

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Student Experience, Access & Equality Committee

Terms of Reference
30 September 2005

UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK

Student Experience, Access and Equality Committee

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PART A:

MAIN OBJECT, SCOPE OF AUTHORITY, WORKPLAN

PREFACE

The terms of reference of the Student Experience, Access and Equality Committee (the "SEAEC") have been drafted having regard to the requirements of the Universities Act 1997 (as amended) and Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016 (the "State Code").

The SEAEC is a Governance Committee of the University's Governing Authority.

1. MAIN OBJECT AND SCOPE OF AUTHORITY

1.1 Main Object

1.1.1 The object of the SEAEC is to provide a forum where issues of serious concern to the student body can be promptly addressed and/or escalated to the highest levels of decision-making in the University.

1.1.2 The SEAEC will also advise the Governing Authority on the University's efforts to:

- enhance communication between students, academic staff and senior management of the University;
- promote greater collegiality as between academics, professional/technical staff, administrators, and the student body;
- build a culture where students feel comfortable raising different points of view, as well as airing their concerns and questions;
- maintain an environment which students find conducive to high quality teaching, learning and research;
- deal with access issues, including or supporting students who are at risk of exiting higher education due to underlying economic and/or social disadvantage;
- ensure that the University's statutes, strategies, and policies as they relate to students are fully aligned to the achievement of equality across all grounds safeguarded in legislation.

1.2 In pursuit of these objectives the SEAEC will provide strategic oversight of the measures to be taken corporately to achieve the foregoing objectives.

1.3 Scope of Authority

1.3.1 The SEAEC's authority derives from the Governing Authority, and includes undergraduate students, postgraduate students (including PhD students), and to post-doctoral researchers.

1.3.2 In addition to its main object the SEAEC may, at the request of the Governing Authority:

(a) investigate any activity within its terms of reference;

(b) seek (and be provided with) any information or explanations that it requires from any University employee, student or subsidiary company (or employee of such company) and all such persons or entities shall cooperate with any request made by the SEAEC.

1.3.3 The Chair of the SEAEC will coordinate with the Chairs of the other Governing Authority Committees to ensure, where necessary and/or expedient in any case, that the respective committees collaborate in the effective discharge of their functions.

1.4 The SEAEC may:

1.4.1 Obtain independent legal or other independent professional advice, at the University's expense and in accordance with procurement rules, and secure the attendance of persons with relevant experience and expertise at the SEAEC meeting if it considers this necessary;

1.4.2 Procure specialist ad-hoc advice at the reasonable expense of the University, subject to budgets agreed by the Governing Authority.

2. WORKPLAN

2.1 The SEAEC shall agree a workplan in September of each year and submit the workplan to the Governing Authority for approval as soon as practicable thereafter.

2.2 The SEAEC may at any time submit a revised workplan to the Governing Authority.

PART B:

RESPONSIBILITIES – STUDENT EXPERIENCE, ACCESS, EQUALITY

3. STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The SEAEC shall have responsibilities for matters pertaining to the to student experience as follows:

3.1 Review, over the lifetime of this SEASC, all student related statutes and policies as they fall due for review.

3.2 Provide oversight and make recommendations to the Governing Authority on the following matters:

(a) the delivery of strong student-focused support services which address the safety, health, welfare and general wellbeing of students.

(b) the development of a strong culture of student engagement.

(c) the costs to students of attending the University, with particular emphasis on the costs of accommodation, food, and access to sporting and recreation facilities.

(d) the services provided by and/or contracted out to third parties and whether such services facilitate students to make healthy choices in terms of their physical, emotional, and nutritional health.

(e) the standard of the common areas / recreational / dining areas where students congregate and whether they are conducive to a positive student experience.

(f) any required upgrades, or maintenance to ensure that facilities for students at the University are (at least) on a par with the best facilities available at other academic institutions.

(g) the University's approach to the provision of student accommodation and the supports that are in place for students seeking accommodation.

(h) the measures in place within the University to address crisis / emerging issues for the student body.

4. ACCESS

The SEAEC shall have responsibilities for matters pertaining to student access to higher and further education as follows:

4.1 Agree policies relating to student access and widening participation in higher education and University life and submit them to the Governing Authority for consideration and approval.

4.2 Review periodically the University's approach to the granting of scholarships (at both undergraduate and post-graduate level) to ensure that appropriate account is being taken of the University's strategic objective to broaden access to higher education.

4.3 Review the University approach to access issues for registered students, including the supports that are available for students who find themselves at risk of exiting the University due to underlying economic and/or social disadvantage;

4.4 Review progress against the University's action plan as a University of Sanctuary to encourage, promote and enable refugees and asylum seekers to access third-level education.

5. EQUALITY

The SEAEC shall have responsibilities for matters pertaining to equality as follows:

5.1 Ensure that the steps taken by the University to advance equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion are having the desired effect in practice.

5.2 Ensure that policies prepared are in accordance with HR-EDI and Athena Swan principles, and that they align with relevant national policy for consideration by Governing Authority.

5.3 Ensure equality for students regardless of their:

- Socio Economic Status
- Gender
- Civil Status
- Family Status
- Sexual Orientation
- Religious belief or lack of religious belief
- Age
- Disability or the nature of their disability
- Race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origin
- Membership of the Traveller or Roma Communities.

5.4 Consider issues other issues affecting students that may have their genesis in access and/or equality such as awareness surrounding drug and alcohol addiction and harm reduction and increased sexual health education.

6. RISK

6.1 The SEAEC will consider material risks relevant to its remit and satisfy itself that: (a) such risks are reflected on the University's risk register(s); and (b) appropriate measures are being taken to mitigate impacts on the student experience.

6.2 In performing its functions under this paragraph, the SEAEC may provide a report and/or advice to the Audit and Risk Committee and/or to the Governing Authority.

PART C:

MEMBERSHIP, ATTENDANCE AND FUNCTIONING

7. MEMBERSHIP AND ATTENDANCE

7.1 There shall be at least eleven but no more than thirteen members of the SEAEC, as follows:

- The Chairperson who shall be either an Internal Member or an External Member of the Governing Authority.
- The President (or their nominee)
- The Provost and Deputy President
- At least one but no more than two External Members (which may include the Chair)
- At least two but no more than three Internal Members (which may include the Chair)
- Three Student Union Representative Members (Governing Authority Members)
- Two Student Union Nominees (one to be nominated by Student Life and one by the Postgraduate Students Union), who are either representative of, or have a representative role for, minority and/or disadvantaged groups[1].
- A maximum of two additional External Appointments[2], who may be coopted in accordance with paragraph 7.3 below.

7.2 The SEAEC, collectively, shall have a good range of skills and competence relevant to student engagement, access and equality matters, as relevant to the University.

7.3 Where the SEAEC considers it requires specific expertise, experience, or skills that complement its needs, or to fill a gap in knowledge or representation that is not met by existing Governing Authority Members, then additional member(s) may be coopted to the SEAEC (i.e., External Appointment(s)) with the approval of the Governing Authority, provided that the membership of the SEAEC does not exceed 12 members.

7.4 The SEAEC membership must comprise not less than two External Members of the Governing Authority. However, provided that the SEAEC moves to fill the vacancy as soon as is practicable, it may act notwithstanding any vacancy among the External Members.

7.5 Members of senior management having delegated responsibility for student related matters will be in attendance at meetings of the SEAEC. However, the SEAEC reserves the right to request that such persons not attend a specific meeting or a part of any meeting as the SEAEC considers appropriate.

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[1] A Student Union Nominee must be (a) a current student of the University; and/or (b) an officer of Student Life or of the Postgraduate Students Union.

[2] An "External Appointment" refers to a person who is not an employee of the University, nor a member of its Governing Authority

7.6 As the business of the SEAEC requires, any employee of the University or subsidiary company may be requested to attend for specific meetings or agenda items at the request of the SEAEC.

7.7 **Appointment of Chairperson and Members**

7.7.1 The Governing Authority shall appoint a person to be the first Chairperson of the SEAEC.

7.7.2 Any vacancy on the SEAEC arising (including for the position of Chairperson) shall be notified to the Nominating and Governance Committee, which shall make a recommendation to the Governing Authority.

7.7.3 The Nominating and Governance Committee may also make a recommendation to the Governing Authority about the term of members' office, and the filling and/or non-filling of any vacancy on the SEAEC, as it considers appropriate.

7.7.4 The SEAEC may, from time to time as the occasion requires, appoint from amongst its External Members (or its External Appointments) a member to be its Deputy Chair.

8. FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

8.1 The SEAEC shall meet at least five times a year.

8.2 The Chancellor and/or the President may request the SEAEC to convene additional meetings to consider particular issues of concern.

9. QUORUM

9.1 No meeting will proceed in the absence of a quorum, which shall be one third the total number of members (to include not less than one Internal, or one External member), rounded up to the nearest whole number, plus one.

9.2 The participation of the members by teleconferencing and/or video conferencing will be counted for the purposes of a quorum.

10. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

10.1 Committee members and persons in attendance shall take personal responsibility for the declaration of any potential conflict of interest, perceived or otherwise. To facilitate this, the declaration of conflicts of interests will be the first agenda item for each meeting of the committee. Where such a conflict is declared, the member will absent him/herself from the meeting during consideration of the agenda item. In addition, any additional documentation will not be made available to the member following the declaration of interest. These matters will be recorded in the minutes.

11. QUESTIONS / DECISION-MAKING

11.1 Questions arising at any SEAEC meeting shall be decided by consensus where possible. Where, in the opinion of the Chair, consensus is not possible, then questions will be decided by a majority of the votes of the members present, either in person or by tele-conferencing and/or video conferencing. Where there is equality of votes, the Chair shall have an extra casting vote.

11.2 Where decisions are unanimous, they shall be recorded as such in the minutes. Dissensions and negative votes shall be noted in the minutes.

12. MINUTES

12.1 Draft minutes will be provided to the Chair of the SEAEC within five working days of each meeting and circulated to the members thereafter.

12.2 With the approval of the members, the secretariat may use approved technology applications (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Microsoft 365 Copilot etc.) to assist in the prompt preparation of minutes, subject to accuracy verification, confidentiality and security compliance, adherence to legal requirements, and human oversight for final approval.

12.3 The SEAEC will provide its agreed minutes to the Governing Authority as soon as practicable for noting and/or discussion, as necessary.

13. CONFIDENTIALITY

13.1 Members of the SEAEC and any person privy to its affairs external to the University and who are not members of the Governing Authority will sign a Statement of Confidentiality based on the paragraph on Confidentiality/Use of Information of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Governing Authority.

14. SECRETARIAT

14.1 The SEAEC shall be provided with a secretariat function by Corporate Secretary's Office.

15. APPROVAL, REVIEW AND EVALUATION

15.1 The SEAEC will review its terms of reference and composition on an annual basis and recommend any proposed changes to the Governing Authority for consideration.

15.2 The SEAEC will undertake a self-evaluation process annually and report on the outcome of this assessment to the Governing Authority.

15.3 These terms of reference have been approved by the Governing Authority with effect from 29 October 2024

16. DOCUMENT CONTROL

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