



Policy for Interdisciplinary Programmes and Disciplines at UCC

This Policy for Interdisciplinary Programmes and Disciplines at UCC was originally approved by Academic Council (25-5-09) and implemented for all interdisciplinary programmes across the university; such programmes may be major or minor awards at any level of the NFQ. This revision has taken on board comments from a focus group with experience with interdisciplinary programmes, ADSC, Colleges and Academic Board.

1. Structures and governance models:

Six categories of organisation are recognised in relation to interdisciplinary programmes/disciplines. Interdisciplinary programmes must be allocated to sit within one of the following categories which will, in turn, affect the overall governance and management of the programme (see below). The allocation to a category will be made through consultation between Head(s) of the relevant School(s)/Departments and the Head(s) of College and approved by the relevant College Council(s).

Categories 1 to 3 relate to programmes, 4 and 5 to the discipline. It is anticipated that as programmes and disciplines develop, they may move from one category to another.

1 – A programme led by a single School, involving the contribution of staff/modules from other Schools, largely built on suites of existing modules and overseen by a Board of Studies.

2 – A programme with shared responsibility within or across Colleges involving several Schools/Departments with no lead School/ Department but overseen by a Board of Studies. A significant number of dedicated modules are usually offered for the programme and such programmes must appoint a Programme Director through a process agreed by the relevant College(s).

3 – A programme with directed responsibility within or across Colleges involving several Schools with either a permanent or a rotational lead/coordination by a School/Department and a Board of Studies. Dedicated staff are appointed to support the programme, allocated by the head of College(s) to the contributing Schools. A significant number of dedicated modules are offered for the programme. Such programmes must appoint a Programme Director through a process agreed by the relevant College(s).

4 – An interdisciplinary subject involving a number of programmes within or across Colleges involving contributions from several Schools, with an overall Head of Discipline appointed by the President through a process agreed by the relevant College(s) and a Board(s) of Studies established as appropriate. A significant number of dedicated modules are offered for the programmes, and dedicated staff are appointed by the College(s). Such a discipline may be governed at a College level with affiliation to an appropriate School for research but ideally, such a discipline should be brought within an appropriate existing School within a College.

5 – An interdisciplinary subject area evolving as an independent discipline, covering a number of programmes and research activity established as a unit in its own right with primary and secondary staff members, Boards of Study, Head of School etc.

6 – Interdisciplinary programmes involving external partners. In this case, management arrangements will be defined in agreements with specific terms of reference developed before the programme approval process.

2. Leadership:

At University level, the Senior Vice-President Academic and Registrar will have overall advocacy for interdisciplinary courses/programmes and oversight of intercollegiate programmes and Heads of the contributing College(s) should undertake a similar advocacy role and oversight for within-College developments while Heads of School will have an advocacy role for interdisciplinary programmes within a school with more than one discipline.

For each interdisciplinary programme in categories 2 and 3, the relevant Head of College should appoint, through an appropriate College-led process, an academic as Programme Director. The Director should have responsibilities for the management and oversight of programme administration and supervision. This task should be recognised by the academic's 'home' School/Department as part of his/her workload.

For interdisciplinary subjects under category 4, The President will appoint, through a process defined in College Rules, a senior academic as Head of Discipline.

For categories 1 and 5, the Head of School will have responsibility for interdisciplinary programmes. A Course Coordinator should be appointed by the relevant Head of School to assist in the management of the various programmes.

It is recommended that each Academic Unit involved in delivery of an interdisciplinary programme should appoint an individual staff member with responsibility for the programme within their Unit.

3. Resources:

To allow for the proper functioning and development of interdisciplinary programmes, direct resourcing by the relevant budget holder is recommended. All contributing Schools are to be given due FTE credit and appropriate support in relation to the nature and extent of their participation in the interdisciplinary programme.

Where an interdisciplinary programme is set within category 2, 3 or 4, and meets the criteria below, it is recommended that the programme be established as a Cost Centre within the College or relevant School as appropriate.

- i) The programme must be inter-departmental and inter-School.
- ii) Staff have been appointed specifically to the programme (categories 3,4)
- iii) The programme has a dedicated and significant core academic structure
- iv) There should be a relatively even distribution of FTEs between Schools/Departments/Disciplines. (Where one School/Department/Discipline attracts a significant majority of FTE for the programme, there should be no separate Cost Centre, and the programme should be coordinated by that School).

Where an interdisciplinary programme is established as a cost centre, resources should be allocated at College level into a separate budget code, based on the resource allocation model of the relevant College or as agreed between collaborating Colleges. The Programme Director will arrange for the transfer of resources/FTE to the participating School(s) involved in the delivery of the programme (e.g., to cover part-time teaching, consumables, equipment etc.) though an agreed formula approved by the appropriate Head(s) of College.

