

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

Paper No ASQEC/19/15d

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

17 June 2019

Agenda Item 6.3

EXTENSION OF APPROVAL

Faculty of Life and Health Sciences

FdSc in Horticulture (CAFRE)

COVER SHEET

*Presenter: Professor A McKillop*

Action is required of the Committee as indicated below.

To consider a request from the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences for a one-year extension of approval.

**SECTION A: FACULTY REQUEST**

FACULTY: Life and Health Sciences

SCHOOL:

SUBJECT UNIT NUMBER AND NAME: 12D Horticulture [CAFRE]

MONTH/YEAR CURRENTLY SCHEDULED: January 2020

PERIOD OF EXTENSION REQUESTED: Maximum of one year to include the September 2020 Semester 1 intake

COURSE(S): Foundation Degree in Horticulture FT 3950; Foundation Degree in Horticulture PT 5744

**REASON FOR REQUEST:**

The reasons for requesting a brief extension of course approval and postponement of revalidation for this course is essentially two-fold.

As noted in a previously withdrawn CA2 [September 2014], it has long been a CAFRE aim to bring forward a proposal for Level 6 education provision in Horticulture in addition to the FdSc programme currently running. As noted in 2014, unexpected budgetary uncertainty placed a block on our plans at that time. Since then, the situation has now improved such that we wish to advance a CA2 to seek approval to develop a Level 6 programme. Should we be approved for this, we would seek to have a joint revalidation / evaluation event. The postponement of the revalidation event for a short period would greatly assist CAFRE to submit a properly considered CA2. Additionally, the current uncertainty surrounding Brexit means that a modest extension of time will allow CAFRE to ensure that not only a revalidated FdSc, but also any approval to advance Level 6 education, will be as current as it can possibly be. CAFRE, as an arm of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs [DAERA], is acutely aware of its responsibility to offer education that supports the maintenance and development of a thriving and sustainable rural economy and wider community. The current DAERA Business Plan has 4 main strategic outcomes, the first 3 of which are directly addressed by the educational offering we provide. These strategic outcomes seek to support:

1. Sustainable, Agri Food, Fisheries, Forestry and Industrial Sectors
2. A clean, healthy environment, benefiting people, nature and the economy, and
3. A thriving rural economy, contributing to prosperity and wellbeing.

As such, these outcomes also finds an echo with the Ulster 5 & 50 objectives. Granting an extension to current provision, and the consideration of a CA2 [to follow] would greatly assist us to improve even further the currency and future-proofing of the educational provision we offer and wish to see in place.

The Horticulture Branch within CAFRE has had a major upheaval in staffing with the loss of Claire Woods, previous Course Director, in February 2019. Claire has been programme Director for the Foundation Degree since it started. A new Senior Lecturer Grade II Officer to act as Foundation Degree Course Director was appointed on 7/04/19. This individual will need some time to become familiar with all aspects of the new role of CD for HE delivery. This process has already begun through internal CAFRE process and with an initial meeting between the CD, the Ulster FPM and the CAFRE Head of Horticulture.

## **CURRENCY AND VALIDITY:**

(Please confirm that the curriculum remains current and valid and provide evidence of this (eg extract from most recent external examiner reports and those of relevant professional, statutory and regulatory body)

We are very confident that the curriculum remains current and valid. In support of this, the last and very positive EE report was received in 2018.

It stated:

“The programme meets the requirements of the subject benchmark statement for horticulture and provides students with a range of knowledge and skills necessary for progression to management of horticultural enterprises. Through their studies students develop an understanding of underpinning scientific, business and economic principles as well as evaluating the wider consequences of horticultural activities. The qualification develops subject and practical knowledge and understanding as well as cognitive, IT and communication skills appropriate at level 5 and is reflective of the National Qualification Framework.

The programme content and delivery reflect the programme specification and support delivery of subject specific research and scholarly activity appropriate for the level.”

It further states:

“There is a coherent programme structure enabling students to develop skills and knowledge across a range of horticulture disciplines. Modules at level 4 provide a good foundation for further development of knowledge at level 5. Content is appropriate for subject and level and provides a strong basis for progression into employment through the inclusion of work experience requirements and realistic project work and assignments. Emphasis on action learning approach to develop transferable and subject specific skills and knowledge is good”

There are no statutory regulatory or professional bodies linked to the programme at present.

## **STANDARDS AND QUALITY:**

(Please confirm that quality is high and there are no concerns. Provide evidence of this through external examiner reports and annual monitoring datasets and reports)

We were pleased to note the EE observed appropriate assessment methods and fair marking standards and identified that the programme prepares students particularly well for progression to employment. The EE highlighted the high level of student support offered by staff and the flexibility afforded to part time students to allow them to balance work life demands. The issues highlighted can be fully addressed under the existing programme.

