Supporting Student Academic Progression Initiative (University College Dublin)

Key Features

1. Was the initiative established specifically to promote progression and retention and/or to address non-progression rates?

   Yes

2. Please state the institutional commitments or national priorities with which this initiative is aligned — for example, an institutional policy or strategic plan, an indicator in the institution's Performance Agreement under the System Performance Framework, and/or the National Access Plan?

   - Continuation – Academic Progress Policy
   - This links to UCD Strategy "Breaking Boundaries" – Initiatives Learning for Life and Student Experience objectives

3. Title of lead or section responsible for the initiative/measure

Student Engagement, Conduct, Complaints and Appeal

4. Focus

- First-year students
- New entrants
- All students
- Early intervention initiative
- Institution-wide initiative
- Institution Policy

5. Theme

- Student wellbeing, experience, & success

Overview of Initiative

6. Briefly describe the initiative, with reference to

- Why, and when introduced
- Overview of activities/intervention
- Success to date & next steps.

UCD aims to support all students to successfully complete their programme of study and to ensure satisfactory academic progress to be maintained throughout their studies. This requirement is set out in Academic Regulations.

There are many factors which may affect a student's academic progress; the Continuation Academic Progress Policy was established to provide a framework to guide the approach to

- support students to maintain progress
- identify those who need additional support
- support governing boards fulfil their responsibility for oversight of the academic performance and progression of students

- ensure a fair and consistent approach is used across UCD where unsatisfactory academic performance indicates that students may need support.

The initiative aims to support as many students as possible to progress through their degree to completion.

The aim is to provide early interventions, with faculty, school, and college offices and support staff identifying and supporting students who may be at risk based on their performance.

Where, despite interventions, the student is not progressing, procedural steps for a formal review of a student's performance are triggered by three failed attempts to pass a module.

The policy was introduced to fill a gap which had arisen when UCD moved to a modularised structure – previously there had been a "two-year rule," which required students to pass first year within 2 years of entry. The policy was developed to be more supportive to students and to give guidance on how academic progress should be monitored by governing boards. It also created a fair procedure to be followed in instances where there was a recommendation for a student's registration to be discontinued.

It is important that students are offered all relevant supports to help them to address their performance. Due to the varying size and nature of taught programmes, different approaches may be used for ensuring that students at risk of failing to meet the require academic standards are identified and communicated with in a timely way. Typical actions taken by programmes include:

- email alerts notifying students about failed modules;
- written requests to attend meetings to discuss their academic performance;
- during the meeting the student will be assisted to develop an academic plan to maximise their chances of successfully remediating the failed modules.

In the rare cases, where issues of performance cannot be satisfactorily addressed, recommendations to discontinue a student's registration can be submitted along with supporting evidence to the Governing Board for decision. Students are notified in advance of a recommendation being made regarding their performance and progression and are given the opportunity to respond accordingly.

Practice varies across programmes due to their size and nature. The following are two good practice examples of how two large Colleges have implemented the process.

College of Science:

All students who fail 50% of their modules are reviewed and invited to a meeting. The student meets with the Associate Dean who discusses their results with them, talks through their issues, and together they develop an academic plan. For example, many students wish to take modules from 2nd year at the same time as repeating 1st year modules which would leave them with an unrealistic workload, so the meeting determines a more feasible plan.

The students are invited to return in 6 weeks to meet the Associate Dean to discuss how things are going. The take-up of this is low.

https://www.ucd.ie/science/study/currentundergraduatesciencestudents/continuation

College of Arts and Humanities:

At present, College-level interventions are based on exam results, similar to the College of Science. Meetings with students often uncover other issues, which may lead to a referral to other UCD supports or result in module grades changing to extenuating circumstances grades or retrospective Leave of Absence. This can, in turn, lead to revisions to the academic plan.

Some Schools are currently taking part in an academic advising pilot, which aims to provide academic mentors with opportunities for earlier interventions. Live data captured from UCD's VLE Brightspace also helps identify low levels of module engagement (UCD LEAP). Way-finding tools to support academic staff on how to direct students to the correct supports form part of early intervention strategies.

For some students who have engaged with the UCD Continuation Framework, a programme change or an agreed exit pathway may offer a viable option, but only as one of a range of supports available to support their academic journey.

https://www.ucd.ie/artshumanities/study/policiesandprocedures/baprogrammecontinuationprocedure/

Aims and Objectives

7. Aim of the initiative

To engage with students so that as many students as possible successfully complete their programme of study. To ensure that students are eligible to continue with their studies, the University requires satisfactory academic progress to be maintained.

