

UNIVERSITY STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Thursday 3 February 2011

9.00-11.30 a.m. in A204

Present: Professor Anne Scott (Chair), Dr Françoise Blin,
Dr Dermot Brabazon, Ms Olivia Bree, Ms Jennifer Bruton,
Mr Cillian Byrne, Ms Bernadette Dowling, Mr Billy Kelly,
Ms Louise McDermott (Secretary), Ms Phylomena McMorrow,
Dr Anne Morrissey, Ms Morag Munro, Professor Gary Murphy,
Mr Paul Sheehan, Ms Annabella Stover, Mr Ronan Tobin,
Dr Sheelagh Wickham

Apologies: Professor Saleem Hashmi

SECTION A: MINUTES AND RELATED ISSUES

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 9 December 2010

The minutes were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

- 3.1** Noted that a new title was being proposed for Level 8 conversion programmes in teacher education but that, sector wide, it was likely that teacher education programmes taken after a primary degree in another discipline would, in future, become Level 9 Master's programmes (as recommended in recent documentation including *Better Literacy and Numeracy for Young People: A Draft National Plan*)

- to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools* – DES, November 2010). The importance of monitoring the implications of these developments for DCU conversion programmes in other disciplines was noted. (Item 3.1)
- 3.2** Noted that discussions with Faculties about the placing of post-1989 (i.e. DCU) qualifications on the NFQ would be progressed in due course. (Item 3.2)
- 3.3** Agreed that the ‘mother’ and ‘child’ module system required no further discussion at present and that any issues or concerns that emerged about it at a future date could be brought to the attention of the USC if necessary. (Item 3.4)
- 3.4** Noted that the fee implications of Marks and Standards, especially in respect of the regulations about repeating modules, were being kept under review. (Item 3.5)
- 3.5** Noted that the implications for Oscail students of the policy on leave of absence were being monitored. (Item 3.8)
- 3.6** Noted that an alternative external examiner to the person originally nominated was being sought by a School. (Item 3.11)
- 3.7** Noted that a Programme Board was giving consideration to alternative marking mechanisms for 2011/12 and beyond. (Item 3.12)
- 3.8** Noted that the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* had been published and that it contained recommendations on the Recognition of Prior Learning (see also Item 8 below). (Item 3.13)
- 3.9** Noted that the PAC system for applications for research degrees would go live on 4 February 2011. The Chair expressed appreciation, on behalf of the USC, to the staff members in the Registry and the Graduate Research Office responsible for implementing the system. Noted that sector-wide discussions about the management of the PAC application fee were in progress. (Item 3.14)
- 3.10** The revised policy on *aegrotat* awards for students on taught programmes was approved. It was noted that the Graduate Studies Board had, at its meeting of 9 November 2010, approved a revised policy on *aegrotat* awards for research students. (This policy was approved in the context of the approval of the minutes of the GSB meeting of 9 November 2010 – see Item 4 below.) (Item 3.19)
- 3.11** Noted that a working group was giving consideration to issues relating to Bologna/NFQ compliance (see also Item 7.1 below). (Item 3.20)

- 3.12** A request for a change to the dates of appointment of an external examiner was approved. It was noted that, if the revised appointment regulations for external examiners were approved by Academic Council, consideration could be given to appointing the examiner for a four-year rather than a three-year period from 2012. (Item 5.1.4)
- 3.13** Noted that a Head of School had discussed with the Chair a matter relating to the University's plagiarism policy which had been raised by an external examiner, and that a further comment from the examiner was awaited. (Item 5.2)
- 3.14** Noted that three changes to Marks and Standards had been approved by Academic Council on 22 December 2010. (Item 7.1.1)
- 3.15** Noted that a working group had been set up to implement the changes to the Calculate programme consequent upon the amendments to Marks and Standards made in 2010/11, that it was expected that its work would be completed by mid-May 2011 and that adequate resources were being made available for this work by integrating it into staff workload. (Item 7.1.2)
- 3.16** Noted that the 'Frequently Asked Questions' document, to accompany Marks and Standards, had been updated and was available on line adjacent to Marks and Standards. (Items 7.1.2, 7.1.3, 7.1.4, 7.1.5 and 7.1.6)
- 3.17** Noted that Faculty-specific memoranda about arrangements for continuous assessment resits had been circulated by the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning/Education. (Item 7.1.7)
- 3.18** Agreed that it would be important to make final recommendations soon in respect of the revisions to the procedures for disseminating and responding to external examiners' reports. Noted that a Head of School had responded to the invitation for additional members to join the working group which is considering the issues, and that the Chair would raise the membership of the working group with the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning /Education with a view to identifying additional members and making a recommendation as to who should chair the group. Noted that it was very important that external examiners got papers and scripts in a timely fashion (see also Item 11 below). Noted that recent external examiners' reports had contained many positive comments and that the comments about the postgraduate taught programmes in Dublin City University Business School had been uniformly positive. Agreed that information would be sought about the contact details of the staff member in the University of Limerick responsible for the UL online database in respect of external examiners. (Item 8.1.2)

