

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. The revised policy below has taken on board comments from Colleges and Academic Board and was approved by Academic Council on 6th March, 2015. The implementation and operation of this revised policy will be reviewed after two academic years.

1. Structures and governance models:

Five categories of organisation are recognised in relation to interdisciplinary programmes/disciplines. Interdisciplinary degree 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) 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 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.

2 – A degree programme 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).

3 – A degree programme 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 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.

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

2. Leadership:

At University level, the Registrar and Senior Vice President Academic will have overall advocacy for interdisciplinary courses/programmes and oversight of intercollegiate programmes and Heads of College should undertake a similar advocacy role and oversight for within-College developments.

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, budgets and project 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, it is recommended that they should be resourced directly, whilst also ensuring that all contributing Schools are 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 degree 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 relevant College Rules 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.

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.

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 Registrar and Senior Vice President Academic 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. External reviews on the full course proposal should, in as far as possible, be sought from relevant interdisciplinary experts. Interdisciplinary programme Module Codes may be developed in consultation with the Academic Programmes and Regulations Office.

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 Externs 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 degree for the existing student cohort.

For example, for a three year degree programme, this transition period would extend to two academic years.

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 should have the right to apply to the appropriate Head(s) of 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 degrees 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 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.

6. Review of Policy:

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