

## ACADEMIC COUNCIL MINUTES

**2 February 2022**  
**2.00 p.m. – 3.20 p.m.**

### Zoom Meeting

**Present:**

W. Ahmed	S. Belton	S. Blott
L. Boran	A. Bourke	M. Brown (IoE)
J. Bruton	PJ Byrne	P. Cahill
A. Castillo Villaneuva	E. Clinton	D. Collings
B. Corcoran	E. Costello	M. Coulter
D. Curran	D. Fahy	O. Farrell
P. Gallagher	R. Gillanders	S. Giordani
K. Goodman	P. Guasoni	C. Gurrin
D. Hand	S. Hegarty	A. Intizar
S. Jones	J. Kearney	R. Keegan (Secretary)
W. Kelly	E. Kennedy	D. Keogh (Chair)
D. Kinahan	P. Landais	A. Logan
T. Lokot	A. Looney	L. Looney
C. Mac an Bhaird	A. Maillot	C. McArdle
A. McAuley	J. McDonough	P. McGorman
A. McKenna	J. McMackin	J. McManis
R. McManus	P. McMorrow	A. McNamara
M. McSharry	P. Mooney	E. Morgenroth
A. Morrissey	G.-M. Muntean	B. Murphy
F. Murphy	N. Murphy	R. Murphy
C. Ní Mhurchú	B. Nolan	S. O'Brien (HSS)
S. O'Brien (IoE)	C. O'Gorman	K. O'Sullivan
N. O'Sullivan	P. Rosati	G. Scanlon Timms
P. Sharkey Scott	A. Sinnott	J. Stokes
M. R. Sweeney	T. Szecsi	J. Travers
M. Ward	A. Waqar	B. White

**In attendance:**

J. Burgi-Tian (Item 8)	V. Cooke	D. McCarthy
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**Apologies:**

B. Anderson	C. Bohan	J. Brunton
M. Butler	C. Furlong	C. Loscher
E. McGlynn	J.-P. Mosnier	G. Uí Laighléis
J. Usher		

**1. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda was adopted.

**A. Minutes and Related Issues****2. Minutes of the meeting of Academic Council of 1 December 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of 1 December 2021 were approved.

**3. Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

**4. Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee of 10 November 2021**

The minutes were approved.

The Vice-President for Academic Affairs/Registrar highlighted to members that Education Committee has approved a number of definitions relating to collaborative provision. She noted that these definitions are one important aspect in ensuring DCU is well-positioned to explore future collaborative opportunities. She recorded her thanks to those who contributed to this work.

The Vice-President for Academic Affairs/Registrar noted also that work is underway in drafting the ECIU proposal for the next round of European Universities funding, and a number of DCU colleagues are participating in this process.

**5. Minutes of the meeting of the University Standards Committee of 18 November 2021**

The minutes were approved.

**6. Minutes of the meetings of the Graduate Research Studies Board of 21 October 2021 and 2 December 2021**

The minutes were approved.

The Dean of Graduate Studies informed members that the Graduate Research Studies Board is currently reviewing a number of Covid-related adjustments that might be retained post-pandemic.

**B. Policy and strategy issues****7. President's report (oral report)**

7.1 The President noted the decision made by Senior Management in December to continue with Semester 2 on campus as planned. He informed members that the commitment to continue with in-person activities was not one made lightly, and that additional mitigations will remain in place for the duration of the Semester. He informed members that Minister Harris has expressed his gratitude to DCU staff for the leadership shown in the return to on-campus activities.

7.2 The President drew members' attention to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Environment's recently published *Transitional Protocol: Good Practice Guidance for Continuing to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19*. He noted that the protocols highlight the importance of maintaining a response plan and call on employers to finalise long-term plans for remote working. He advised members that the establishment of a remote working policy is underway in DCU.

7.3 The President informed members that DCU has received permission from the HEA to proceed to construction of the Futuretech building. This flagship facility will further advance DCU's international reputation for excellence in STEM disciplines. He recorded his gratitude to colleagues in the relevant Faculties, Office of the Chief Operations Officer, the Estates Office and Finance for getting this project to this point.

7.4 The President informed members that DCU has ranked in the top ten most sustainable universities in Europe and 15th on the Global UI GreenMetric. He noted the significance of these rankings, reminding members that DCU has placed sustainability at the core of the University, reflecting our commitment to address a critical global challenge.

