

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE EVALUATION PANEL FOR FdA INTERACTION DESIGN (FT/PT) AT SOUTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE (NEWRY CAMPUS)

4 June 2019

PANEL: Professor C Nugent, Head of School of Computing, Ulster University [Chair]
Professor K Fleming, Head of Belfast School of Art, Ulster University
Professor B Quinn, Professor of Retail Marketing, Department of Management, Leadership and Marketing, Ulster University
Mr D Watson, Creative/Subject Lead, Department of Creative Professions and Digital Arts, University of Greenwich
Mr J Pietsch, Lecturer, Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dublin
Mr M Johnston, Head of Software Engineering, Digital Circle
Miss A Hanna, HND Business Studies, Student Representative, Southern Regional College

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

APOLOGIES: Mr J Curran, Faculty Partnership Manager, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Ulster University
Ms L O'Boyle, Associate Head of Belfast School of Art, Ulster University

1 INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider a proposal from the School of Creative Design and Computing at Southern Regional College to offer FdA Interaction Design in full-time and part-time modes at the College's Newry campus from September 2019.

The proposed programme replaces the College's FdSc in Interactive Multimedia which was associated with the University's Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment.

The Panel initially met with the following senior staff: Chair of the Course Planning Committee, the Head of School, the Deputy Head of School and the Director of Curriculum. The proposal 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 Evaluation Panels;
- (iii) the Recognition Agreement to be signed between the University and the College;
- (iv) the QAA Statement for Foundation Degree Characteristics (2015);
- (v) the QAA Benchmark Statement for Art and Design (2017);

- (vi) a statement from the Faculty Partnership Manager (CA4);
- (vii) preliminary comments from Panel members (CA7);
- (viii) Academic Office notes on regulatory and standards matters.

3 MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM COHORT SIZES

The Panel noted the following proposed minimum and maximum cohort sizes:

<u>Mode of Attendance</u>	<u>Minimum Cohort Size</u>	<u>Maximum Cohort Size</u>
Full-time	15 students	22 students
Part-time	15 students	15 students

4 MEETING WITH SENIOR STAFF

4.1 OVERALL STRATEGY

The Panel began by asking the senior staff how the programme fitted within the College's overall strategy and was advised that the College worked with a number of Higher Education partners to offer Higher Education programmes. The College had delivered Higher Education programmes in Computing since 2001 and had a long-standing partnership arrangement with Ulster University. The senior staff advised that the proposed programme fitted well with the College's aim to promote STEM-related subjects. The FdA Interaction Design would provide a clear progression route for students recruited at Levels 2 / 3 to progress to Level 6. The senior staff explained how Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLAs) were continually being developed and that the Foundation Degree qualification was the underpinning academic programme for HLAs. The Panel was advised that the FdA Interaction Design curriculum had been designed following engagement with employers through, inter alia, employer forums, partnerships, curriculum hubs and the College's Employer Engagement Unit.

The senior staff advised that the proposed programme replaced the FdSc in Interactive Multimedia, which had recruited well and had a strong profile within the College and a 100% pass rate in second year. The Panel therefore queried why the College was seeking to replace this programme. The senior staff explained that the progression route for the FdSc in Interactive Multimedia within Ulster University's Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment was programme-orientated and was better suited to graduates of the College's FdSc Computing programme. The FdSc Interactive Multimedia had therefore been revised to develop the FdA Interaction Design and alternative progression routes, which were a better match to the Interaction Design curriculum, had been identified within the University's Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The change to the Foundation Degree had been discussed among the teaching staff, students and staff at Ulster University's Belfast campus. It was intended that the new FdA Interaction Design would recruit from the same market as the former FdSc Interactive Multimedia programme.

4.2 DESIGN PROCESS

The Panel enquired how the Course Team had worked together to design the new FdA Interaction Design programme. The senior staff explained that Team meetings had been

held in which the Team had looked at the University's BDes Hons Interaction Design and how the Foundation Degree could be mapped to this Honours Degree. The aim had been to incorporate, within the FdA Interaction Design, the development of a broad range of skills whilst enhancing the design element within the programme. The design process had taken into account the skills of the Course Team and had involved engagement with the Graphic Designer at the College's Lurgan campus, as well as engagement with employers and University staff. The proposed programme was similar to the former FdSc Interactive Multimedia but had a stronger design element and more creative progression routes. Feedback from students on the proposed progression routes was very positive.

