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(Title of Item)

Academic Protocol for Responding to Students Who Encounter Difficulties on Study Abroad Programmes

Action requested approve

Background rationale

At Academic Board 02-12-15, during discussion of the terrorist attacks in Paris, it was suggested that *there is a need to ensure consistency and fairness regarding policy for students across the university should they, for example, wish to re-enter their UCC-based course during the same academic year if they decide to return to Cork during an overseas placement.* In that regard it was suggested that a protocol should be devised.

Academic route when difficulties arise with Study Abroad

Many academic undergraduate programmes now incorporate a study abroad element meaning that students may spend either a semester or a full academic year studying at one of our partner Universities. In some cases, this is a compulsory component that is integral to the degree; in others, this is an optional element that can provide valuable opportunities for academic or other placements.

From time to time, circumstances may arise that cause a student to reconsider their decision to study abroad. This document aims to set out the guiding principles that should inform the decision-making of academic units (including boards of studies and programme directors) when this arises. It applies specifically to circumstances where study abroad is a compulsory component of the student's degree. It recognises that, although the reluctance to travel can arise for genuine reasons (e.g. reasons relating to family or personal circumstances or concern about the risks involved), any decision that may be made must take into account the fact that study abroad is integral to the student's degree. The issue of wider contingency must also be taken into account, in that if one student is permitted not to travel, or special arrangements are made for one student, they may have to be made for all. This may, in certain circumstances, render the particular placement unsustainable in the short or long term.

The four principal approaches are as follows:

1. The first priority should be to support the student to pursue the study abroad opportunity as planned. The reasons why the student is reluctant to travel should be explored and steps taken to reassure the student. This might involve providing the student with additional supports, putting them into contact with students from other Colleges or Irish universities before departing, or the partner University's agents or staff at their destination.
2. If the student has particular and genuine reasons for not travelling to their chosen destination to study abroad, efforts should be made to identify another suitable study abroad partner so as to allow the study abroad element of their degree to be duly completed.
3. If such alternatives are not available, and if such a measure is feasible, then the student should be facilitated in making an application to transfer out of the specialist programme. For instance, a BCL (International) student should transfer into the BCL programme.

4. If the student is unwilling to travel abroad and a solution under 2 or 3 above cannot be found, then an ad hoc solution should be developed in consultation with the Head of College. This could involve registering for a semester at UCC, undertaking a research or other work placement. As a rule, every effort should be made to ensure due equivalence between this programme and the aims of studying abroad. For instance, the proposed alternative programme of study might incorporate a substantial language and/or cultural programme.

Recourse to any of the above solutions should adhere to the appropriate decision-making procedures in the College concerned, and be reported annually to College Council, reporting onwards to Academic Board. Such circumstances should also be kept under review in the relevant Board of Studies.

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