- 7.5 The President drew attention to the recently published findings from the national surveys of student and staff experiences of sexual violence and harassment in higher education. He noted that some of the accounts are most troubling and informed members that the University is currently working on a sexual misconduct policy. He noted the importance of allyship and bystander support and reminded members of DCU's *Policy to promote respect and dignity by preventing harassment or bullying*.
- 7.6 The President informed members that BDO Ireland has just completed a review of research integrity processes in DCU on behalf of Science Foundation Ireland. He recorded his thanks to colleagues in Research Support for contributing to this work.
- 7.7 The President drew attention to the most recent Springboard call and he encouraged Faculties and Schools to consider proposing programmes.
- 7.8 The President drew attention to the recently published *European Strategy for Universities* which emphasises the major role of higher education in the societal, cultural and economic development of Europe. The Strategy also draws attention to the importance of the higher education sector in addressing future fundamental challenges. He informed members that the Strategy stresses the importance of the European universities initiative as a catalyst for deeper transnational cooperation. He noted that the Strategy makes clear that DCU is on the right track in terms of our ECIU involvement and wider strategic plans.
- 7.9 The President noted the significance of DCU's partnership with Arizona State University and informed members that a series of joint seminars are being planned for March to explore how to progress this partnership to the next phase. He also drew attention to ECIU, noting that our engagement represents a significant and demanding commitment for DCU colleagues. He noted the important work of the Education Committee in exploring collaborative provision definitions and principles which will facilitate DCU in advancing these strategic partnerships.

**8. DCU Undergraduate Exam Results Analysis 2017-2021, presentation by Dr Jing Burgi-Tian, Institutional Research & Analysis Officer**

Dr Burgi-Tian presented to Academic Council on undergraduate exam results for the 2017-2021 period and undergraduate academic progress over the past ten years. The following findings were noted from the presentation, with particular attention drawn to findings from the recent two-year pandemic period:

Exam results analysis 2017-2021

- Grades have been increasing significantly in the past five years, particularly during the pandemic period
- Grade differentiation has been decreasing in the past few years, particularly during the last two years

- Access students' grade increase is not as pronounced as for other students during the pandemic period
- The attainment gap between access student and other students is wider in the graduating class of 2021 than in previous cohorts
- Grades of non-EU students have decreased more observably compared to EU and Irish students during the pandemic

#### DCU undergraduate progression rates

- The available HEA data shows that DCU's non-progression rate is lower than the sectoral average.
- In tracking each entrant cohort over six years, the retention rates are 91% after year 1 and 87% after year 2. DCU has a 72% graduation rate at year 4 and an 80% graduation rate at year 6.
- In looking at the 'widening participation cohorts' the retention rate for 1st and 2nd year is similar to other cohorts, however, the year 4 and 6 graduation rates are, on average, 5% lower.

Dr Burgi-Tian noted that while trends can be identified in the available data, the reasons behind these are not clear.

It was suggested that it would be helpful if it could be determined if assessment design changes during the pandemic were of benefit to lower performing students. It was noted that further data would be needed to determine the reasons for these grade increases. It was noted that student feedback would be critical in this regard.

It was noted that the supports offered in later years to mature, disability, international and Access students should be revisited, in light of the data presented.

It was noted that it would be useful to see progression rates across the university sector in particular. This information should be available once the most recent HEA data is published.

It was noted that similar data on postgraduate taught and research students would be useful. Dr Stokes informed members that some work has been completed by the Graduate Studies Office and it was agreed that this will be shared with Dr Burgi-Tian and Mr Waqar, Students' Union Postgraduate Officer, after the meeting.

Dr Burgi -Tian asked programme teams interested in detail relevant to their students to contact her. The President recorded his thanks to Dr Burgi-Tian for her informative presentation.

## 9. Strategic academic initiatives

### 9.1 Revised academic calendar

The Deputy Registrar/Dean for Teaching and Learning reminded members that in December 2020 Academic Council approved outline calendars for 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24. He informed members that the Academic Calendar Implementation Group (ACIG), which has representatives from each Faculty and other key units, continues to

meet on a regular basis, to monitor and review implementation and to address any issues as they arise.