3.19 Noted that the revised regulations and guidelines for the appointment of external examiners would be submitted for consideration by Academic Council at its meeting of 9 February 2011 and that Council would be made aware of the proposed transitional arrangements between the current and the proposed new regulations that would apply in the event of approval of the new regulations. The importance of organising the approval procedure in a timely fashion, i.e. in the academic session prior to the session in which the appointment is proposed to begin, was noted. (Item 8.2)

3.20 Noted that the fitness for purpose of the new system of making the majority of papers for USC meetings available in electronic format was being kept under review. (Item 10.2)

4. Minutes of the meeting of the Graduate Studies Board of 11 November 2010

Approved. Noted, in respect of Item 3.27, that it had been agreed by the GSB that any applicant who requested admission to a research programme on a transfer basis would be considered for admission to a year no higher than second year.

SECTION B: FACULTY ISSUES

5.1 Appointment of external examiners

5.1.1 Dr Stephen Cushion, Cardiff University
Modules on the MA in Political and Public Communication and the MA in Journalism

Approved.

5.1.2 Professor Sarah Edge, University of Ulster
Modules on the BSc in Multimedia and the MSc in Multimedia

Approved.

5.1.3 Dr Anne B Ryan, National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Uaneen Modules UM404 and UM405

Approved.

5.1.4 Professor Emeritus Sheelagh Drudy, University College Dublin
Master's in Special Educational Needs, St Patrick's College

Approved.

5.1.5 Professor Ann Loades, Durham University
MA in Theology, Mater Dei Institute of Education

Approved.

- 5.1.6 Dr Declan Marmion, Milltown Institute and St Patrick's College, Maynooth
Modules on the BA in Irish Studies and Religious Studies, Mater Dei Institute of
Education
Approved.

5.2 Renewal of appointment of external examiners, and/or changes to duties

- 5.2.1 Dr David Dunn, University of Birmingham
MA in International Relations, MA in Development, MA in Security and Conflict
Studies
Approved.
- 5.2.2 Dr Patricia Eaton, National University of Ireland, Galway
Graduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs (high-incidence pathway)
Approved.

6. Other issues

6.1 Faculty of Engineering and Computing

6.1.1 Discussion document on contract cheating

The increasing opportunities for students to engage in contract cheating were noted. Noted that advice from the Secretary's Office had indicated that engagement with an online service with a view to obtaining a bespoke essay or other assignment, and paying for this, should be regarded as offences against the University's Code of Discipline. It was agreed that contact would be made with the Secretary's Office to arrange for an appropriate addition to be made to the University's Code of Discipline. The following were noted in discussion: the issue is a sensitive one, and the environment in which contract cheating takes place is volatile (for instance, new opportunities for cheating emerge on the basis of technological developments and, meanwhile, universities are making increasing use of legitimate tools such as online personal learning environments); there is a link with concerns expressed by the Graduate Studies Board at its meeting of 13 January 2011 about research students engaging external parties to proofread and/or edit their theses; there may be scope for leveraging University expertise in forensic linguistics to increase the effectiveness of detection techniques in relation to contract cheating and plagiarism; it is essential to induct students into ethical practices from the outset of their studies with a view to minimising the risk of their engaging in cheating of any kind; constant awareness of, and vigilance in relation to, the issues relating to cheating are essential.

6.1.2 Request to approve amendment to programme regulations for 2010/11 in respect of programmes in the Faculty of Engineering and Computing

Approved. Noted that the wording used by the Faculty, which incorporates references to mode of delivery, was a useful one that could be adopted by other Faculties in any future requests of this kind. The timetabling difficulties relating to having students carry failed modules into the next academic session were noted, and it was noted that a centralised timetabling system would have the advantage of minimising such difficulties. It was noted that, given the imminence of decisions within Faculties in respect of the academic structures for 2011/12, it was timely that decisions about allowing students to carry failed modules were being made at this time. Issues relating to balancing flexibility of provision of modules with equity of treatment in terms of permission to carry failed modules were noted. Agreed that the annual report from the Registry to Academic Council which summarises issues from Progression and Awards Boards would, henceforth, include information on the numbers of students who had been permitted to carry failed modules, and their programmes of study.

6.2 Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

6.2.1 Request to re-admit a student to complete the MA in Globalisation

Approved subject to a stipulation that the student complete 90 credits. Noted that a template for requests for re-admission of legacy students was being prepared, and agreed that it would include a stipulation that, in the case of students on taught postgraduate programmes, the expectation is that if re-admitted they will be required to complete 90 credits even if they began their programmes when the credit rating was 75.

6.2.2 Request to approve amendments to programme regulations for 2010/11 in respect of programmes in the School of Communications

Approved subject to the removal of the word 'deferred' before 'modules' in the four instances in which it appears.