They were;

### **1. Inclusion of development of digital technology skills in delivery.**

Staff have now been issued with iPads and will actively seek out opportunities to utilise social and digital media in other modules. The team will work at embedding this technology into their teaching and learning practice. The EE also noted that students seemed less aware of digital technologies that we could help support their skills development. The course team we will endeavour to include digital technology in all modules if appropriate.

### **2. Review marking /assessment rubrics for consistency across modules.**

The marking and assessment rubrics will be reviewed for consistency.

### **3. Review assessment schedules to provide a balance across the academic year.**

The assessment schedule will be reviewed for level 5 to try and balance the assessment across the year and avoid bunching around the time of the study tour.

#### 4. Reinforce development of academic writing skills, particularly at level 5.

The course team are aware of the need to continually reinforce good academic writing skills. Level 5 modules will be reviewed prior to the next academic year and opportunities to increase the critical evaluation required and the use of academic sources will be identified.

#### PSRB (if applicable):

Not applicable.

#### DEMAND:

Early indications lead one to conclude that recruitment in 2019 will be broadly in line with recent intakes. It is anticipated that the validation of an Honours degree top-up will help reinvigorate recruitment.

Year	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Year 1FT	13	10	8	7	11
Year 2 FT	7	9	10	7	5
New PT	17	18	14	20	19
Existing PT	30	29	31	28	29
Totals	67	66	63	62	64

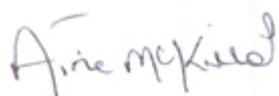
#### FACULTY PARTNERSHIP MANAGER'S ASSESSMENT (for partner institutions only):

I have had a number of in-depth discussions with Paul Mooney, Head of Horticulture at CAFRE as well as with the then acting Course Director regarding the interlinked issues of staff challenges, the recent departure of the previous Course Director, and revalidation as well their plans to seek approval for the provision of a Level 6 offering. It is very encouraging to note that the CAFRE Horticulture team are very focussed not only on the needs of their current students but also on their understanding of the need for an augmented educational offering. It is also good to note that positive action has been taken to recruit new members of highly qualified staff to the broad education and support team.

Although not formally considered as part of this request for extension to current provision and postponement of revalidation, I would broadly support the request as outlined above. This would not only allow consolidation of the current team but would also assist CAFRE to ensure that their current FdSc is even more properly aligned to the realities of a post-Brexit economy as well as allowing the advancement of a CA2 for consideration by the university, now that the time is right within the organisation to do so. Since starting to work with CAFRE Horticulture I have been very aware of their understanding of the existing need within a significant sector of the FdSc graduate community of an option to pursue L6 education. Granting an extension would certainly assist the organisation to advance their plans for consideration.

I am very content that should an extension of current provision be approved, the student experience will not be adversely affected and students will continue to enjoy a very positive and rewarding education experience at CAFRE.

**FACULTY CONFIRMATION:**



SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_  
Associate Dean (Education)

DATE: 20 May 2019 \_\_\_\_\_

The completed form should be returned to the Academic Office, Room J410, Tower Building, Coleraine.

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**SECTION B: ACADEMIC OFFICE COMMENTS:**

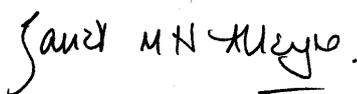
This course was first evaluated in 2004/5 and last revalidated in 2014/15 so was due revalidation in 2019/20. The FPM has reported that CAFRE will bring forward a CA2 in 2019/20 proposing that a level 6 course (incorporating the current provision) be evaluated in 2020/21. It would appear sensible, in operational terms, that the revalidation be delayed by granting an extension to the period of approval for the current course to 2020/21 so that either an evaluation or revalidation event can take place at that point. A review of the three most recent external examiner reports indicates the general satisfaction of the external and that there is no fundamental risk to quality and standards. The College has given an assurance that it will address those issues identified by the external examiner (see section on standards and quality above). The academic Office endorses the proposed extension to the period of approval.



SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: 21 May 2019 \_\_\_\_\_  
Academic Policy and Standards Manager

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**SECTION C: QUALITY ENHANCEMENT ASSESSMENT (reflecting annual monitoring data)**



SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: 22 May 2019 \_\_\_\_\_  
Head of Quality Enhancement

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**SECTION D: ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE  
(delegated authority from Senate)**

DATE OF COMMITTEE MEETING:

DECISION: Approve (Yes/No)

Late requests (in-year and no imminent Committee meeting) (actioned by Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) on behalf of ASQEC)

DECISION: Approve (Yes/No)

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_  
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE REPORTED TO ASQEC:

Academic Office  
July 2019