

## UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

### REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL: REVALIDATION UNIT 7E MUSEUM STUDIES (PG)

3 December 2018

#### PANEL:

Dr M Black, Head of School of Computing, Engineering and Intelligent Systems, Ulster University (Chair)

Mr J Marley, Lecturer, School of Nursing, Ulster University

Ms M Downey, Students' Union, VP Academic and Affairs, Belfast campus, Ulster University

Dr G Corsane, Senior Lecturer in Heritage, Museum and Gallery Studies, Newcastle University

Dr K Lloyd, Lecturer in Museum Studies, University of Glasgow

Dr C Warleigh-Lack, Curator, Hillsborough Castle, Hillsborough

#### REVALIDATION UNIT CO-ORDINATOR:

Professor E Croke, School of Arts and Humanities, Ulster University

#### IN ATTENDANCE

Mr B McArthur, Academic Office, Ulster University

## 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Panel met to consider the following provision within Revalidation Unit 7E Museum Studies (PG).

- MA Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies (with PgDip exit award) (FT/PT) (BT)
- PgDip/MA Museum Practice and Management (with PgCert exit award) (PT) (DL)

## 2 DOCUMENTATION

2.1 The Panel received the following documentation:

- Agenda and programme of the meeting
- Guidelines for revalidation panels
- QAA Master's Degree Characteristics Statement (2015)
- Preliminary comments provided by panel members
- External examiners' reports for the last two years
- Revalidation documentation

2.2 The panel initially met with the Faculty senior management team comprising, Professor R Fee, Associate Dean, (Education), Dr T Maguire, Head of School of Arts and Humanities, Dr K White, Associate Head of School and Professor E Croke, Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator before meeting with a group of current students and finally with the course team.

2.3 The following report is a summary of responses to panel questions provided by each of the groups that the Panel met with during the meeting.

### 3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

#### Staff

3.1 The panel noted concern expressed by the programme's external examiner regarding the small size of the teaching team, particularly should student numbers grow. The team replied that part-time lecturers, doctoral students and external contributors supplemented the core teaching team. The range of contributors brought a richness to the programme. The team worked well together and supported one another. For example, arrangements had been made to enable the Course Director, Professor Crooke, to take a sabbatical during semester 2 of the current academic year. The Head of School, Dr Maguire, who also contributed to programme delivery, provided strong support. The provision had been designed to take account of the size and strengths of the team. A further advantage was that teaching mature students in postgraduate programmes was less demanding than for undergraduate provision.

#### Demand

3.2 Student numbers on the MA Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies were currently healthy. Eighteen students had been recruited for the current year. The numbers on the Museum Practice and Management programme however were less so with recruitment down for the current year. This reflected the level of demand in recent years. During the early years of the programme, the Heritage Council had funded students but this was no longer the case. The projected intake figure per annum over the forthcoming approval period for Museum Practice and Management was six students. Recruitment of six students per year was considered sufficient to create a positive student experience. Discussions were ongoing regarding development of a marketing strategy making use of personal contacts and networks and highlighting the positive reputation of the programme and its teaching staff within the industry. It was necessary as well in considering recruitment to be mindful of the limited local employment market in what was a niche area; flooding the Irish market with graduates was to be avoided. Such an approach would lead to industry resentment and a loss of reputation. In these circumstances, it would be wrong to offer students an outcome in terms of employability that could not be delivered.

3.3 Market intelligence was generally patchy. However, current feedback from the Middle East was encouraging. However, given the bespoke nature of the subject, unlike other areas such as nursing, the target audience would always be small, at best only two or three potential students per country.

3.4 In the early days, the Museum Practice and Management part-time programme had been able to sustain a significant student cohort of with numbers in double figures. Should the marketing strategy significantly increase numbers, the team would be able to cope. The distance learning programme however presented different recruitment challenges to campus-based programmes. Despite the low student numbers, the programme's retention was important to the School. It was regarded as a flagship programme and critical to the future of School. If necessary, the School would "cross-subsidise" the programme from other areas. One benefit of its retention was that students were all working in the industry enabling staff to remain current with industry developments.