6.3 Faculty of Science and Health

6.3.1 Request in respect of the calculation of the final mark for a student on the MSc in Plasma and Vacuum Technology

Approved. Noted that, in the event of an appeal, the DCU appeals regulations would apply, as the student is registered in DCU though the programme is jointly offered with Queen's University Belfast.

SECTION C: OTHER ISSUES (NOT FACULTY SPECIFIC)**7. Marks and Standards****7.1 Request for amendments to Marks and Standards**

In the course of discussion, the spread of credit ratings which attach to Special-Purpose Awards in other universities was noted. It was agreed that the proposed amendments would be discussed in further detail by the working group set up by the Education Committee to make recommendations on a flexible programme framework for responding to calls for submissions for funding under the Labour Market Activation scheme. This group will now have a wider remit which will facilitate consideration of the detailed issues relating to the proposed amendments to ensure Bologna/NFQ compliance (see Item 3.11 above). The proposed amendments were approved subject to the resolution of the issues to be considered by the working group and to the inclusion of a footnote containing the definition of a minor award. Noted that this approval would facilitate the creation of a Level 8 Undergraduate Certificate in Homeless Prevention and Intervention, as requested of the Education Committee by the Faculty of Science and Health. Noted that the amendments would necessitate some editorial changes to sections of Marks and Standards. Noted that it was possible that, at a future date, a student who had completed some but not all of the credits associated with a Level 8 major award would request an award (e.g. a minor award), and agreed that the working group should make recommendations relating to this issue.

7.2 Request for an additional derogation from Marks and Standards in respect of the MSc in Plasma and Vacuum Technology

Approved. Noted, however, that the maximum time period for completion of the degree, as specified in the derogation, is unusually long. Agreed that a request would be made to the Programme Chair to raise this issue with the relevant staff members in the partner institution, Queen's University Belfast, and that the Dean of the Faculty of Science and Health would be made aware of the concerns that had been expressed about the issue.

8. Proposed policy and procedures on the Recognition of Prior Learning

Approved subject to some minor editing, a stipulation that RPL admissions decisions are final and binding, and changes to the section on exemptions to introduce the possibility of granting exemptions for modules as well as for academic sessions (either or both may be deemed appropriate by individual Programme Boards). Agreed that consideration could be given to assigning either

to the Registry or to Access and Student Recruitment any staff resource that might be made available to work on RPL, but noted that the Employment Control Framework is making it increasingly difficult to provide staffing across the University. Thus this RPL responsibility would make up a portion, i.e. integrated into an element, of the role of a member of permanent university staff. Agreed that the proposed policy and procedures would be submitted to Academic Council for consideration at its meeting of 9 February 2011. Agreed that it would be important to ensure familiarity within Faculties with the policy and procedures after they have been approved by Council. The Chair, on behalf of the USC, thanked the Chair, Dr Sheelagh Wickham, and members of the RPL Working Group, for an excellent piece of work.

9. Draft revised *Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis*

Approved subject to the following:

- inclusion of references to the need to ensure the suitability of supervisors from the point of view of compatibility between their areas of expertise and the students' research
- a stipulation that a supervisor who retires from the University will normally be expected to continue to supervise his/her student(s) until the research has been completed and the degree obtained
- some changes to the wording in relation to appeals
- a change to Section 8.9 to include reference to the concept of licence and to make this section compatible with Section 8.10
- a change to Section 8.10 to include reference to the concept of the integrity of the thesis
- the inclusion of a reference to Marks and Standards and the compatibility between them and the regulations
- such other comments as may be submitted to Professor Murphy by Friday 4 February 2011.

Agreed that the revised regulations would be submitted for consideration by Academic Council at its meeting of 13 April 2011.

10. Proposal to display full module result information on student portal pages

Approved. Noted that continuous assessment and examination weightings will also be displayed, for ease of reference, though students will already have been made aware of these. Agreed that it would be important for Programme Chairs and module co-ordinators to be made aware of the new display system, especially since

(subject to approval by Academic Council at its meeting of 9 February 2011) it will be introduced with effect from the publication of the Semester 1 2010/11 examination results on 17 February 2011.

11. Discussion of issues relating to submission of papers and scripts to external examiners, providing feedback to students and retaining scripts

Noted that consideration should be given to the establishment of a working group to make recommendations on the provision of feedback to students following continuous assessment submission and examinations. Noted that, once the revised procedures for disseminating and responding to external examiners' reports were agreed and approved, it would be important to consider the fitness for purpose of current policies and practices in respect of submitting examination papers, continuous assessment project / assessment titles and scripts to external examiners, and retaining scripts post assessment and examination. (See also Item 3.18 above).

12. Any other business

The Chair noted that the USC should keep under review the necessity of holding an additional meeting during the academic year on account of pressure of business. A recommendation on this might be made at the next meeting of USC in respect of the academic session 2011/12.

Date of next meeting:

**7 April 2011
9.00 a.m. in A204**

Signed: _____
Chair

Date: _____