

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 9F: EDUCATION MINOR

24 March 2020

PANEL: Dr P McClure, Associate Head of School of Health Sciences, Ulster University [Chair]
Ms A Wright, Director of Religious Education PGCE, King's College London
Dr J Irwin, Associate Professor, School of Human Development, Dublin City University

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

APOLOGIES: Miss S Duggan, Lecturer in Nursing, School of Nursing, Ulster University

1 INTRODUCTION

The Panel met by Skype to consider the revalidation of Undergraduate Honours Subject: Education (Minor) (with Certificate of Higher Education and Associate Bachelor's Degree exit awards) currently delivered in full-time mode at the Coleraine campus in combination with the following Major subjects: English, Environmental Science, Geography, History and Journalism.

At the revalidation the Faculty brought forward a proposal to deliver the provision also at the Magee campus in full-time mode with new combinations.

The Panel initially met with the Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator / Course Director (Dr A Hunter), the Head of School of Education (Dr D Barr) and the Associate Dean (Education) (Professor R Fee). 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 Benchmark Statement for Education Studies (2015);
- (iv) external examiner reports for 2017/18 and 2018/19;
- (v) 'Curriculum Design at Ulster' document;
- (vi) preliminary comments from the two external Panel members (CA7);
- (vii) Student Testimonials
- (viii) Academic Office notes on regulatory and standards matters.

No assessment rubrics were received in advance of the revalidation event. The Head of School and Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator advised that these had been omitted from the documentation in error and that they were available to circulate to the Panel members. The assessment rubric for module EDU301 *Learning and Teaching with Technology* was circulated to Panel members during the meeting.

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR STAFF

3.1 PROPOSAL TO OFFER THE PROVISION AT THE MAGEE CAMPUS

The Panel asked the Senior Staff to outline the rationale for the proposal to offer the provision at the Magee campus and sought assurance that the resources were in place to deliver the provision at this additional location. The Panel also queried if the same staff members would be required to deliver their modules twice. The Head of School explained that the Coleraine campus had undergone a substantial re-structure in terms of the courses offered and that many of the former Education subject combinations, such as Business, Computing, Irish and the creative arts subjects, had now been re-located to the Magee campus. These combinations had proved popular with students taking Education as their Minor subject and the School wished to be in a position to offer these subject combinations again. There had also been significant changes in staffing within the School in the last four years and the provision had been streamlined. Where there were previously nine modules, there were now seven, one of which was fully online. Another module was a placement module which only had three points of contact. Each module had at least two members of staff assigned to it to aid the duplication of its delivery at Magee. The addition of the Magee campus had been discussed with the University's Timetabling Officer. The Panel was advised that teaching at Magee and Coleraine would be on separate days and that staff would have two days free from teaching on other courses to deliver the Education Minor provision at the two locations.

The Panel enquired if staff envisaged any issues arising from the delivery of the provision at two campuses. The Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator stated that the main challenge would be timetabling. The Panel was informed that most of the provision's resources were online but following University approval of the proposal to offer the provision at the Magee campus and the new combinations, any required hard copy resources would be added to the library at Magee.

The Panel enquired what the projected intakes were for the proposed combinations at the Magee campus. The Panel was informed that when the Business and Computing combinations were previously offered on the Coleraine campus there had been approximately 15 students taking each combination. With regard to the Drama and Music combinations, it was envisaged that the number of students on each of these would be approximately five as these Major subjects were smaller than the Business and Computing subjects.

The Panel enquired how staff would be supported in terms of ensuring sufficient time for research activities with the addition of the Magee location. The Head of School advised that staff teaching on the Education Minor provision were predominantly from the PGCE area and many were currently undertaking PhDs. A review of each staff member's workload was carried out each year and relevant CPD opportunities identified. Staff members were able to avail of opportunities for teaching buy-out to enable them to meet research demands. With regard to workload, the number of modules on the provision had been reduced and the

PGCE provision had also been streamlined. Two members of the Team were TESOL staff currently involved in developing a new programme, while the remainder were PGCE staff. All members of the Course Team had a teaching workload of 13 or 14 hours per week. The PGCE programme started earlier in the semester and face-to-face teaching stopped around week 4 of the first semester as this is when the PGCE students commenced their placements.