4.3 INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT IN DESIGN OF PROGRAMME

The Panel was concerned to note the continued inclusion of Dreamweaver, which was no longer used in industry. The Panel therefore wished to understand the Course Team's engagement with industry throughout the design process and how it had decided which packages to include. The Panel was informed that feedback from students who had undertaken placements in industry had been used to determine which packages should be included in the programme. The Panel was of the view that the programming and IT support roles described in the work-based learning element of the programme were not suited for the new programme, which would be producing a more creative practitioner. The Chair of the Course Planning Committee acknowledged that it would be necessary to take cognisance of the enhanced design element in the new programme and that more creative-oriented companies would be sought for students' work placements.

4.4 ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Panel enquired how entrepreneurship was incorporated within the programme as placement in a small business might not provide a suitable environment in which to develop entrepreneurial skills. The senior staff acknowledged that it was difficult to instil entrepreneurship as many of the work-based learning placements tended to be with small businesses. There were however opportunities to promote entrepreneurship through student involvement in project-based learning competitions and entrepreneurship could also be incorporated within the taught modules.

4.5 PLACEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Panel enquired if opportunities existed for students to undertake international work placements. The senior staff advised that students could avail of such opportunities through the ERASMUS scheme. Staff also participated in international exchanges and were able to incorporate their experiences of these into the curriculum. Opportunities existed at College level for students to spend time in countries such as Spain and China. The College also welcomed exchange students. The senior staff stated that the short duration of the work-based element of the Foundation Degree made it more challenging to undertake a meaningful international work placement.

4.6 DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND GENDER IN THE SECTOR

The Panel asked the senior staff to explain the Team's approach to diversity, equality and gender. The senior staff acknowledged the challenges in these areas in terms of student intake, staff base and in the industry but stated that diversity and equality were promoted as much as possible. The Panel was advised that addressing the skills agenda and social inclusion were drivers in the College's business. The senior staff explained how the

College's provision was publicised in the community through, inter alia, open days and engagement with schools through the Schools Partnership Programme. The College also engaged with the Connect Programme and The Prince's Trust.

5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

5.1 COURSE DESIGN / COHERENCE

The Panel was of the view that the provision appeared to be a collection of separate modules rather than a coherent programme and recommended that the Level 4 and Level 5 modules be paired to create a sense of coherence and progression through the programme. The Panel suggested, for example, that the Level 4 *Introduction to Communication Design* module could be paired with the Level 5 *Imaging and Data Visualisation* module and that the Level 4 *Advanced Web Authoring* module could be paired with the Level 5 *Web Server and Platforms* module to identify pathways through the programme.

5.2 STRUCTURE

The Panel queried the order in which the modules were delivered and was of the view that the *Introduction to Multimedia Authoring* module risked overwhelming some students in their first semester. The Panel was of the view that the softer modules should be delivered first in order to provide a gentler introduction to the subject area.

Given the centrality of the *Interaction Design Fundamentals* module to the programme, the Panel queried why it was delivered in Semester 2 of Year 1 instead of Semester 1 and suggested that it would be better delivered earlier in the programme to enable the methodology taught in this module to be put into practice in subsequent modules. The Team advised that the *Introduction to Multimedia Authoring* and *Introduction to Communication Design* modules needed to be in Semester 1 but that it might be possible to swap the *Creative 3D Modelling* module, currently delivered in Semester 1, with the *Interaction Design Fundamentals* module.

5.3 CONTENT

5.3.1 Currency of Content

The Panel was of the view that the content and technologies used in some of the modules required updating. Specific concern had been expressed in the Panel's preliminary comments about the *Multimedia Authoring Software* module but the Team had advised that this would be replaced by *Web Programming and Databases* and the description for the latter had been circulated prior to the evaluation event.

5.3.2 Introduction to Multimedia Authoring Module

The Panel recommended that the content of this module be updated, and in particular that references to DHTML and FLASH be removed or updated.

