UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 19Aii: JOURNALISM (UNDERGRADUATE)

11 May 2018

PANEL:                    Professor A McKillop, Associate Dean (Education), Faculty of Life and Health Sciences, Ulster University (Chair)
Dr K Hutchinson, Provost (Coleraine), Ulster University
Mr O Kinsella, Vice-President, Ulster University Students' Union, Jordanstown campus, Ulster University
Ms E Hannaford, Lecturer in Multimedia Journalism, Department of Languages, Information and Communications, Manchester Metropolitan University
Dr P Hoey, Senior Lecturer in Media and Politics, Department of Media, Edge Hill University

IN ATTENDANCE:      Mrs A Garland, Academic Policy and Standards Officer, Academic Office, Ulster University

1    INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider the revalidation of:

Undergraduate Honours Subject: Journalism (Major) (FT/PT) (with optional DIAS (FT only) and Certificate of Higher Education and Associate Bachelor's Degree exit awards) (Coleraine campus)

and the proposal to offer:

BA Hons Journalism (Single Honours Subject) (FT/PT) (with optional DIAS (FT only) and Certificate of Higher Education and Associate Bachelor's Degree exit awards) (Coleraine campus).

The Panel initially met with the Associate Dean (Education) for the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (Professor R Fee), the Acting Head of School of Communication and Media (Dr C Rhys) and the Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator (Mr M Rowntree).  The provision was then discussed in more detail with the Course Team.

2    DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation in advance of the meeting:

(i)     course submission;
(ii)    the University's Guidelines for Revalidation Panels;
(iii)   the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies (October 2016);
(iv)   external examiner reports for the last two years;
(v)    preliminary comments from Panel members;
(vi)   Academic Office notes on regulatory and standards matters.

3    BACKGROUND

Journalism has been offered as a Major Subject Strand since 2005.  The subject is taught exclusively by staff in the School of Communication and Media and offers an academic and practical grounding in the study of print, contemporary online and broadcast journalism.  Students study the history, sociology and economics of journalism while, at the same time, acquiring the skills that underpin professional practices such as news gathering, reporting, writing and sub-editing.  The provision also enables students to acquire foundational skills in broadcast journalism, such as radio and television.  Students can choose to study Journalism as a Major Subject in combination with Education, English or History, all of which are offered at the Coleraine campus.

The expansion to a Single Honours degree is being proposed in response to feedback from current students and in light of developments within the broader Media provision.  Both the Major and Single Honours provision place a strong emphasis on work-based learning and employability and a short professional placement is compulsory for all students.

The key difference between the Single Honours and the Major programmes is the provision of extensive broadcast journalism (audio and visual) coverage across all three years on the Single Honours programme.


MEETING WITH SENIOR STAFF

4    FACULTY STRATEGY

The Panel began by asking the Senior Staff to explain how the provision fitted within the Faculty's overall strategic vision.  The Senior Staff advised that the Faculty's key priorities included the areas of global engagement, research, Media and education related to graduate employment.  The Faculty's vision to increase the number of international students focused on the growth of Master's Level and part-time provision but Journalism was considered an area of growth in terms of attracting international students.  The Senior Staff explained that Journalism was an area of strength within the Faculty with regard to research and that the compulsory placement within the Journalism provision was an example of Faculty best practice.

4.1    SINGLE HONOURS JOURNALISM

The Panel was advised that there had been demand from students for the provision of a Single Honours Journalism degree and that this had also been recommended by the Panel at the previous revalidation event.  The Senior Staff were of the view that the development of the Single Honours Journalism degree was important to the strategic development of the subject and the integration of Journalism within Media.  The School had strong links with the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) and was keen to develop the Journalism provision.

The Panel was informed that, in the past, Journalism as a Major Strand had been offered with many different Minor combinations across faculties but that all the combinations would now be within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.  Journalism with English was the most popular combination.  The Panel was informed that, in order to

produce graduates with skills required by employers, the provision was moving more towards mobile journalism, within the broader framework of understanding Journalism's place within society.

## 4.2 UNIQUE SELLING POINT

The Panel enquired what the Team deemed to be the Unique Selling Point of the provision and was advised that this was undoubtedly its post-conflict focus, which derived from the research interests of staff. The teaching staff had extensive contacts in the BBC and different newspapers and the programme incorporated talks from journalists whose background was in the era of the Troubles. Against this backdrop, the provision aimed to inculcate academic thought and an understanding of the complexities of the background of journalism in Northern Ireland. The programme not only covered conflict in Northern Ireland, but across the world.