The Panel enquired how many students each member of staff was responsible for in a Studies Advisor capacity and was advised that the Course Director was the primary point of contact for all students, although issues relating to modules tended to be dealt with by module co-ordinators. Studies Advisors were, however, appointed from students' Major subject area.

3.2 MARKETING

The Panel enquired how the Education Minor provision was marketed. The Senior Staff explained that the PGCE provision at Ulster University was very oversubscribed. The Education Minor provision was therefore marketed as an opportunity for students to see if they were suited to a career in Education, while studying their chosen Major subject. Taking the combination of Education and another Major subject offered more career opportunities for students.

3.3 INTERNATIONALISATION

The Panel enquired if there was scope for internationalisation within the Minor subject. The Senior Staff advised that students had the option, within their Major subject, to undertake a placement, which could be international, or a period of study abroad. The Education Minor provision included study of comparative education and the use of case studies to look at teaching in other countries. The Course Director advised that in future consideration would be given to incorporating ERASMUS opportunities within the provision.

3.4 ASSESSMENT RUBRICS

The Chair queried why no examples of assessment rubrics had been submitted with the revalidation documentation and enquired if these were available. The Head of School confirmed that assessment rubrics were available, but that they had been omitted from the submission in error. The assessment rubric for module EDU301 *Learning and Teaching with Technology* was circulated to Panel members during the meeting.

4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel did not meet with any students via Skype but received student testimonials which were all very positive and complimentary about the provision and the support offered by the Course Team.

5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

5.1 REVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM PROCESS

The Panel asked the Team to outline what the curriculum review process had involved and which internal and external stakeholders had been consulted. The Team explained that the provision had not been significantly revised since its inception and the opportunity had therefore been taken to review and extensively revise the provision for revalidation. This review process had involved consultation with employers and students, and consideration of results from module feedback surveys, the National Student Survey, as well as feedback from Staff Student Consultative Committee meetings, and had also involved analysis of destinations of leavers. In addition, the Team had worked with the University's Careers and Employability Department and the Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice (CHERP).

The Panel was informed that the provision had hitherto been very knowledge-based and that feedback from employers and students had indicated a need for the provision to be more skills-based. A careful balance of knowledge and skills had therefore been developed within the provision. Changes in staff within the School had resulted in the incorporation of new skills and research areas in the provision. As part of the programme students kept a logbook of skills they had developed. The Team explained that staff research interests and students' needs had driven the revised curriculum. Consultations had also taken place with those in non-traditional education settings, such as local government and NGOs. The provision had been structured to support a placement module and practical skills, as well as the theory and practice of pedagogy, which had been included in the *Facilitating An Effective Learning Environment* module (EDU101).

The Panel was of the view that the provision had a good balance of knowledge and skills and offered a vision for wider understanding of education. The Panel was also impressed by the attractive vocational / placement element. The re-design of the provision had also focused on graduate qualities. The Panel noted that the student feedback received as part of the revalidation process had been highly complimentary.

5.2 CURRICULUM DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The Panel noted that the design of the provision adhered to the University's Curriculum Design Principles with all modules having a credit value of 20 credit points and each module having four learning outcomes and two pieces of assessment. The Team members advised that they had worked with CHERP colleagues, including the CHERP Design Consultant for the Faculty, with Access, Digital and Distributed Learning (ADDL) and with the Employability and Careers Department. This, in addition to consultation with stakeholders had informed the re-design of the provision. The Team advised that the provision was designed around what students needed to know, how they needed to learn it and what they needed to be. The Team further explained how consideration had been given to what students needed to learn in their first year and that this content constituted the first two modules taken. The Team stated that ongoing opportunities were available for students to provide feedback and that this feedback was used to create the optimal learning environment.

5.3 UNIQUE SELLING POINT / VISION

The Panel enquired what the Team considered to be the Unique Selling Point of the Education Minor provision. The Team advised that the placement element of the provision was rich in potential as not all students would necessarily wish to pursue a career in teaching. For this reason, the Team had made a conscious effort to widen this aspect of the provision beyond educational placements.