5.3.3 Advanced Web Authoring Module

The Panel was of the view that the 'Web Standards Model' should be the underlying concept of this module and should therefore be referred to in the module description. The Panel also stated that references to HTML5 and CSS3 should be changed to HTML and CSS respectively.

5.3.4 Web Programming Fundamentals Module

The Panel queried why ASP.NET was taught in this module and was informed that the module co-ordinator had industry experience of using this. The Team stated that it tended to use platforms that were free and that the programme aimed to provide students with as broad a knowledge as possible. Students were also expected to carry out independent research into different platforms. The Panel cautioned that the use of too many different platforms might give rise to confusion.

5.3.5 Interaction Design Fundamentals Module

The Panel was of the view that the learning outcome for this module which stated 'Understand the principles of interaction design, UX design and key emerging trends in interactive systems' should be listed as one of the programme learning outcomes.

5.3.6 Creative 3D Modelling Module

The Panel was of the view that this module appeared to be very technical and whilst acknowledging that it taught a useful skill, noted that it was unusual for this content to be included in this type of programme. The Panel was concerned that this module was over ambitious in terms of its content and suggested that the focus should be on some type of interactive output.

5.3.7 Mobile Development

The Panel questioned where mobile development had been incorporated within the programme and was advised that this was covered in the *Interaction Design Fundamentals* module as well as the *Advanced Web Authoring* module, and was also touched upon in *Introduction to Communication Design*.

5.3.8 Overarching Principles of Programme

The Panel noted that some modules were platform agnostic, whilst other module descriptions referred to a specific platform, and was of the view that it would be useful to adopt and state general principles for the programme.

5.4 ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Panel considered that entrepreneurship had not been adequately addressed in the programme and enquired if students would have the opportunity to demonstrate entrepreneurship by starting their own business rather than undertaking a placement for the work-based learning element of the programme. The Team stated that students would be able to generate their own ideas in the placement setting but that the work-based learning element of the programme was required to adhere to the Foundation Degree requirements. The Team stated that entrepreneurship would be incorporated into the

programme through the use of guest speakers from industry. The Panel was of the view that opportunities should be provided for students to take ownership of a project early in the programme. The Team however stated that it was not a business course and it was necessary for the programme to cover a broad range of subject-related areas.

5.5 PREPARATION FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING

The Panel enquired how students were prepared for the work-based learning element of the programme and was advised that students' communication skills were developed through undertaking presentations in different modules. Guest speakers from industry were invited to speak to the students and there were opportunities to undertake live projects. Students were also taken to visit companies before the work placement. The Panel enquired what would happen if a student was unable to find a placement and was advised that to date all students had been placed but that, if necessary, a student would be able to complete his/her placement within the College.

5.6 ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

The Panel asked the Team to explain what approach had been taken to the programme's overall assessment strategy. The Team advised that a range of different assessment methods had been incorporated into the modules, such as individual assignments, group work, presentations, class tests, practical work and one module was partly assessed by examination. Some modules incorporated an early class test of which students were in favour and which enabled staff to ascertain if a student was having difficulty with the module content. The Panel queried why only one examination was included in the programme to which the Team replied that students had indicated that they did not like examinations and that undertaking a project provided more time to develop skills. The Team explained that some modules included class tests carried out under examination conditions and that the *Web Programming Fundamentals* module required students to undertake a practical skills assessment in a class test environment.

The Panel noted that in the *Advanced Web Authoring* module the class test was worth 50% and the practical assignment was worth 50% and suggested that a more appropriate split would be 30% for the class test and 70% for the practical assignment.

The Panel queried why in the Programme Learning Outcome map many of the modules were shown to assess a large number of the programme learning outcomes. The Panel stated that distinction should be made between Levels 4 and 5 and that the learning outcomes at Level 5 should be more evaluative and reflective. The Panel was of the view that the way in which the modules had been mapped to the programme learning outcomes should be reviewed to ensure that the same learning outcome was not being assessed multiple times resulting in a heavy assessment load.

The Panel enquired if consideration had been given to assessment across modules. The Team stated that this occurred in other programmes at Levels 2 and 3 and agreed to consider ways in which this might be incorporated.