The Panel was also advised that the Single Honours programme had been designed to focus more on broadcast journalism (audio and visual) and to produce graduates with a solid grounding in basic journalism skills. The content of the provision had been informed by the NCTJ and practitioners.

The Panel was of the view that the investigative and post-conflict aspects of the provision needed to be made more explicit within the course document.

## 4.3 RECRUITMENT

The Panel queried why the course document did not include any projected intakes to the part-time mode having been marketed, there had been no applicants for this mode of study to date. The Panel was of the view that intake to the part-time mode would encourage diversity among the cohort.

The Senior Staff explained that it was hoped that the development of the Single Honours programme would create progression opportunities for students at Further Education Colleges, where they would spend two years at the college completing a Foundation Degree and then enter Year 2 of the Journalism Honours degree. The Panel was informed that although North West Regional College offered a Journalism course students had previously been unable to progress to Year 2 of the University's Journalism Major programme as they did not meet the required entry criteria for the Minor subject.

## 4.4 MAXIMUM AND MINIMUM COHORT SIZES

It was noted that, at its meeting on 14 March 2018, the University's Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee had agreed that in future Evaluation and Revalidation Panels should consider minimum and maximum cohort sizes for programmes and that these recommendations should be based on the minimum number of students required to ensure course viability and a quality student experience, with the maximum cohort size based on the physical and human resources available to deliver the provision.

The following maximum and minimum cohort sizes were therefore deemed appropriate for the Journalism provision:

<u>Journalism Major</u>

Full-time: maximum cohort of 25 students and minimum cohort of 15 students;
Part-time: maximum cohort of 5 students.

<u>Single Honours Journalism</u>

Full-time: maximum cohort of 40 students and minimum cohort of 15 students;
Part-time: maximum cohort of 5 students.

## 5 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with a group of four students comprising one first year (studying Journalism with Education), two second years (studying Journalism with Education and Journalism with English) and one third year (studying Journalism with Computing).

## 5.1 STUDENT EXPERIENCE

In response to a question from the Panel regarding their experience of the programme to date, the students stated that they had enjoyed the programme and had found the teaching staff to be very approachable and helpful. The final year student informed the Panel that his dissertation supervisor had been very supportive.

Among the reasons given by the students for choosing to study Journalism at Ulster University were that it was the only university in Northern Ireland that offered the subject and that the course provided good opportunities and the skills required for a career in Journalism. The first year student, who was an international student, stated that the fees, which were lower than for English universities, had been a major factor in her choice of university. The students agreed that it was a very exciting course.

The Panel asked the third year student to what extent his study of Computing as his Minor subject had helped with aspects of the Journalism programme. The student stated that there was a heavy workload but that he found this combination of subjects useful.

## 5.2 ASSESSMENT

The Panel enquired if students felt that they fully understood the different expectations at each level of study and what criteria they were required to meet in order to achieve a first class Honours degree, an upper Second class and a lower Second class Honours degree. The students stated that they were aware of what was required in terms of percentage mark for each class of Honours degree and that they were given information on the criteria they had to meet and goals they were required to achieve for each grade band.

The students were of the view that assignment deadlines were well spaced out throughout the semester. The students advised that there was not much group work and that they preferred individual assignments. The final year student reported that he had been required to undertake a 15-minute radio package in a group, which had been a positive experience as the group had been well organised. The student confirmed that the group work had been assessed in terms of the individual's contribution and that the tutor monitored each student's contribution.

5.3 FEEDBACK

When asked about feedback on assignments, one student stated that she had submitted a written piece of work before the Easter break but to date had not received any feedback. Another student however stated that, for the majority of assignments, quality feedback had been promptly received.  The students reported that in the *News and Journalism* module (MED305) they had not received feedback on the first piece of work before submitting the next assignment.  In response to a question from the Panel, the students advised that they received formative feedback and were able to gauge how they were performing in a module.

5.4 CONTENT

The Panel sought the views of the students on how useful the theory modules were.  The students stated that theory was incorporated each semester and that they appreciated the importance of such modules and how they related to practice.

5.5 COHORT IDENTITY

The Panel enquired what opportunities existed to foster cohort identity.  The students explained that, as part of a second year module, they worked together in teams in workshops to produce editions of the 'Ulster Buzz'.  This provided a good sense of camaraderie.  The 'Ulster Buzz' was published on Issuu for a public audience and a few hard copies were printed.