The Panel noted that the revalidation process had provided an opportunity to review the provision and asked the Team to elaborate upon the overarching vision of the revised provision. The Team explained that the provision brought forward for revalidation was mainly new, resulting from the changes in staff within the School and changes in society. The Course Director stated that the focus of the provision was not necessarily on the professional aspect of teaching, but that broad themes, such as the role of education as an agent of change, the philosophy of education, legal aspects of inclusion, and barriers to accessing education had been incorporated. The Team had sought to include the development of a range of broader transferable skills. The Team advised that it would continue to refresh the provision and develop the concept of widening education beyond traditional skills by drawing more from other areas such as prison education, TESOL and library in future.

5.4 ASSESSMENT

5.4.1 Overall Assessment Strategy

The Panel asked the Team to outline how the overall coherence of the assessment strategy had been ensured. The Team stated that University guidelines on assessment and workload equivalence had been taken into account when determining how to assess each module. The Team had sought to incorporate opportunities for the development of a range of skills used in different career areas, not just teaching, and to cater for students' different learning styles. To this end a wide variety of assessment methods were employed, including essays, portfolios and presentations. An examination also formed part of the assessment of the *Contemporary Educational Issues* module.

The Team explained how in Year 1 students were equipped with the skills needed for assessment, such as critical analysis skills, how to reference correctly and presentation skills. The University's Principles for Feedback and timeframe were adhered to, as were the University's guidelines for second marking. In addition to summative feedback, ongoing formative feedback was provided to students.

5.4.2 Module EDU101: *Facilitating An Effective Learning Environment*

The Team explained how the assessment of the *Facilitating An Effective Learning Environment* module aimed to be practical, as well as ensuring an understanding of theory. The module was assessed by an individual written assignment on the opportunities and challenges of facilitating effective learning environments and by a group presentation on a problem-based learning scenario. The Team recognised that group work needed to be well supported and organised in first year and was of the view that this type of assessment enhanced the students' learning process. In addition to assessing the final presentation, the group work process was assessed through the submission of an individual learning log and an individual reflective summary.

5.5 STUDENT COHORT

The Panel enquired what type of student the provision attracted and was advised that students tended to be those taking their Major subjects in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The two most common combination subjects were currently English and History. The Team explained that this could however change if approval was given to deliver the provision at Magee where combinations would include STEM subjects. In the

past Computing had worked well in combination with Education as the latter offered softer skills useful for delivering training in a computing environment.

The Team explained that those taking the Education Minor provision were an interesting, diverse group of students with varied backgrounds who tended to be very committed and enthusiastic. The Panel was very impressed by the positive impact this Minor subject appeared to have on students, which was evident from the student testimonials received for the revalidation event.

5.6 BALANCE BETWEEN TEACHING AND RESEARCH

The Panel commended the obvious synergy between research and teaching, but noted however that the level of student support provided by staff and the Team members' enthusiasm and commitment to the provision rendered the provision very labour-intensive. The Panel therefore enquired how the Team members would be supported in their research, which obviously informed teaching, particularly with the additional work involved in delivering the provision at a second campus. The Team advised that the School provided support and that staff recognised the need to be research-active and ensure that their research fed into modules. The Panel recommended that the Team ensure that the exemplary synergy between research and teaching was supported and maintained.

5.7 CONTENT

5.7.1 Module EDU517: *English as an Additional Language and Education*

The Panel queried the rationale for the inclusion of the Year 3 *English as an Additional Language and Education* module, as this was a very specific area, and why this content had not been incorporated within one of the other modules instead. The Team explained that the provision had been designed around the expertise of staff, with the most accessible content delivered in Year 1 and the more specialised, challenging content in Year 3. The *English as an Additional Language and Education* module covered learning and teaching in multicultural contexts, which was relatively new in Northern Ireland. The Panel was of the view that the rationale for the inclusion of this module within the provision was not clear in the course document and recommended that the module be reconceptualised, building on work already done within the module in terms of multiculturalism and internationalism, to connect with the wider purpose and key concepts of the programme.

