

## **Workshop on Academic Decision-Making**

**Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1-2 pm**

**Council Room**

(Attendance attached)

### Decision-making models

- In relation to recommendation 1.1, participants questioned whether the sub-committee referenced is Academic Board?
- Participants commented that although the current structures are cumbersome, they do work and we do need some structures in place to get feedback from Colleges
- Reports still need to be forwarded to colleges so colleges can make decisions
- It was proposed that documents could be published on the website and consultation would be on the web
- Participants remarked that reports and policy documents go up and down the University so people could see same report multiple times. There is little clarity on who needs to see what.
- It was proposed that the approval pathway be clarified
- It was suggested that this could be an issue of policy generation – if there was a checklist of stakeholders that need to be consulted it would make policy formulation easier
- There was some discussion around Committee membership; whether members take their roles seriously and bring back information to their College/School/Department
- The lack of awareness of Committee members of their roles and how they should be feeding back to colleges was raised
- It was pointed out that the same people tend to sit on committees and there is a need to balance workload
- Participants questioned whether the mirroring of structures through University and College level is the best use of time?
- It was reported that delays in forwarding meeting minutes leads to a delay in decisions being taken and implemented
- It was proposed that if a member can't attend a committee meeting, a substitute could be nominated to attend in their place as long as the substitute have been fully briefed and informed
  
- There was some discussion about the recommendation to reduce by at least half the number of committees (recommendation 1.4)
- Participants agreed that a principles-based approach could have merit but there would need to be a substantial body of work around identifying the principles- who writes them and how many principles do we have?
- It was noted that there is an interdependence between the recommendations and decisions fundamentally, what is it that we need academic decision-making to do?
- Participants agreed that the key is to have reference points around academic/executive decision-making

- It was agreed that the principles need to be clarified before further subsidiarity is implemented and that there should be no devolution without adequate training and resources
- Participants made the point that we should be careful around separation of powers
- This issue can arise where a programme team is keen to ensure a programme is approved, but this may not be best for quality control of programme approval
- Participants discussed version control of documents up and down through the University
- It was agreed that it can be difficult to see how a document has changed and where the changes have been made. This can lead to confusion around whether Committee feedback has been included
- There was agreement on the need for training at university level and the idea that when a member is nominated to a Committee/role they should be provided with training
- It was suggested that a technological solution to version control could be employed such as a time slider which would record the versioning of documents
- The recommendation of the previous institutional review was recalled, namely that the University pay close attention to securing greater consistency in the way its regulations are observed. Devolution was perceived by the Review Group as being uneven and the reliability of decision-making was questioned.
- It was felt that attention should be paid to decision-making horizontally across the University to ensure parity and equity
- The key issues include: can we use a plausible narrative to demonstrate any deviation in decision-making?
- Participants commented that a unique feature of the Irish higher education system is that we have a great deal of autonomy in terms of the awards we offer, how we offer them etc.
- Any proposed reforms must preserve our institutional autonomy, however our governance structures and systems should be readable to external stakeholders

#### Institutional culture

- It was noted that different colleges operate in different ways
- Participants remarked that Departments do not have the same parity as Schools/Colleges
- Reference was made to an earlier point regarding the availability of meeting minutes. In some meetings, minutes are not recorded- does that mean no formal decisions are taken?
- It was noted that as a chair of a committee or sub-committee it's hard to move forward if the relevant people aren't attending meetings
- A suggestion was made that a pool of people could be identified and kept abreast of relevant issues, ready to stand in if the relevant committee member wasn't available to attend
- Participants remarked that it can very difficult to find a substitute to attend a meeting in your place if you're not available. Difficulty is increased by the fact that all meetings are crammed into the academic year
- It's often the same group of people who are called on to participate in committees which can lead to a subset of staff becoming overburdened
- It was noted that in the College of Medicine & Health, documents are made available on quick minutes in advance of meetings to allow staff the opportunity to comment when they can. Comments are then read out at meetings if staff member is unable to attend.
- It was suggested that Academic Council chairs would appreciate input into drawing up agendas for meetings

- A suggestion was made regarding development of a portal where agendas and minutes would be made available
- It was agreed that a workshop will be held annually with AC Committee chairs to map out a work plan
- A participant reported that a document went to AC a couple of years ago that covers a lot of this detail
- It was suggested that to increase engagement an annual AC report could be sent to all staff in a manner similar to the GB staff report
- Training was discussed, with the need for training to be offered at entry level
- Progress on action 29 (review and enhance programme approval process) was discussed. A lack of connection between programme boards was reported. It was stated that programmes need to be defined and supported – how do we maintain the integrity of our programmes?

#### Policy Development and Implementation

- It was agreed that policies should have an owner. There was some discussion around the level of seniority of the owner and whether he/she would have the authority to ensure the policy is implemented
- In this context the University Policy Framework was mentioned in addition to an OCLA policy template
- It was noted that there is no formal right of initiative for policy generation. Policy can come from a variety of sources across the University.
- People formulate in policies in good faith but the policies don't always hit the right touch point and in some cases the University ends up with policies which are not implementable
- It was suggested that policy proposals be directed through an appropriate channel
- Use of appropriate language was also discussed and the requirement for a document hierarchy was noted
- The need to be more data driven in policy making was also considered
- The issue of equality-proofing policies was raised and it was noted that equality proofing guidelines are being developed by EDI and OCLA
- It was agreed that feedback on the workshop would be provided

**List of attendees:**

John O'Halloran (latter part of the workshop)

Paul O'Donovan

Majella O'Sullivan

Audrey Huggard

Leah Neville

Catherine Desmond

Aine Flynn

Patrick Harrison

Bernard Hanzon

Karl Kitching

Orla Murphy

Colman Quain

Katie Sandham

Kate O'Brien

Orla Lynch

Aoife Ni Neill

Sarah Field

Conor Delaney

Elizabeth Kiely

Fiona Crowley

Mary O'Rourke

Mary McCarthy

Yvonne Clune

Mags Arnold

Clodagh Harris

Mathias Reckmann

Keith Burke