The policy was introduced to

- ensure that the Academic Regulations concerning continuation and readmission are applied in a fair and transparent manner.
- provide a suitable framework for the effective, consistent and timely identification and management of continuation issues that may arise.
- provide the procedures to be followed where a student's academic performance and progression within their programme is deemed unacceptable.

8. Objective 1

To identify students who may require additional academic support.

Actions

Students are contacted with advice around module remediation and programme progression and directed to appropriate support channels. Communications may include the invitation to meet with a member of academic staff to jointly develop an academic plan to support the student in returning to satisfactory academic progress. Students are also advised of other supports that may assist them, as non-academic issues often become apparent during these meetings.
Some students may choose to pursue a different programme, while others may decide not to engage with the supports offered.

Expected Outcome

The early identification of students who may be struggling enables earlier engagement with them. It is excepted that earlier interventions and support will ultimately lead to better retention and progression rates across all years but particularly for Stage 1 students who may otherwise be unaware of the support mechanisms available in UCD.

9. Objective 2

To define roles and responsibilities for follow-up with students.

Actions

The policy and procedures document has set out clear roles and responsibilities for this process.

Expected Outcome

Fair and consistent approach to supporting students in difficulties across all programme areas.

10. Objective 3

The Continuation – Academic Progress Policy is intended to support governing boards fulfil their responsibility for oversight of the academic performance and progression of students and ensure a fair and consistent approach is used across the University where there are concerns about academic performance.

Actions

Because it is important that students feel part of their College/School community, the most appropriate point for initial contact regarding continuation issues should be at local level.

UCD works to ensure that the policy and procedure be disseminated to Colleges and Schools as well as students being aware of them. Information for both staff and students is published, including guidance for staff, flowcharts and student FAQs: https://www.ucd.ie/secca/continuation-academicprogress/.

Allowing the first line of intervention to be local also means that variations in approach to suit programmes of different sizes and content can be used as deemed appropriate for the local context to ensure the best outcome for the students.

Expected Outcome

Notwithstanding local variations in procedures, students across all programme areas should have a comparable overall experience.

The number of students failing to progress should be reduced.

Those who ultimately decide to leave UCD should do so having made an informed decision and feeling that in reaching this decision they had been offered a range of supports and remediation alternatives.

Resourcing

11. How is the initiative resourced?

From central funds.

Monitoring & Oversight

12. How is the initiative monitored — is there a reporting structure in place or a committee where there is a monitoring of and reporting on progress and the achievement of objectives (e.g. academic council, university executive team)?

Governing Boards are responsible for monitoring the academic progress of students registered to their programmes. Programme and School Exam Boards review student performance relative to previous years and note any changes or trends.

Data relating to the number of students whose registration has been discontinued under the policy are reported to Academic Council annually by Academic Council Conduct and Capacity (ACCSCC).

Data relating to student contacts is held locally at School and/or College level.

ACCSCC is responsible for the oversight of the policy and related procedures. The policy is subject to formal periodic review under the University's Policy Management Framework which requires review every 3–5 years. The policy was introduced in 2017 and has been reviewed frequently (last revised in May 2024).

Retention and Progression data is reported to the Governing Authority annually by the Registrar.

Data & Evidence of Impact

13. How do you know that the initiative is working as planned, i.e.
    - Are data gathered (ongoing monitoring and evaluation of achievement of objectives)?
    - Have the objectives been achieved? What data and evidence are there to support this?

Low numbers of students whose registrations have been discontinued under this policy may indicate successful interventions. However, more data on the overall application of the policy is needed to evidence this assumption.

14. Has impact been established, and how? If not at present, how do you plan to gather data and evidence to establish impact?

Central exam board and progression audit reports identify students in need of intervention. Significant manual, resource-intensive work at local School and College office level is required to extract and manipulate data for the purpose of Governing Boards. We intend to investigate developing an allied system to support automated identification of students at academic risk under this policy and accurate tracking of follow-up activity.

Additional Information

15. Additional information including relevant URLs

- https://hub.ucd.ie/usis/!W_HU_MENU.P_PUBLISH?p_tag=GD-DOCLAND&ID=153
- https://www.ucd.ie/secca/t4media/CR_process_map_taught_progrs.pdf
- https://www.ucd.ie/academicadvising/
- https://hub.teachingandlearning.ie/student-progression-in-higher-education/entry/10234/

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