

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL: UNIT 26J CUSTODY PRISON OFFICER PRACTICE

2 February 2018

PANEL:

Professor P Bartholomew, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), Ulster University (Chair)
Ms S McCall, Associate Head of the School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences, Ulster University
Professor S McIlfatrick, Head of the School of Nursing, Ulster University
Ms K Flanagan, Lecturer in Psychology, Waterford Institute of Technology
Mr R O'Keeffe, Chief Officer, Irish Prison Service College, Portlaoise
Professor J Shapland, Edward Bramley Professor of Criminal Justice, School of Law, University of Sheffield

REVALIDATION UNIT CO-ORDINATOR:

Mr H Campbell, School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences, Ulster University

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr M Davidson, Subject Partnership Manager, School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences, Ulster University
Mr B McArthur, Academic Office, Ulster University

1 INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider the following provision within Revalidation Unit 26J Custody Prison Officer Practice.

Certificate in Custody Prison Officer Practice (PT) (Northern Ireland Prison Service College, Hydebank Wood, Belfast)

The Certificate programme is a bespoke course developed for new entrants to the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS). Successful completion of the programme is a requirement for permanent appointment.

The programme was initially validated in May 2014 following a successful bid by Ulster in a competitive tender process. A further successful bid in 2016 led to the award of the current tender for a four-year period commencing in 2018.

The original development of the programme arose out of recommendations in Dame Anne Ower's report, the 'Owers review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (October 2011)'. It recommended, inter alia, that the Prison College should become a secure college,

“... offering a full programme of skills-based activities and one to one support, with a multi-disciplinary trained staff group, and working in partnership with a range of external providers and agencies”.

The review formed part of the Hillsborough Agreement (February 2010) that resulted in the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Identified at the time were “significant and long-lasting problems in the Northern Ireland Prison Service” and the Ower’s report led to a period of change and transformation in the service.

The Certificate programme was originally approved for delivery at the Prison College at Millisle, Co Down. In December 2016, the University approved an application to move delivery to new premises at Hydebank Wood, Belfast, on the basis that it offered improved security and a better teaching environment with improved facilities. The application was supported by the Faculty which confirmed the adequacy of the resources at the new location.

The current proposal is an updated version of the existing programme. The programme comprises three compulsory 20-credit point modules. Delivery does not follow the normal academic calendar. Students commence study of all three modules during an initial 9-week period at the College followed by a placement of up to 15 months in a prison establishment where they undertake applied professional development, assessed and mentored by trained NIPS staff. Throughout, in addition to other assessments, students would be required to maintain a ‘portfolio of learning’, which would be reviewed regularly and would be summatively assessed at the end of the training period. Assessment throughout is by way of pass / fail.

The Subject Partnership Manager, Mr Michael Davidson, in his preliminary comments (From CA4), provided an overview of resources available to support delivery of the programme based on a recent visit to the College. He concluded,

“The programme in its current format is adequately resourced in terms of physical and human resources ... the facilities provided are of a high standard and are well maintained”.

The following are the proposed student intake figures over the next four years. There would be four or five cohorts of 20 to 25 students joining per calendar year.

MAXIMUM COHORT SIZE		Year 1 Intake	Year 2 Intake	Year 3 Intake	Year 4 Intake
Cohort size for each site proposed by Institution (year 1)	PT	120	120	120	120
Maximum cohort size for each site recommended by Faculty	PT	20 – 25	20 – 25	20 - 25	20 - 25

The Panel met initially with the Senior Management Team comprising, Mr H Campbell, Revalidation Unit Coordinator, Mr D Eagleson, Deputy Director, NIPS, Governor B McKee, NIPS, Hydebank Wood College and Mr S Ferguson, NIPS Staff Training Officer. The Panel then met with two current students and finally, with the course team to discuss the provision in detail.

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

- Agenda and programme of the meeting
- Guidelines for revalidation panels
- External examiners' reports for the last two years
- Preliminary comments from the Subject Partnership Manager
- Preliminary comments from panel members
- Revalidation documentation

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3.1 Staff

The Panel asked the Team about arrangements for staff development. The Team replied that the College had a staff development policy which was continually updated. Staff were encouraged to further their studies and gain additional qualifications. In addition, staff completed various external courses such as 'Safetalk', a suicide alertness course. They said that three additional teaching staff had recently been appointed and each had appropriate qualifications. The Team referred to a new protocol whereby local managers in the prison establishments and teaching staff exchanged information regarding students' progress which informed trainers on students' strengths and weaknesses which in turn, informed their training.

3.2 Support for placement supervisors

The Panel asked the Team to outline the support available to local managers in the prison establishments where much of the student training would take place. The Team pointed out that Ulster had a Certificate and a PgD/MSc in Restorative Practices that were suitable for senior prison officers and would aid their development as supervisors. Two members of the teaching team were currently on the Master's programme. Part of the provision dealt with how to lead new recruits. One module focused on "how to lead learning". Approximately 60% of senior staff had completed one of the programmes over the last five years. It was emphasised however that regardless of whether a manager had completed one of the programmes, other forms of support were available. Training staff would brief local managers on the students to be placed in their establishments. A programme of work would be prepared for each student and shared with the managers ensuring that they were aware of students' training requirements. In addition, a training tutor was based in each of the three prison establishments who would be on hand to provide advice and guidance. The Team explained that when students were on placement, the training tutors would oversee students' progress.

3.3 Support for students

The Team was asked about support for students and their wellbeing. The Team stated that at the outset of the programme, a family night was organised at the College. Senior managers would attend and speak to students and their families. They stated that family support throughout a prison officer's career was vital. On the last occasion, the Deputy Governor at each of the three prisons had attended. Advice on personal security was an

important issue which was reinforced from the outset. A booklet on personal security was provided to each student. In addition, they were made aware of the support available from the Human Resource and Occupational Health Departments.

The Panel pointed out that Ulster also had a duty of care towards students and asked how students would be supported in their learning. The Team replied that two 'lead tutors' would be appointed to each student cohort. They explained that a lead tutor performed a similar role to that of an 'Advisor of Studies' in the University. Each student would be appointed to one of the lead tutors who would meet with each student within two or three weeks of the start of the programme. The lead tutor would have at least two one-to-one meetings with each student within the initial nine weeks of the programme. Once students were placed in an establishment, the training tutor based on that site would take on the mentoring role and oversee their training.

The Panel asked whether Ulster could be satisfied that students would have a secured learning environment. The Revalidation Unit Coordinator, Mr Campbell, replied that during the initial nine weeks within the College, this would be easily managed. He explained that during this period, he would have direct involvement with the students. In the first week, he would meet with the cohort to talk about and explain various aspects of the programme. In addition, in week 5, he would teach a workshop. Consequently, students would quickly become familiar with him as well as the College teaching staff. Mr Campbell added that students would quickly be made aware of the integrated nature of the learning, teaching and assessment strategies with various important components of the programme highlighted, for example, the portfolio of evidence.

The Team stated that students would attend the College each day at 8.00 am. Classes would start at 8.30 am. During the intervening half hour, often senior managers such as the Governor of the College and the Deputy Director of the NIPS, who had responsibility for recruit training, would talk to students about their progress. In addition, as an aid to managing potential trauma situations, students would undertake "live environment training" which was an integral part of the programme. This would be followed by a full debrief involving the whole student group.

3.4 Online Resources

The Panel asked about student access to electronic resources, particularly when students would be on placement in a prison establishment. The Team replied that students would have normal internet and email access while on placement. They explained that currently, many staff within the establishments were now provided with personal tablets. Wider online access was now one of the Service's business priorities. The Panel suggested that it might be worth exploring setting up an online repository for learning materials which students would be able to access remotely from any location.

3.3 Retention and progression

In response to the Panel, the Team stated that retention on the programme was excellent. During 2017 the retention rate during the initial nine weeks of the programme had been 95.6% and throughout the programme as a whole, 94.5%.

The Panel asked how progression boards would operate within the programme. The Team replied that since there would be multiple cohorts running throughout the year, there would be approximately four Boards of Examiner meetings per year. They explained that

on joining the Service, students would receive an entry salary which, on successful completion of the programme, would then be increased. Maintenance of the portfolio of evidence would begin during the initial nine weeks of the programme. Most of it would be completed during a student's time on placement. As part of the portfolio exercises, students would be required to submit one reflective practice statement per week within the initial nine weeks and, on average, one per month while on placement. In response to the Panel, the Team confirmed that there was no cap on the number of reflective statements that a student might submit. However, in practice, where a larger number than required was submitted, the tutor would ask which of them the student wished to go forward for assessment.

The Team explained that minimum standards had to be achieved during each section of the portfolio. Where a student was unable to meet a particular standard, they would be deferred to retake with the following cohort. The Team stated that the portfolio would be reviewed at 3-monthly intervals and summatively assessed at the end of the programme. The Team confirmed that a student would only pass the programme having met the programme level learning outcomes and that progression would be based solely on the formal assessments set out in the module descriptions. Removal for other reasons, for example, a breach of the Code of Professional Conduct, would lie outside the parameters of the programme in keeping with a student's co-status of employee.

4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with a two students currently on Week 8 of the programme. The following are summaries of their responses to issues raised by the Panel.

4.1 Support

The students stated that the Senior Officer (lead tutor), who was always accessible, was students' first point of contact. For personal difficulties, the Chief Training Officer was the point of contact. One student stated that he had been out of formal education for many years and had initially found the classroom environment difficult. However, the support provided by both peers and staff had helped him through the early stages. If he had a problem, there was always help available. The other student said that the support provided for their assessed work was particularly helpful.

4.2 Study Resources

One student said that she particularly enjoyed composing the reflective statements and visiting a working prison. She found that writing down what she thought and felt about her experiences proved helpful. In her view, all necessary resources to support the programme were available.

The students confirmed that during the first week of the programme, they had received instruction on study skills. For example, the process of reflective writing was explained; that it involved more than simple descriptive writing.

4.3 Theory and practice

The initial part of the course prepared them well for their placements. During this period, they had had opportunities to put the classroom theory into practice through practice exercises and 'job shadowing'. There would therefore be "no surprises" when eventually

they went on placement. They suggested that the programme quickly taught them that their role was much more than that of a guard, more of a social worker dealing with people with problems. They said that their understanding of the role of a prison officer had changed radically since joining the programme.

4.3 Placement

The students knew what to expect in the coming placement months. It would be a combination of on-the-job training whilst continuing with the portfolio of evidence and their reflective writing. Placement would provide an opportunity to put their classroom learning into practice. They felt well prepared for this stage given the practice elements included in the first nine weeks.

4.4 Values and ethics

Ample time was afforded for reflection. After practice exercises, the group would reflect on their experiences in the classroom. One student said that being a father would help him perform in the role of custody officer, particularly when dealing with young people. He thought that his role would be about looking after people; that it was “all about rehabilitation”.

4.5 Feedback to staff

There was a student forum for raising issues with staff. Two examples of how student complaints had been dealt with within 24 hours were provided. The process “could not be faulted”.

4.6 External contributors

The Team confirmed that external agencies such as Barnardo’s contribute to the programme. They were also able to speak to prisoners which helped with assignments.

4.7 General

The students stated that while there was a lot of work during the initial 9-week stage of the programme, they thought that 9 weeks was sufficient. Generally, they felt that there was not a lot about the programme that needed to be changed; that it was always being “tweaked” in response to student feedback. Days were set aside to allow time to complete assignments, which they thought, was a positive feature of the programme. The practice of ‘job shadowing’ during the programme instilled a belief that “I can really do this”.

5 MEETING WITH THE COURSE TEAM

5.1 Assessment Strategy

The Panel asked why the assessment strategy was based on pass / fail only. The Panel suggested that students welcomed recognition of higher achievement, to be rewarded for a higher than average performance and to be able to see evidence of improvement as they progress through a programme. In addition, a pass mark in percentage terms would be more helpful to students who wished to progress to further study. Mr Campbell stated that the assessment strategy had been modelled on the Police recruitment programme, the Advanced Diploma in Policing, which was also validated by Ulster. That programme’s

assessment strategy was also based wholly on pass / fail. He added that the programme's underpinning philosophy was "equity around competence" and the establishment of solidarity within the student cohort. It was also suggested that an assessment strategy based on percentage marks would favour those with a strong academic background.

A discussion followed around the level of academic content in the programme and how there could be assurance that the assessment of practice competences had sufficient academic underpinning. The Team stated that a pass mark of 40% in practice exercises would not be sufficient to earn a 'pass' since competence to practice needed a much higher bar. The Panel pointed out that within a pass / fail assessment, a percentage mark could be set at whatever level deemed appropriate and much higher than 40%. Regarding academic underpinning, the Team stated that assessment of practice was not simply a matter of demonstrating skills, but also required the demonstration of understanding of the underpinning theory and social context in which the practice was carried out and this would be detailed in students' reflective writing and assessed as part of the portfolio of evidence.

In response to a Panel query regarding what would constitute a 'pass', the Team said that this would be partly subjective but that also, students would be required to complete a reflective learning log which would be assessed. The aim of the learning log was to allow students to capture and reflect on their new learning experiences while linking them back to the theory and their initial training. Mr Campbell stated that during Week 1 of the programme, he would be teaching the underpinning principles of reflective practice and students would be shown examples of good reflective writing by former students.

The Panel queried how the external examiner would be assured that there was equity across the cohort in the standard of reflective practice writing produced. The Team replied that the external examiner would examine a sample of students' work and throughout the programme, the portfolio would be continually reviewed by teaching staff to ensure that the appropriate standard was being achieved by each student.

5.2 Staff

The Panel asked, given the level of assessment on the programme, whether staff would be able to manage. The Team replied that three new teaching staff had been appointed in December and they believed that they had sufficient staff to manage all aspects of the programme. They also pointed out that the College rather than the HR department now had more control over cohort start dates which would help manage the workload in the future.

The Panel asked whether there was a contingency plan if Mr Campbell and the Chief Training Officer, Mr Ferguson, were to leave the programme. The Team emphasised that all training staff were conversant with all learning materials and the learning, teaching and assessment strategies used in the programme. In addition, all members of staff had access to student portfolios where all interactions between staff and students and students' development were recorded.

5.3 Regulations - Progression

The Panel asked how a failure in a practice element during the initial nine weeks of the programme would affect student progression into the placement stage. The Team explained that in that situation, a student would be placed in an establishment where the

failed practice would not be required. Support would then be provided before the student re-took the assessment.

5.4 Regulations - Consequences of failure

The Panel queried the number and timing of resits detailed in the course document, particularly in relation to practical assessments where it was suggested that a retake had to be completed within 24 hours. The Team confirmed that, in accordance with University regulations, students would only have one opportunity to retake a failed assessment. Regarding the specific timescale for practice assessment resits, the description in the document was erroneous although the Team believed that a relatively quick retake while the exercise was still fresh in the student's mind was beneficial. The Team stated that the relevant regulation would be revised.

5.5 Content

The Panel noted the reference in the revalidation document to the programme content having been mapped against the National Occupational Standards and asked to what degree they had influenced course design. The Team explained that not all the Standards mapped to the Northern Ireland context and therefore, while they had been taken account of, the Standards had not been rigorously followed. The Team added that their ambition was to go beyond the requirements of the Standards.

The Panel asked about the balance between theory and practice in the programme. The Team replied that the focus on rehabilitation in the programme could not be overstated. Within the first nine weeks, students would have opportunities to meet with prisoners and 'test' the theory they had learned against practice. They said that human rights underpinned everything in the programme which had a broad range of content from working with female and young offenders to understanding autism. Workshops had been introduced to teach underpinning theory during the initial nine weeks. The Team explained that following the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008 which introduced indeterminate sentences for serious crimes, the Prison Service had responded by introducing probation and prison officers dedicated to working with long-term prisoners using a personal development plan until that offender's release. Other new strategies had included the redesign of the Senior Officer training programme where the first module was dedicated solely to rehabilitation and was followed by the importance of leadership.

A discussion followed around whether there was scope for the contribution of serving or former prisoners to the programme. The Team expressed caution about the idea and could foresee certain problems. They stated that while the principle was fine, there needed to be a full debate around the issue.

5.6 Modules

The Panel suggested that the module learning outcomes in module, 'The Protection of the Public', did not adequately reflect the academic level of the programme content as described by the students. The Team agreed to review the module learning outcomes. The Panel also suggested a similar review of the learning outcomes of the two other modules.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the Course Team on the following:

- Relationship and support which exists between senior and trainer levels of the Service
- Level of support provided to diverse cohorts of students and particularly, the provision of a single point of contact for students
- Diligence and commitment of staff and their willingness to engage with staff development opportunities and continuing practice development
- Philosophy of the programme and its work-based content
- Close operation of the partnership between the two institutions

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the provision within Revalidation Unit 26J Custody Prison Officer Practice be approved for delivery at Hydebank Wood College for the maximum number of students identified at Section 1 above, for a period of five years (intakes 2017/18 – 2021/22 inclusive) subject to the conditions and recommendations of the Panel being addressed and a satisfactory response and a revised submission being forwarded to the Academic Office by **2 May 2018** for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

- 1) that the issues identified in the appendix to the panel report be addressed;
- 2) that the learning outcomes of module, 'The Protection of the Public', be revised to better reflect the quality of its content.

Recommendations

- 1) that the learning outcomes of modules, 'Custody Prison Practice and Healthy Prisons' and 'The Standards and Norms of Custody Prison Work', be revised in line with discussions with the Panel;
- 2) that consideration be given, in collaboration with Ulster colleagues, to the creation of a dedicated online platform for the collation of programme learning materials which would be remotely accessible by students;
- 3) that the staffing levels at both institutions be kept under review to ensure continued resilience and succession planning.

7 APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked the Panel members and, in particular, the external members, for their valuable contribution to the revalidation process.

Ref: BMCA/panelreport/7/2/18