Where the interdisciplinary programme is set within a School (category 1 or 5), resources should be allocated at College level to the School based on the resource allocation model of the relevant College or as agreed between collaborating Colleges. The Head of School will arrange for the transfer of

resources to other participating School(s) involved in the delivery of the programme (e.g. to cover part-time teaching, consumables, equipment etc.) through an agreed formula approved by the appropriate Head(s) of College.

These resourcing arrangements must be set up and executed in accordance with the College finance policy and as close to the start of the academic year as possible in order to allow for the Head of College involved to plan for the allocation of resources. Resource arrangements should be reviewed annually. Where the scale of the interdisciplinary programme warrants, consideration should be given to the appointment, an administrative programme manager to ensure effective delivery of the programme.

4. Management and Operations:

a) Board of Studies

Each interdisciplinary programme will have a Board of Studies which will meet at least once per semester. The structure and composition may vary to reflect the nature of the programme, but generally should comprise at least one representative from each of the participating Schools/Departments/Disciplines teaching directly on the programme and be chaired by the Programme Director (categories 2, 3), Head of Discipline (Category 4) or Head of School or nominee (category 1, 5). Membership may include representatives from amongst staff teaching on the programme, Heads of relevant Schools/ Departments/ Disciplines or their nominees and College representatives. The membership of Boards of Studies should be described in general terms during the programme approval process.

Cognisance should be taken in determining the composition to ensure that the size of the Board does not inhibit the effective oversight and development of the programme. In the case of exceptionally large Boards of Studies (e.g., twelve or more members), consideration could be given to the establishment of a management sub-group to assist the Director in the day-to-day running of the programme. Boards of Studies should pay particular attention to accreditation issues and the views of students should feed into their deliberations through an active staff-student committee.

b) Programme development and approval

In the initial phases of programme development, appropriate expertise should be sought from within the University. Agreement would have to be sought from Heads of Schools to the establishment of interdisciplinary programmes involving their particular subject/discipline area. The Senior Vice-President Academic and Registrar should be

involved in the planning process to ensure engagement of all appropriate disciplines within the university.

Where appropriate expertise is not available within the university, consideration may be given to the seeking of such expertise from outside of the University (within the budgetary allocation available).

New Interdisciplinary programmes should be processed through the normal University Programme Approval Process following appropriate consultation and consideration through the Colleges and initial approval by Academic Board. External reviews on the full course proposal should, as far as practicable, be sought from relevant interdisciplinary experts. Interdisciplinary programme Module Codes may be developed in consultation with the Academic Programmes and Regulations Office. In general, Interdisciplinary programmes of Category 1 will be subjected to a college-level programme approval panel (CPAP) as will those of Category 2 that lie fully within one college.

Category 2 programmes that lie between colleges and programmes of Categories 3-6 will generally undergo a university-level PAP (UPAP).

Management structures for interdisciplinary programmes should be made explicit in the programme approval documentation.

All proposed minor changes to programme modules made by contributing Schools/Departments/Disciplines should be notified to the interdisciplinary programme Board of Studies in the first instance for final approval by the relevant College in which the programme is anchored.

c) Time-tabling:

Schools participating in interdisciplinary programmes must recognise that overall time-tabling must take equal account of the needs of interdisciplinary courses. The lead/coordinating School/Department or Board of Studies (for Category 2 programmes) should take overall responsibility for developing the programme timetable.

d) Examining:

Each interdisciplinary programme in Categories 2 and 3 should have a dedicated Programme External Examiner, i.e., an examiner who has overall external examining

responsibility for the course. In the case of programmes with very large student numbers more than one programme External Examiner may be considered.

For Categories 1, 4 and 5, Disciplinary externs will have overall external examining responsibility for the relevant interdisciplinary programmes

The role of the Interdisciplinary Programme Extern has been approved by Academic Council. The Programme External Examiner must complete an annual report and is responsible for programme review in relation to subject balances, examining student workloads and the general standard in relation to the programme. Academic Council has approved that the programme Externals views take precedence over module-level Disciplinary External Examiners in relation to the overall interdisciplinary programme awards.

[The detailed role and responsibilities of Programme Extern Examiners are covered in a separate Academic Council Policy].

e) Withdrawal or introduction of partners:

Any contributing School should be able to withdraw from a programme following appropriate consultation and safeguarding of students already on the programme.

Withdrawal of any contributing Schools/Departments/Disciplines from an interdisciplinary programme should occur in a manner that provides a transition period to ensure the integrity of the programme for the existing student cohort.

If the withdrawal is likely to lead to the cessation of a Discipline (Category 4), the university process laid out in the Policy on Cessation of Disciplines should be followed.

New contributing academic units may join an interdisciplinary programme with the agreement of existing parties in the programme. Associated changes to the programme must be processed in the usual way through the relevant academic bodies and approval processes.

f) Space and student home base:

The Programme Director of programmes in Categories 2-6 should have the right to apply to the appropriate Head(s) of School/College in relation to the space requirements of the programme. Every effort should be made to provide students of interdisciplinary/cross-College programmes with some dedicated space which would act as a central focus for their activities.

g) Student experience/pastoral care

The Programme Director/Course Coordinator should act as the overall focal point for academic and pastoral care of students in an interdisciplinary programme. Initial contact for students related to particular modules should be made with the relevant School/Department/Discipline (e.g. for med certs, absences etc.). Issues related to students registered for interdisciplinary programmes should be passed on to the Programme Director/Course Coordinator.

h) Staff allocation to interdisciplinary programmes:

For interdisciplinary programme categories 2, 3 and 4, prior agreements should be made between the Head of the home School/Department, the staff member(s) proposed to be involved in teaching on the programme and the Director of the interdisciplinary programme as to the level teaching commitment that will be provided to the programme. Ultimately staff are responsible to the Head of their home School. There should be explicit recognition of workloads of staff associated with interdisciplinary programmes in the overall workload allocations by the relevant Head of their home School/Department.

5. Research:

Where the interdisciplinary area is sufficiently well developed to support disciplinary-based research activity and postgraduate research, (categories 4, 5), the Head of Discipline/Head of School/Head of College should have responsibility not only for the co-ordination and organisation of the interdisciplinary programmes but also for the development of relevant interdisciplinary post-graduate courses and research. FTEs associated with PhD students should be shared appropriately between schools.

6. Review of Policy:

The implementation and operation of this revised policy will be reviewed after two academic years.

Management and operations - roles and responsibility chart - to be read in conjunction with draft Policy for Interdisciplinary Programmes and Disciplines at UCC										
		a	b	c	d	e - 1	e. 2	f	f	h
Category	Description	Chair of Board of Studies	Programme Development and Approval	Time-tabling	Examining (role of External Examiners)	Withdrawal of Partners	Introduction of Partners	Space and student home base	Student Experience/pastoral Care	Staff allocation to interdisciplinary programmes
1	A degree programme led by a single School, involving the contribution of staff/modules from other Schools, largely built on suites of existing modules and overseen by a Board of Studies	Head of School or nominee	College Level	School	Disciplinary - role to be approved by AC		With agreement of existing programme parties - approval from AB needed		See policy	
2	A degree programme with shared responsibility within or across Colleges involving several Schools with no Lead School/ Department but overseen by a Board of Studies. A significant number of dedicated modules are usually offered for the programme and such programmes must appoint a Programme Director through a process agreed by the relevant College(s).	Programme director	College Level if programme lies within one college. UPAP applies if programme lies between Colleges	Lead School/ Dept or Board of studies	Programme (role per current guidelines)		With agreement of existing programme parties - approval from AB needed	Programme Director has right to apply to Head(s) of School/College	See policy	With prior agreement of lead School/Department. Programme Director responsible for agreeing level of teaching commitment. Staff are responsible to Head of home School/Department. Workload recognition at home School/Department level
3	A degree programme with directed responsibility within or across Colleges involving several Schools with either a permanent or a rotational lead/coordination by a School/Department and a Board of Studies. Dedicated staff are appointed to support the programme, allocated by the head of College(s) to the contributing Schools. A significant number of dedicated modules are offered for the programme. Such programmes must appoint a Programme Director through a process agreed by the relevant College(s).	Programme director	UPAP	Coordinator/Board of Studies	Programme (role per current guidelines)		With agreement of existing programme parties - approval from AB needed	Programme Director has right to apply to Head(s) of School/College	See policy	With prior agreement of lead School/Department. Programme Director responsible for agreeing level of teaching commitment
4	An interdisciplinary subject involving a number of degree programmes within or across Colleges involving contributions from several Schools, with an overall Head of Discipline appointed by the President through a process agreed by the relevant College(s) and a Board(s) of Studies established as appropriate. A significant number of dedicated modules are offered for the programmes, and dedicated staff are appointed by the College(s). Such a discipline may be governed at a College level with affiliation to an appropriate School for research but ideally, such a discipline should be brought within an appropriate existing School within a College.	Head of Discipline	UPAP	Head of Discipline	Disciplinary - role to be approved by AC	Policy on Cessation of Disciplines applies	With agreement of existing programme parties - approval from AB needed	Programme Director has right to apply to Head(s) of School/College	See policy	With prior agreement of lead School/Department. Programme Director responsible for agreeing level of teaching commitment
5	An interdisciplinary subject area evolving as an independent discipline, covering a number of programmes and research activity established as a unit in its own right with primary and secondary staff members, Boards of Study, Head of School etc	Head of School or nominee	UPAP	Head of Discipline	Disciplinary - role to be approved by AC			Programme Director has right to apply to Head(s) of School/College	See policy	
6	Interdisciplinary programmes involving external partners. In this case, management arrangements will be defined in agreements with specific terms of reference developed before the programme approval process.		UPAP	As defined in MoU	Disciplinary - role to be approved by AC	As defined in MoU	As defined in MoU	Programme Director has right to apply to Head(s) of School/College	See policy	