The Deputy Registrar/Dean for Teaching and Learning advised members that the ACIG has reviewed a number of issues relating to the 2022-23 outline calendar. Following consultation with staff and students and detailed exploration of possible solutions, the ACIG is proposing a number of amendments to the calendar, as documented in the circulated memo (AC2022/A1/9.1a). He briefed members on the proposed changes and the rationale for each:

1. The commencement of Semester 1 one week later than originally planned in 2022  
In mapping out the detailed calendar for 2022-23, a critical issue arising from interdependencies between registration and timetabling was identified. Cyclical movement within the annual calendar sees the first Monday of Semester 1 falling as early as the 5th and as late as the 11th of September. In the original outline calendar for 2022-23, year 1 registrations will close on Friday, 2 September and Semester 1 teaching will commence on Monday, 5 September. This leaves no working days for essential, post-registration timetabling activities.

Colleagues in Registry, the Faculties and the Academic Systems Unit have explored possible modifications to existing processes with a view to creating additional time in the calendar. However, none of the revised processes or technical solutions will create sufficient time-saving for necessary timetabling work to take place. As such, the only feasible solution identified is to move the start date of Semester 1 out by one week to 12 September. The 12-week semester will also finish a week later, however, examinations will still finish no later than 22 December.

2. The commencement of Semester 2 one week later in 2023  
This proposed amendment follows on from the later Semester 1 start date. Moving Semester 2 out by one week to 16 January will create space within the calendar for dedicated correction time and will ensure students have an adequate inter-semester break.

3. The commencement of the resit examination period in 2023 one week earlier  
An earlier start date of 1 August for resits is proposed for the 2022-23 calendar. This change is required to facilitate the migration of student data into the new student information system.
  
4. The creation of a 13-week Semester 2, in a 6 - 1 - 6 model  
Following feedback from the Faculties and the student body, the ACIG has also given detailed consideration to the inclusion of a break in teaching in Semester 2. Feedback has indicated that students strongly advocated for additional time within the semester, particularly in those schools and programmes with high contact hours and no reading week.

The proposal will see a compulsory reading week introduced in Semester 2 in 2023. If approved, this will apply to all Faculties and will be incorporated into subsequent outline calendars. The proposal is for a 6 -1-6 model (six weeks of teaching, a one week break in teaching (reading week), followed by a further six weeks of teaching).

It was noted that with the introduction of the 13-week Semester 2, the academic year will still finish at an early or comparable time to other Irish universities. The summer period is also comparable to that of previous years.

It was noted that, while the ACIG consulted widely on the introduction of a revised Semester 2, the time period for consultation was constrained due to the urgent need to begin planning for the 2022-23 detailed calendar.

It was noted that it must be made clear in the published calendar that the Semester 1 reading week does not apply to all Faculties.

It was noted that the proposal to avoid scheduling University meetings during reading week is a welcomed one.

It was noted that some flexibility will be needed in how Semester 2 is structured for particular courts, as indicated in the circulated memo.

It was noted that the issue of timetabling is a complicated one, due to the interrelatedness of student timetables. Cross-faculty teaching and finite physical resources on campus mean that this issue is not restricted to those programmes where students have options. It was noted that removing current flexibility would see a loss of the student-centred approach to timetabling currently adopted by DCU, and so is not being proposed.

The Students' Union Vice President for Academic Life informed members that the Students' Union supports the proposal to introduce a universal reading week in Semester 2. She noted that this will give students much needed time for progressing assignments and other academic activities, and will contribute to the well-being of students. This view was echoed by Students' Union Faculty representatives.

The outline academic calendars for 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25, as detailed in the circulated memo (AC2022/A1/9.1a), were approved.

The *DCU Outline and Detailed Academic Calendar, Criteria and Elements*, version 2, which has been updated to reflect the agreed changes, was approved.

**C. Items for formal approval/noting**

**10. Validation reports**

**10.1 MSc in Specialist Nursing for Future Healthcare**

Noted. Approved by Chair's action.

**10.2 Graduate Certificate in Financial Intelligence and Technology**

Approved

**11. Recommendations from Progression and Awards Boards for Spring 2022 conferring**

The Report from Spring 2022 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 2022 conferring**

The Report from Spring 2022 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. Any other business**

There was no other business.

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

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

**Date of next meeting:**

6 April 2022

2.00 p.m.

Location to be confirmed