THINKING OF CHANGING PROGRAMME

Step by Step Guide to Making the Right Decision

Student Support & Development
If you are reading this booklet, you are probably feeling uncertain about your current programme. Don’t panic, you are not the first student to express uncertainty about your choice of programme and you won’t be the last!

Before making any hasty decisions, it is important that you identify the reasons for feeling uncertain, gather information, consider and evaluate your options and understand the implications, including financial.

How Can This Booklet Help You?

This booklet outlines a four step approach with practical, easy-to-follow advice to help you make the right choices. After reading the booklet, make sure to make an appointment to speak to somebody to ensure you follow the correct steps. Contact student.support@dcu.ie for information about the best person to contact.

Four Simple Steps:

Step One Identify the Problem
Step Two Gather Information
Step Three Research Your Options
Step Four Decide on a Plan of Action
If you are feeling unsure about your programme, the first step is to identify the problem. Think about your current situation and ask yourself what is making you unhappy. Some students have given the following reasons for wanting to change or leave a programme.

**Programme / Subject Area**
- It is not what you expected
- The content is too easy or too difficult
- You’re not interested in the subject area anymore
- You like some of the modules but not others
- The lecture format and assessment styles are different to anything you have experienced before.

**Career**
- You thought your programme would lead into a certain profession. Now you feel the programme won’t deliver on this. You think that another programme might be more beneficial to meet your career aims.
- You may have changed your mind about your career ideas and are now wondering what route you should be taking.

**New Learning Environment - Academic Adjustment**
- Some students might struggle with adapting to the university learning environment. Common challenges include managing your time; new study environment; coping with coursework, exams, assignments and becoming an independent learner.
- Are you finding the level of academic writing difficult – perhaps because English is a second language?

**Settling-In**
- Are you feeling homesick or isolated, finding it hard to make friends
- Is DCU too big or too small or far way from home?

**Personal**
- Are you having any personal/family issues that make your academic progress difficult?
- Do you feel out of your depth?
- Are you trying to balance part-time work, family life and studies?
- Do you have a long commute?

**Financial**
- Are you worried about the financial burden of university?
- You can’t afford to pay your tuition fees or essential bills, for example, books, rent, childcare.
- You’re worried about getting into debt.

**Disability**
- Have you a disability (perhaps a learning difficulty) and have not disclosed it? Is this affecting your studies?

**Health**
- Are there any health issues, either mental or physical, affecting your studies?

Hopefully you are starting to identify the reasons for your uncertainty. Think carefully about your current situation. Identify the reasons you want to change or leave your programme. This will help you make an informed decision that’s right for you. It will also help you to identify the best person to speak to for more advice.
Don’t make any hasty decisions. There are a number of things you should do before making a final decision. It’s really important that you research your options to get as much detailed information as possible.

**IMPORTANT: Continue to Attend DCU**
If possible, continue to attend all lectures, tutorials, lab work, and group meetings until you make your final decision. You may decide that your programme is right for you at a later stage and therefore should not miss out on any of your lectures and have to try to catch up later.

**a) Seek Advice**
Talking to a member of staff can help clarify the issues you face. Within DCU, there are a number of people with whom you can talk. These include:

**Academic Issues**
- Chairperson: Will give you advice on how the programme progresses from 1st to final year and will be able to discuss this with you in detail. Alternatively, you can speak to individual module lecturers, if you are concerned about specific modules.
- Personal Tutor / Year Co-ordinators / Year Heads: Meet with your Personal Tutor, Year Co-ordinator or Year Head to discuss your situation. They may be able to help you if your issue is not purely academic.
- Careers Service: Meet with a Careers Adviser to discuss your options and career plans.
- Student Advice Centre: Drop in and meet with a member of staff and meet them in confidence. Areas of assistance dealt with include financial, personal and academic issues. They can offer advice and guidance or point you in the right direction to the appropriate person, if you are unsure who to speak to.
- Disability & Learning Support Service: Offers a range of services and supports for all students with a disability, specific learning difficulty or long-term medical condition.
- International Office: Offers support to international students.
- Students: Talk to more senior students ahead of you. They’ll be able to chat about how the programme progresses and maybe even offer some hints & tips.

**b) Explore Career Options**
Another way to gather information is to think about where your studies fit in with your career ideas. If you are unsure about options with your programme, read the online prospectus and research the careers that may interest you. The following resources will help you.

- [www.dcu.ie/prospective/degrees.php](http://www.dcu.ie/prospective/degrees.php) - DCU online prospectus
- [www.dcu.ie/careers](http://www.dcu.ie/careers) - go to Online Resources and click Destinations® (an a-z career planning resource)
- [www.gradireland.com](http://www.gradireland.com) – go to ‘Career Sectors’
- [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) – explore Types of Jobs (go to Jobs & Work Experience and then to Types of Jobs)
- [www.careersportal.ie](http://www.careersportal.ie) – explore Occupations (go to Career Information for Third Level Students, then to Career Exploration and click on Occupations)
- [www.careerdirections.ie](http://www.careerdirections.ie) – go to the A-Z Career List

**Take Some Self Assessment Tests**
Self assessment tests do not tell you what you should be. They increase awareness about yourself – how your interests, skills and values relate to your career / vocational ideas.
Gradireland Careers Report
The gradireland careers report generates a list of careers that match your skills, motivations, personality and preferences.

- Go to [www.dcu.ie/careers](http://www.dcu.ie/careers)
- On the Careers Service homepage, click ‘Need some career direction – Gradireland Careers report’.
- Register with gradireland.com first and set-up your Profile and Settings.
- Then go to the tab called Gradireland Careers Report.
- Do Step 1 by completing the Biographical Data and Interests and Preferences.
- Step 2 is optional.

Prospects Planner
What jobs would suit me?
Prospects Planner is a job exploration tool which aims to help you identify your skills, motivations and interests and then to match yourself to relevant job types.

- Go to [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)
- Click on Jobs & Work
- What Jobs would suit me
- Join My Prospects (free to join)
- Access the Test

Take the Skills Profile test and the Interests and Motivations Profile test. Before you take these tests, read the instructions. Go to the navigation pane on the left hand side to ‘How to use Planner’. Copy your results into a Word document.

Interest Questionnaire on Qualifax

- Go to [www.qualifax.ie](http://www.qualifax.ie)
- Click on Students
- Useful Tools
- Interest Assessment

All of these tests will help you clarify where your interests are and will feed into the next steps you need to take in your academic career.

Top Tip

It can be helpful to do the self assessment tests before meeting with a Careers Adviser.
You have a number of options to consider:

a) Continue with your Programme
b) Change Programme: Transfer internally to another course within DCU
c) Choose a Different Programme in another University
d) Take Time Out (Deferral of Year)
e) Withdraw from the University.

a) Continue With Your Programme

There may be good reasons for continuing with your programme:

- There are elements you enjoy. If you are a First Year student, there may be modules that you have to take, even if you think they bear no relationship to your programme. There may also be modules that you find too difficult or too easy. Look at the Academic Structures for your programme in order to see how it progresses through the years: www.dcu.ie/registry/module_programme.shtml

- Perhaps you can specialise in a particular area later, allowing you to tailor the course to your interests.

- If you are nearly through your programme, it may be better to complete it. Many jobs/careers are open to graduates irrespective of the degree area (within reason!). Employers are interested in your skill set. Core skills which employers seek include written and oral communication, team work, and research skills combined with the intellectual knowledge derived from your course. You'll still need to do as well as possible on your programme, as employers will look at your overall grade.

- You may also think about undertaking a conversion course at postgraduate level after your programme of study. A conversion course is a taught postgraduate programme that allows graduates to ‘convert’ to a new discipline, for example Business, Law, IT etc.

b) Change Programme

Transfer internally to another programme within DCU

You may want to stay in DCU. It may be possible to transfer internally to another programme within the University.

Questions to ask yourself include:

- Do you know what you want to study?
- Do you know about the programme content and specialisms?
- Is there a work placement on the programme?
- What are the career opportunities with the programme?
- Are there any fee implications?

Things to do include:

- Be sure to research the programme thoroughly
- Research the modules and specialisms
- Meet with the Programme Chairperson, Careers Advisers and/or the Student Advice Centre
- Sit in on some lectures (ask lecturers’ permission) and talk to students on the programme

Procedure:

- There are criteria, procedures and cut-off dates for transferring internally. Be sure to read the documentation. There may also be fee implications.
- If you are a student wishing to transfer into 1st Year of another programme in DCU, you must complete the R39 Form at: www.dcu.ie/registry/forms/pdfs/R39.pdf
- If you are a student wishing to transfer to a year other than Year 1, you must complete the R10 form at: www.dcu.ie/registry/forms/pdfs/R10.pdf
- For information about fee implications, go to: www.dcu.ie/finance/fees/index.shtml

As well as an internal transfer, it may be possible to apply via the CAO for another course in DCU. As students enter DCU via different pathways, for example, CAO or direct entry, you need to clarify what the application process would be for you in this case. Check with the Registry to clarify the correct pathway.
Step Three Research your Options

c) Choose a Different Programme in Another University or IT

You may decide that you want to study at another institution.

Questions to ask Yourself

• What type of programme am I interested in?
• Where do I want to study?
• What are the career opportunities with the programme?
• Are there any fee implications?
• Is there travel involved or do I need to get accommodation?

Things to do include:

• Contact the relevant university to enquire about their application procedure and allow plenty of time to make your application
• Attend Open Days and visit the campus
• Research the programme in as much detail as possible
• Be sure to seek advice about fee implications and grants before changing.

d) Take Time Out (Deferral of Year)

You may not want to leave or change your programme but decide to take some time out. Should you wish to defer the year, you must complete the ‘Application for Deferral of Academic Year Form’, available at: www.dcu.ie/registry/forms/pdfs/r32.pdf, and ask the Chairperson to sign it.

It costs to defer an academic year - contact the Finance Office to enquire about the fee.

It is advisable to speak to your Chairperson, Personal Tutor or a member of the Student Advice Centre ‘in person’ if this option is being taken.

Please note that you cannot defer a full semester, although it may be possible to defer single semester examinations. Please consult with the Registry for the relevant form.

International students should make contact with the International Office before making a final decision on deferring a year, as this has implications for your immigration status. In all cases, you will require the International Office to sign off on your deferral. This also applies to the deferral of assessments / examinations.

Using Your Time Effectively - If you defer the year, it’s best to have a plan of action. Consider what you will do. For example, develop your skills and experiences by getting some part-time work or undertaking voluntary work. Go to www.dcu.ie/careers for more information on CV preparation and networking.
Step Three  Research your Options

e) Withdraw From The University

In some cases, for various reasons, some students do not complete their programme. You may be feeling disappointed, angry, upset or lacking in confidence. However, as a result of your time in DCU, you have gained academic experience and developed skills. This is a positive aspect that you can take with you.

Questions to ask Yourself
- Am I withdrawing for the right reasons?
- Do I know the fee implications?
- Have I a plan of action? Before you withdraw, know what you are going to do and research any application procedures and deadline dates.

Things to do include:
- Before making a decision to withdraw, speak to a member of staff to discuss your options. You could, for example, speak to a Student Adviser in the Student Advice Centre or a Careers Adviser. You may need advice and guidance on what to do next or the impact that withdrawing will have on your fees in the future, should you wish to return to university.
- If in accommodation, check if you owe any money or if you need to pay any bills.
- Meet with your current Programme Chairperson to let them know you are withdrawing.

Withdrawal Process
- In order to withdraw, you need to complete the R27 form at: www.dcu.ie/registry/forms/pdfs/R27.pdf.
  For information about the implication on your fees in the future, go to: www.dcu.ie/finance/fees/withdrawals.shtml.
- International students should make contact with the International Office should you wish to officially withdraw from the University, as this impacts on your immigration rights and status.

Step Four  Take Action

Having articulated your reasons for feeling uncertain with your programme, researched your options in detail and sought advice, you are now in a position to make an informed choice about your next steps.

Things to Do
- Draft a plan of action - what do you need to do over the next few weeks?
- Do you need to complete any forms?
- Do you need to meet with any members of staff?
- Have you checked out grant/fee implications?
- Make sure not to miss any important cut-off dates.

Over to You

Write down the actions you are going to take as a result of reading this booklet:

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 

Conclusion

Thinking about changing or leaving your programme requires careful consideration. This guide sets out some of the main considerations and options you should take into account. Clarity of thought is essential and it is strongly advised to talk to a member of staff within DCU, including the units within Student Support & Development. There may well be options you have not yet considered / are not aware of, so please do not make any hasty decisions.
Useful Contacts / Web Sites

**Student Advice Centre**
Ground Floor
Henry Grattan Building (opposite the student restaurant)
T: 7007165
E: student.support@dcu.ie
www.dcu.ie/students/advice/index.shtml

**Careers Service**
CG28
Henry Grattan Building
T: 7005163
E: careers@dcu.ie
www.dcu.ie/careers

Or consult other services mentioned at:
www.dcu.ie/students/index.shtml

**Reference**
Dewar, Colin. 2007. AGCAS Guide: Changing or Leaving Your Course.

The information given in this booklet is intended as a guide. The DCU Careers Service, Student Support & Development and DCU are not responsible and shall not be bound by any errors in or omissions from this publication.