#### Development of Museum Practice and Management

3.5 Throughout the life of the distance learning programme, strong support had been provided by Access, Digital and Distributed Learning (ADDL). There were now very good teaching materials available through Blackboard Collaborate. For example, videos, including YouTube videos, could now be uploaded as well as reading materials for the week ahead. The range of electronic tools now made online teaching and learning a much more interactive activity providing a more interesting and positive experience. It also stimulated students themselves to interact more. Traditional approaches such as lectures where 'lecture capture' can be employed were still

important. One advantage of the distance learning mode of delivery was the potential for programme growth.

#### 4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

4.1 The panel met with three current students, two from the Cultural Heritage programme and one from Museum Practice and Management. A discussion took place encompassing how the students had located the programme, support provided by staff, the overall student experience and the voluntary work-based learning element of the provision.

4.2 The students were generally positive regarding all aspects discussed and of their overall experience of the programmes. However, the following negative responses were provided.

- Lack of sufficient work placements outside Greater Belfast area
- Access to a wider selection of online journals
- Difficulty in contacting staff on the Belfast campus

#### 5 MEETING WITH SUBJECT TEAM

##### Preparation for revalidation

5.1 In preparing for revalidation, care had been taken to ensure adherence with all the University's new and recent policies. Much of what was required had already been adopted. Module titles had not been changed. Recently, due to the organisational restructuring of the faculties, major changes had taken place resulting in the provision moving into a new School. At that time, the content of the provision had been adjusted to reflect the available expertise within the School. Adjustments to provision was a constant in response to ongoing internal and external changes in the environment.

5.2 The University's new curriculum design principles had been taken into account in reviewing the provision, for example, in ensuring that assignment word counts were appropriate to module sizes. However, occasionally it was fitting to restrict a word count to ensure a succinct piece of work which can sometimes be a more difficult exercise. The provision's assessment strategy was based primarily on two pieces of coursework, a report and an essay, per module. Several however also contained in addition, a short presentation or performance.

##### Internationalisation

5.3 Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies is a topic with international scope. While the programme was centred in Northern Ireland, its content contained themes that can easily bring in international practice from across the world. The presence of international students (recently from Europe and North America) also contributed to the programme's international context. Students want to reference their study to their own country. In addition, all the case studies have an international perspective. The international dimension was therefore naturally embedded in this programme.

##### Employability

5.4 Museum Practice and Management would appeal primarily, although not exclusively, to those already employed in the industry. The focus in Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies was entirely on employability. The programme's overall aim was to create a 'heritage professional' and to that end, the programme was a vehicle to employment. All students undertake voluntary work placements during the programme. Very often, there were more placement opportunities than there were students resulting in employers contacting the team early in the year seeking placement students. The teams' own networks were also an invaluable source. Students would also be encouraged to scrutinise job advertisements. While the work was voluntary, there was a structured process for placing students. One day per week spent on placement was the norm and quite often

students would switch placements in semester 2. One advantage of the small Northern Ireland museum sector was that it enabled students to be placed in small organisations where they learn a much wider range of skills than they would otherwise in a larger endeavour. The skills learned enhanced students' academic work and often, the topic of their final dissertation arose from their placement work.

5.5 The industry panel member, Dr Warleigh-Lack, suggested that references in the revalidation document to work placements would be more appropriately described as 'voluntary work placements'.

### Curriculum Design Principles

5.6 The taught modules within the provision were either 15- or 30-credit point modules. This suited the subject and reflected areas of practice. The smaller 15-credit point modules in the Cultural Heritage programme enabled the subject to be "broken down" and ensured that students were not overwhelmed. The size also suited the nature of the content. The team opined that the module sizes were "sensible" and "worked" in the context of the subject area. They also pointed out that the University's policy in this regard contained *guidelines* only.