5.6 STUDENT SUPPORT

The Panel enquired what support students received to go outside the University to interview members of the public or politicians.  The students stated that they could either interview people in the University or go into the town to carry out interviews.  If they wished to interview a local politician, the onus was on them to organise this.  The Panel was informed that the majority of students carried out interviews using email.  One student stated that for the 'vox pop' exercise she had attended the switching on of the Christmas tree lights in the town and had interviewed people in the crowd.

5.7 RESOURCES

The Panel sought the students' views on the resources available to support the provision. The students were of the view that the Library was excellent in terms of books and that staff were very helpful and supportive.  With regard to equipment, the students advised that they were only allowed to use the radio studios in final year.  They were able to use audio and camera equipment in first and second year but the collection times were restricted to either early or late in the day.  The students stated that they mainly used audio recorders or their mobile 'phones.  They also had the opportunity to use a range of editing software, such as Adobe Premiere.

5.8 SUGGESTED CHANGES TO THE PROVISION

In response to a question from the Panel regarding what, if anything, the students would like to change about the programme, one student stated that a more practical approach in second year would be welcome.  The Panel suggested that more practical methods of assessing the theory modules, rather than essays, might be a possible solution.

The Chair thanked the students for taking the time to meet with the Panel and wished them well in their studies and future careers.


MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

6      CURRICULUM DESIGN

The Panel asked the Team to outline how the University's new Curriculum Design Principles had been integrated into the provision.  The Team explained that the starting point had been the QAA subject benchmark statement for Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies.  Four learning outcomes had been selected for each module and the Team had used the online Employability Development Opportunities Review Tool (EDORT) to review and develop the provision.  The Team had also engaged extensively with stakeholders and large and small industries.

The Panel enquired if the proposed change in degree algorithm (to include Level 5) had been incorporated into the assessment plan.  The Team confirmed that this had been considered but, as it was not yet known what the algorithm would be, it would be discussed further in future.

7      CONTENT

7.1    Content Updates

The Panel enquired how the Team ensured that the latest developments were incorporated into the provision.  The Team stated that engagement with the EDORT process and extensive contacts in the journalism industry, who were invited to give guest lectures, ensured that the content of the provision was kept up-to-date.  Staff planned to visit major and minor journalism outlets over the summer months as well as the new ITV premises.  The Panel was informed that a number of staff members were practice-active rather than research-active, which ensured that current practices in industry were reflected in the course content.

7.2    Optionality within the Programme

In response to a question from the Panel, the Team confirmed that all of the modules on the Single Honours and Major programmes were compulsory but that the project and dissertation modules provided opportunities for students to specialise in areas of interest.  The Team explained that it was necessary to include certain compulsory modules in order for students to acquire the required skills and that it was not therefore possible to include a wide range of other modules.  The Panel suggested incorporating different pathways within the Single Honours programme and the Team confirmed that this was the intention in the future.  There were also plans to develop modules that could be offered as options across all of the programmes taught within the School.

7.3    Research Methods

Some members of the Panel expressed concern that the *Research Methods* module was not taken until Year 3 and queried if it might be better taken in semester 2 of Year 2.  The Team advised that modules MED333 and MED324 also covered aspects of research

methods and introduced students to literature and potential research methodology. The Team explained that until Year 3 students might not have covered sufficient curriculum to know what research questions they wished to address in their dissertations and that a scaffolding approach was taken in terms of research skills prior to final year. The *Research Methods* helped to focus students' minds on their dissertations. Other members of the Panel concurred with the Team that Year 3 was the best time for students to take this module. The Team advised that the current *Research Methods* module was taught across all of the programmes in the School but that the new module would be more subject-specific.

7.4    Data Scraping and Data Modelling

The Panel queried where scraping data, which was an important aspect of modern investigative journalism, had been incorporated within the content of the course. The Team advised that data scraping and data modelling was covered in the Interactive Media Studies course and that more staff with relevant expertise would be required to incorporate these aspects into the Journalism provision. The Panel was of the view that existing staff expertise should be utilised to incorporate data journalism into the investigative journalism modules where possible.