5.7.2 Module Choice

The Panel noted that in Year 2 students could choose one from two optional modules in Semester 1. While recognising the difficulties it might present, the Panel enquired if there was scope for a greater choice of modules to be made available to students by, for example, offering optional modules on a rotational basis. The Panel was of the view that such an arrangement would alleviate pressure on staff while giving students a greater choice of modules.

5.8 PLACEMENT

5.8.1 Sourcing of Placement

The Panel commended the inclusion of the *Industrial Educational Placement* module and enquired of the Team how the placements were sourced. The Team advised that staff and

students worked together to source the placements, and also with ADDL which facilitated the University's Tutoring in Schools programme. Students could sign up to undertake projects requested by Schools. If a student was unable to travel to a particular school to undertake a project, the individual could contact a local school to arrange a project. In order to undertake a placement in a school, students were required to pass an Access NI check. Alternative placements could be arranged with local government in, for example, Borough Councils and NGOs for any students who did not pass the Access NI check or did not wish to undertake a placement in a school. Placements sourced by students were subject to approval by the Course Director.

The Panel enquired if students had an opportunity to undertake a placement in integrated schools. The Team advised that the provision included the study of integrated education, shared education and education as an agent of change, and that it was an ecumenical programme with no affiliation to any one type of school. Students could choose to undertake their placement in any school, although they were encouraged to spend their placement in a different type to that which they had attended themselves.

5.8.2 Assessment of Placement

The Team explained that the provision was structured around supporting the *Industrial Educational Placement* module by incorporating practical skills in the Year 1 modules and the specialism chosen by students in Year 2. Students also completed a Child Protection course as part of the programme. The Panel was informed that students made contact with their placement school / provider before Christmas in the first semester of Year 2. A lecture was held prior to the commencement of the placement to provide instruction on appropriate conduct and dress code, as well as to provide information on the assessment process. The Team explained that the placement was assessed by a portfolio which included completion of a project set by the host school / organisation, students' engagement with their Main subject while on placement and their contribution to the extracurricular life of the school / host organisation. Students were required to complete weekly online journal tasks, for which they received formative feedback. The Panel was informed that students were supported online while on placement and by a visit from the placement tutor. On completion of the placement, placement providers were invited to attend presentations given by the students on their placement experience and project.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the following aspects of the provision:

- (i) the ethos of the programme and its emphasis on connecting education, society and value;
- (ii) the highly impressive research expertise and teaching excellence of the programme team and the synergy of teaching and research where the commitment to teaching and to students is both obvious and authentic;
- (iii) the pastoral aspect of the programme and the emphasis on the importance of a dynamic teacher-student relationship which is indicative of a healthy educational environment;
- (iv) the employability of graduates in diverse roles;

- (v) the industry placement module which is a key component and strengthens the vocational dimension and attractiveness of the provision;
- (vi) the high level of diversity in terms of assessment and clear evidence of developing more innovative and interactive pedagogies since the last revalidation.

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 2020/21 – 2024/25), subject to the condition and recommendations of the Panel being addressed, and a satisfactory response and revised submission being forwarded to the Academic Office by **Tuesday, 5 May 2020** for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Note: Approval of the proposal to offer the provision at the Magee campus with new combinations is subject to approval by the University's Academic Planning Advisory Group.

Condition

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

Recommendations

- (i) that the Team keep under consideration the overall vision and coherence of the programme as it evolves;
- (ii) that consideration be given to offering a greater choice of elective modules on a rotational basis;
- (iii) that the *English as an Additional Language and Education* module be reconceptualised, building on work already done within the module in terms of multiculturalism and internationalism, to connect with the wider purpose and key concepts of the programme;
- (iv) that the Team ensure that the exemplary synergy between research and teaching is supported and maintained;
- (v) that Reading Lists be updated and added to in terms of specific concerns of recent times.

7 APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked the Panel members for their valuable contribution to the revalidation exercise and thanked the Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator for providing excellent documentation.

The Chair also thanked members of the Course Team for the useful discussion.

Dr Barr, Head of School, thanked the Chair and the Panel members for the useful recommendations. Dr Barr also thanked Dr Hunter, Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator.