical Sciences, and the Nursing application by the School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community Health. He noted an expert advisory panel would review the applications. He thanked Heads of School for responding so promptly to the call on such a tight timeframe and noted the contribution of the Deputy President's Office, Finance and Academic Affairs. He anticipated that a decision would go to the Cabinet by the end of March 2023.
- 7.5 The President noted that the Education Trust had hosted its annual Leadership Circle Dinner on 1 February 2023. The annual event provides an opportunity to acknowledge and thank DCU's donors for their collective contribution. He hoped the donations received, in addition to providing continued support to the Access programme, would also contribute to Teaching and Learning and Research activities.
- 7.6 The President informed Council that DCU's fruitful partnership with Barrettstown as a charity partner had ended. He noted that it was planned DCU's Executive would consider any future arrangements, in light of the University's own charity status.
- 7.7 The President drew the attention of Council to the implications of the new Higher Education Authority Act 2022. In keeping with the agreement, he noted that he and the Chancellor would sign a Governance Agreement between the institution and the HEA with respect to DCU's responsibilities. He also noted that the composition of the Governing Authority would be reformed, to reduce its numbers. The Chancellor will be convening a meeting of the nominations sub-committee of Governing Authority to revise its composition.
- 7.8 In the context of the planned presentation under item 8 of the agenda, the President noted that the funded HCI initiatives have enabled DCU to progress its plans in terms of the reform of the curriculum. He emphasised that DCU Futures should be considered as a philosophical approach rather than a project.

- 7.9 The President noted that there would be a final Strategic Plan Town hall meeting at 3.30 pm this afternoon. He noted that the Senior Management team had found these meetings very valuable both for meeting colleagues and for receiving valuable feedback, which had been largely positive. He noted too that Senior Management had also met with the Students' Union who were very positive about DCU's future plans.

## 8. Strategic academic initiatives

### 8.1 *National Training Fund Initiatives—Mid-term update (Presentation provided)*

The Vice President for Academic Affairs (Registrar) introduced this item noting that the aim of this presentation was to provide an update on DCU Human Capital Initiatives (HCI), which are HEA (National Training Fund) funded projects. She noted that she expected further calls from the National Training Fund, which has a budget of over one billion currently. The biggest DCU project, with over €19 million investment, has been running for two years and it was timely to provide an update to Academic Council.

Dr Blanaid White provided brief updates on the following five HCI projects:

- Towards a multi-campus Micro-credential system (IUA led) (national project);
- Recognition of Prior Learning and Lifelong Learning in Higher Education (THEA led) (national project);
- Postgraduate Certificate in Innovative Materials for Industry 4.0 (SETU (Carlow) led)
- Virtual Laboratories in Higher Education (MU led);
- DCU Futures (DCU led) and is a pilot for our future direction of travel for programmes. This project is at the mid-point and currently undergoing an extensive review/audit.

Dr White briefed Council in detail on DCU Futures noting the following achievements over the past two years:

- Ten new programmes and specialisms up and running: intakes from year 1 to year 3 currently;
- Over 850 students are currently registered for data literacy and analysis module;
- There were 162 additional student places in 2021-2022; on track for 375 additional places in 2022-2023 (official reporting only due in March 2023); over 1,000 additional student places by the end of DCU Futures;
- A language and culture programme has been established by SALIS, offering French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Russian;

- Over 40 modules developed/redeveloped in collaboration with DCU Studio, to leverage affordances of online learning for all DCU Futures students.

It was noted that DCU Futures has established the following additional supports to innovation in teaching and learning:

- International Pedagogy Advisory Panel;
- External Stakeholder Engagement Forum;
- The initiation of the DCU Futures Evaluation Project led by the DCU Institute of Education.

Dr White briefed Council on the key areas of Innovative Pedagogy and Assessment involving challenge based learning, transversal skills development, Data Literacy and Analytics for 21<sup>st</sup> century and DCU Language and Culture Programme. She noted too that the DCU Futures website was launched before Christmas 2022, which was student, and outward focused.

The Vice President Academic Affairs/Registrar indicated the DCU Futures has enhanced DCU's currency in a very competitive environment. She thanked Dr Blanaid White and Dr Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl and colleagues across Academic Council and the University for their collective contribution to DCU HCI projects.

## **9. Analysis of Student Performance, Presentation by Dr Jing Burgi-Tian**

The Vice President for Academic Affairs (Registrar) introduced this item, noting DCU had become aware that during the Covid period (19-20 and 20-21) study context, learning and assessment had changed substantially, which affected student performance. It was important to engage in early analysis of students' academic performance post-Covid as teaching returned to pre-Covid modes.

Dr Jing Burgi-Tian presented on Student Performance up to 21-22 and noted at sectoral level, there was concern from Quality Qualifications Ireland (QQI) that there is an increasing proportion of first class honour awards, with 23.5% of graduating students at national level achieving first-class honours in 2021.

Dr Burgi-Tian noted that QQI had expressed concern most recently as follows:

“An increased proportion of upper degrees may erode the practical usefulness of the honours degree classification system for grading and differentiating student attainment.

More generally, the upward trend risks undermining confidence in the integrity of academic standards and the value of higher education among students, employers and society.”

She noted that DCU is in the middle of the below average profile for universities nationally, so while DCU is observing this upward trend, it is moving at a slower pace than some other institutions. This pattern does vary between disciplines.

She provided an analysis of DCU student performance and observed that there were changes in the two Covid years with an unusually high percentage of higher precision marks and pass rates, but that the trend had returned to a more normal level in 2022.

She noted, in this context, it was planned to:

- Conduct a deeper case analysis, identifying selected programmes and disciplinary areas where there are:
  - High first degree percentages;
  - Low first degree percentages;
  - Fast-growing first-degree percentages.

The following questions and comments were noted following the presentation:

- What does a first class degree mean to employers?
- DCU needs to look at the slow gradual increase and analyse further what is the cause of this change
- Further nuanced analysis is required (e.g. student profile changes) and additional data post-2022.

The Vice President for Academic Affairs (Registrar) noted it was positive that the impact of the changes brought about in the context of the pandemic were easing and DCU is in the middle in terms of the rate of increase in higher grades. She thanked Dr Jing Burgi-Tian for the informative presentation.

**C. Items for formal approval/noting****10. Recommendations from Progression and Awards Boards for Spring 2023 conferring**

The Report from Spring 2023 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.

**11. Recommendations from Faculty Awards Boards for Research Degrees for Spring 2023 conferring**

The Report from Spring 2023 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.

**12. Report from Research Committee 2021-2022**

The Vice President for Research made a brief presentation. He wished to alert Academic Council that there was a gap developing between DCU and its competitors with regard to publications and postgraduate research student numbers as a proportion of its student population, which he proposed should be addressed as a matter of priority in the new strategy. He highlighted a series of recommendations to address these gaps.

The Vice President of Academic Affairs (Registrar) thanked the Vice President for Research for his very interesting and useful presentation.

The Research Committee Report 2021-2022 was noted.

**13. Report to Academic Council on the Accreditation of Programmes during Semester 1 of the 2022/23 Academic Year**

Approved

**14. Any other business**

There were no items of business.

**Date of next meeting:**

**5 April 2023**

**2:00 pm**

**Zoom**