7.5    Radio and Broadcasting

The Panel noted the absence of media terms such as 'radio' and 'broadcasting' in the course document and queried if this was deliberate and, if so, what the rationale for this was. The Team confirmed that the use of these terms had been omitted deliberately as the aim was to provide a multi-platform education for students. The Team explained that the fundamental journalistic skills remained the same but that the aim of the programme was to produce students who were versatile in the face of changing technologies. The term 'audio' had been deliberately used instead of 'radio' as the Team did not wish the course to focus on one platform of distribution.

7.6    Multi-Platform

The Panel noted the inclusion of modules *Introduction to Multi-platform Journalism* (MED126) and *Advanced Multi-platform Journalism* (MED322) and asked the Team to explain how these modules were multi-platform. The Panel outlined the different platforms covered within these modules. The Panel supported the use of 'multi-platform' in the module titles but stated that the different platforms needed to be defined in the course document.

In response to a question from the Panel, the Team confirmed that online journalism skills and the use of industry specific platforms, such as WordPress, were incorporated within the programme.

7.7    Publishing Opportunities

The Team advised that, as part of a module taken in Year 2, students worked alongside the Students' Union to create a newspaper called 'Ulster Buzz' using Issuu. Students were given a brief and had to source and write stories and produce the newspaper to appear on the Students' Union social media platforms. A number of copies of the newspaper were also printed for the Students' Union. Students received audience feedback on the stories and issues included in the 'Ulster Buzz'. The Students' Union

representative on the Panel advised that the Students' Union could provide a small amount of funding if a student wished to develop this further. The Team stated that it worked closely with the Students' Union and that the development of mobile live feed across the University's campuses was being explored. In addition to the 'Ulster Buzz', the School also had an outward facing site called 'Ulster Craic'.

7.8   Interviews

Further to the discussion with the students, the Panel enquired if it would be possible to complete the course without going off-campus to carry out interviews. The Team advised that one of the modules required students to interview a politician and that the expectation was that as students progressed through the course they would carry out off-campus interviews.

8   BLENDED LEARNING

The Panel noted that a number of modules were described as using blended learning and enquired of the Team if this meant that learning was delivered online or if the VLE was simply used as a repository for lecture notes and other module information. The Team advised that the term "blended" was used differently across the modules with Blackboard being used as a repository for information and notes in module MED102 but for more active learning in a number of other modules.

9   WORK BASED LEARNING

The Panel asked the Team to expand upon the work-based learning element of the provision. The Team explained that Journalism students had always been encouraged to engage in work-based learning and had the opportunity to undertake a 70-hour placement in addition to the programme's modules. For this revalidation, however, the work-based learning had been formalised within the *Placement and Professional Contexts* module taken by students in semester 2 of Year 2. This module enabled students to contextualise their industry placement as a learning opportunity, requiring them to undertake 70 hours of work-based learning and write a reflective piece about their learning experience in the placement.

The Panel enquired what the placement involved and was informed that students would undertake 70 hours of work-based learning in the media and creative industries, for example one day per week in a radio station. Non-traditional work placements with independent journalists were also being explored as an option. In addition to the formal work placement, students also worked during the holidays with, for example, their local newspapers. The Panel enquired if the Team had considered placements in the community sector, such as community radio stations. The Team advised that a licence had been granted for a community radio station on the North Coast, although its location had not yet been decided, and students would have the opportunity to work there. Students were also able to obtain briefs to work on from the Science Shop.

10   LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Panel was of the view that there was a lack of consistency at module level in the way in which the learning outcomes were articulated and expressed concern at the vagueness of the verbs employed, such as "show understanding of" and "demonstrate", which made it difficult to ascertain how a student's achievement of the learning outcomes would be

assessed. The Panel highlighted modules MED106, MED125, MED 324, MED528 and MED539, in particular, and stated that the learning outcomes should be revised to be expressed in more functional terms stating exactly what was expected of a student.

The Panel further noted that the number of learning outcomes listed for some of the modules needed to be reduced, in particular modules MED302 and MED320 which had 11 learning outcomes, modules MED305 and MED319 which had 12 learning outcomes and module MED513 which listed 18 learning outcomes. The Team undertook to review the module learning outcomes.

11    CLASSIFICATION BAND REQUIREMENTS

Concern was expressed by members of the Panel that the number of learning outcomes might be confusing for students in terms of understanding the different requirements for each level of the programme. The Team advised that students received a rubric for assessment in each module. A standardised rubric, which clearly indicated what was expected for each degree classification band, was employed across all of the modules. The Team stated that there was good practice in the School in terms of ensuring students knew what was expected for each grade band and explained how Blackboard was used to show students samples of work graded at each band. In the *Research Methods* module students were given the marking schedule, which clearly stated what specific skills they needed to demonstrate in order to obtain a good mark, in advance of submitting assignments.

12    GROUP WORK

The Panel noted that some of the module learning outcomes referred to collaborative work (MED125 and MED528) but that it was not clear how this was captured in assessments. The Team stated that group work was an important aspect of the programme and that in most cases the assessment was based on the individual's input to the group work. The group work was therefore the taking of individual work and putting it together to produce a product. Students were assigned to different groups for each assignment and were given different roles. The Panel enquired if the final product was assessed as a piece of group work as the "group" aspect did not appear to be captured in the description of the assessment. The Team stated that the News Days were assessed by looking at the digital trail of the individual's contribution and observing a student's contribution during the exercise. The Panel was of the view that the mark awarded for group work should not only reflect the individual's effort and achievement, but also the contribution to the group work process.

13    ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF COURSEWORK

In response to a question from the Panel, the Team confirmed that cognisance had been taken of the University's Electronic Management of Assessment and Feedback policy and that electronic submission of assignments and electronic feedback were used in a number of modules where appropriate. There was, however, no uniform approach taken across the School.

14    RESOURCES

The Panel reported that students had stated that they could only access some of the facilities in final year. The Team confirmed that this situation arose because there was

currently only one technical officer in the School. There were plans, however, to increase the technical provision and the Team advised that in future students would have more access to the facilities. The Panel was informed that students had access to state-of-the-art news rooms 24 hours seven days a week but that access to the radio and television studio was restricted due to health and safety requirements, as well as scheduling issues. The Panel was of the view that the unique facilities available to support the provision should be made much more explicit in the course document.

15    CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the following aspects of the provision:

(i)     the commitment of staff to their continuing professional development and engagement with technologies; their valuable engagement and networking with industry; and links and developmental opportunities that exist with creative industries;

(ii)    the continued emphasis on innovation, creativity and employability and the range of activities aimed at ensuring the readiness of students for the workplace;

(iii)   the range of opportunities that are offered to students to showcase their professional skills through external facing activities which build on knowledge as well as the students' sense of belonging and cohort identity;

(iv)    the integration of learning and teaching and research expertise of staff in the curriculum and individual modules;

(v)     the ongoing commitment to the excellent, industry-standard, facilities that reflect the work based learning environment.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the Undergraduate Honours Subject: Journalism (Major) be re-approved for a period of five years (intakes 2018 – 2022) and that the BA Hons Journalism be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2018 – 2022), subject to the conditions and recommendation of the Panel being addressed, and a satisfactory response and revised submission being forwarded to the Academic Office by 22 June 2018 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

(i)     that the course team work with CHERP to review the  learning outcomes of the programme and modules to capture the learning activities and level of achievement expected at each level and that the learning outcomes in some of the modules, where there are more than four learning outcomes, be reduced in line with the Curriculum Design Principles;

(ii)    that all of the points raised by the Academic Office in the Appendix be addressed.

Recommendations

(i)     that the overall vision of the programme be clearly outlined in the course document in order to demonstrate the distinctiveness of the provision;

(ii)    that the balance of theoretical and practical elements within the provision be reviewed and clearly articulated, for example, through the reframing of some assessment using non-traditional methods such as podcasts or other digital approaches, in order to address student expectations;

(iii)   that how industry-specific platforms and media are integrated be made more explicit in the course document in order to make clear which platform is used (for example, WordPress, coding and / or podcasts) and how it is integrated into the learning;

(iv)   that the opportunities and potential that exist for outward facing activities be further exploited by incorporating, where possible, such activities into assessment;

(v)   that the way in which group work maps to assessment and module learning outcomes be clarified in the module descriptions, ensuring transparency and fairness, and that the mark awarded reflects not only the individual's effort and achievement, but also the contribution to the group work process;

(vi)   that existing staff expertise be utilised to incorporate data journalism within the investigative journalism modules where possible.

## 16   APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked the members of the Panel for their valuable contribution to the revalidation exercise and also thanked the Team members for their engagement with the Panel.  The Panel and the Team were also thanked by the Associate Dean (Education). The Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator wished to record special thanks to Mrs Sally Quinn, who had now retired, for her work and dedication in the preparation of the course document.