5.7 PROGRESSION ROUTES

The Panel noted that graduates of FdA Interaction Design would be eligible to progress to:

- Year 2 of Ulster University's BDes Hons Interaction Design (FT) (BT), subject to any other admission requirements being met;
- Year 2 of Ulster University's BSc Hons Interactive Media (FT/PT) (CE), subject to any other admission requirements being met.

The Panel further noted that the course document contained a table showing how the FdA Interaction Design was mapped to modules in the BDes Hons Interaction Design but there was no equivalent table that mapped the programme to the BSc Hons Interactive Media. The Panel asked that this information be provided in the revised course document.

Professor Fleming, Head of the University's Belfast School of Art, advised that intake to the BDes Hons Interaction Design programme was capped at 20 students and encouraged the Team to explore additional progression routes. The Chair of the Panel advised that the University's School of Computing offered bridging modules in Python and Mathematics for entry to Year 2 of the Computing provision at Jordanstown.

In response to a question from the Panel, the Team advised that it was anticipated that approximately 80% of Foundation Degree students would wish to progress to Honours Degree study and that students were informed about other possible progression routes, including at other universities. The Chair of the Panel highlighted the importance of ensuring that students were aware that places on the Honours Degrees were limited and that progression to a particular Honours Degree could not therefore be guaranteed.

5.8 MARKETING / RECRUITMENT

The Panel noted that the intake to the FdSc Interactive Multimedia programme in 2018/19 was less than in previous years and queried why this was the case. The Team stated that the turnaround in the construction industry had resulted in an increased intake to construction-related programmes and a decrease in the intake to IT-related programmes in 2018/19. The Team was however confident that the normal pattern of intake to IT-related programmes would resume for 2019/20 and advised that there had been increased activity in social media to highlight the benefits of these programmes and that staff were working with employers to inform them about the programmes on offer. The Panel was informed that applications to the College's courses were received from November onwards and that these were monitored and additional marketing undertaken for any programmes with a low number of applications.

The Panel enquired if feeder schools had been identified. The Team advised that there were four grammar schools in Newry but that the schools preferred students to complete A-Levels and progress to University.

The Panel enquired how the revised curriculum and consequent change in title from FdSc Interactive Multimedia to FdA Interaction Design would impact on the number of applications. The Team was confident that recruitment would not be affected by the changes to the programme and advised that the content of the programme would be explained in the marketing material. Short videos had been made to promote the provision and it was envisaged that the opening of the new College buildings in 2020 would have a positive impact on enrolment College-wide.

5.9 PHYSICAL RESOURCES

The Panel enquired how often equipment was renewed and was advised that this was undertaken every three years and that equipment for this programme had been renewed in the last 18 months. College staff were able to request any software that was required.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the following aspects of the provision:

- (i) the concept of the programme which was contemporary and responded to the needs of industry;
- (ii) the programme's role in widening access and creating a pathway in this subject area from Level 2 onwards;
- (iii) the resources and teaching space available to support the programme.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the programme be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2019/20 – 2023/24), subject to the conditions and recommendations of the Panel being addressed, and a satisfactory response and revised submission being forwarded to the Academic Office by 25 June 2019 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

- (i) that all of the points raised by the Academic Office in the Appendix be addressed;
- (ii) that the coherence and integration of the modules, and the progression between Levels 4 and 5 be made more explicit by, for example, the identification of subject strands through the programme (section 5.1);
- (iii) that the *Interaction Design Fundamentals* module be delivered in Year 1 semester 1 (section 5.2);
- (iv) that the *Work-based Learning* element of the programme be revised to incorporate a stronger entrepreneurial component (section 5.4);
- (v) that the overarching assessment strategy, showing progression between Levels 4 and 5, be made more explicit throughout the course document and reflected in revised programme learning outcomes (section 5.6);
- (vi) that the Team liaise with the Faculty Partnership Manager to identify further progression routes at Ulster University (section 5.7).

Recommendations

- (i) that a clearer vision with regard to equality and diversity be incorporated within the programme and monitored (section 4.6);
- (ii) that consideration be given to incorporating joint assessment across modules (section 5.6).

7 APPRECIATION

The Chair of the Panel congratulated the members of the Course Team and thanked them for their hospitality. The Panel members were thanked by the Chair for their valuable contribution to the evaluation exercise. The Panel was also thanked by the Head of School and by the Chair of the Course Planning Committee.