### Learning outcomes

5.7 The panel noted that in each programme each of the module learning outcomes addressed all 22 programme learning outcomes. The team responded that this aspect had been given careful consideration and they were confident that each module was able to address each on the programme outcomes but in different ways. Coursework within the modules would touch on the various areas indicated in the programme outcomes to a greater or lesser extent. Even those outcomes associated with research activities would be reflected to a degree in all of the modules through research-based assignments. Constant repetition and reinforcement was a positive feature of the learning and teaching strategy. Students would be given examples of what good work looks like and where to pick up marks. Throughout the module, they would receive formative feedback to ensure they were prepared for the summative assessments.

### Feedback

5.8 Students had indicated that no class representatives had been appointed in their respective cohorts. The team stated that the appointment of class representatives had been offered but no one had accepted. Staff/Student Consultative Committees were always established and was a means for students to feedback issues to the course team. In addition, online discussion areas enabled student feedback and facilitated peer support. When on placement, students would receive face-to-face feedback from employers. Moreover, students on these programmes were mature students who had the confidence to bring concerns directly to staff.

### Modules

#### Research Project modules

5.9 The panel noted an absence of contact hours in the Research Project module in each of the programmes suggesting that there would be no supervisory tutorials. The team stated that this was misleading in that there would be supervisory meetings with students both as a group and individually. Throughout the module, staff would meet with students at regular intervals to gauge their progress. This would be timetabled into the module. The team demonstrated how this would work in the distance learning programme, Museum Practice and Management, through a short online presentation. Students would be provided with a module handbook that would include deadlines for review of project drafts by staff. The underpinning ethos was "to provide a little feedback, but often".

5.10 The team acknowledged that recommended reading lists were lengthy (there is no required reading) and explained that each week lecture material together with links to key reading related to for that week's work would be posted on Blackboard Learn. This would indicate key book chapters and relevant journal articles. By this means, students would receive clear direction throughout the module on what reading to focus on.

5.11 Modules in the Postgraduate Diploma stage of the Museum Practice and Management programme would be able to be taken in any order. However, not all modules would be offered in every semester so if a student chooses to take a module out of sync, they would have to wait until that module was being delivered.

5.12 Within each of the 30-credit point modules, there would be 36 hours of contact time. This would equate to 3 hours per week across the semester. The 3 hours would be taken up with a lecture, practical tasks and discussion periods. All lecture material would be made available in advance in Blackboard Learn.

5.13 Dr Warleigh-Lack suggested that it be made clearer in modules, *Cultures of Curatorship, Exhibitions: Practice and Evaluation* and *Communication and Learning in the Museum* the difference between 'curation' and 'public engagement'.

#### Library resources

5.14 All texts and journals identified in module reading lists would be available electronically, even the older texts. In addition, sector reports would be available online. One student stated that he had found it difficult to navigate the online system. The Team replied that library induction and clear guidelines were provided at the outset and, in addition, there was always a direct link to the relevant reading materials provided in the online module booklets. It was emphasised that a great deal of effort went into providing guidance for students.

#### CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The Panel commended the Subject Team on the following:

- Added value provided by external contributors
- Voluntary work-based placement component
- Internationalisation element and potential for growth of the provision
- Opportunities for individual specialisation within the curricula
- Currency and academic mix of the modules
- Discussion forum within the distance learning programme
- Content offering within Blackboard Learn in the distance learning programme
- Passion, knowledge and experience demonstrated by the subject team
- Positive academic and industry reputation of the provision

6.2 The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the provision within Subject Unit 7E Museum Studies (PG) be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2019/20 – 2023/24 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 25 January 2019 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

#### Conditions (both programmes)

- 1) Address all issues detailed in the appendix to the panel report.

## Recommendations

### MA Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies

- 1) Formalise opportunities for the provision of more face-to-face contact between staff and students.
- 2) Amend all references to work-based placements to 'voluntary work-based placement' in the revised document.

### PgDip / MA Museum Practice and Management

- 1) Enlist the services of the Department of Global Recruitment and Engagement to design a robust marketing strategy targeting international students.
- 2) Make explicit in the revised document the range of support available to students.

### Both programmes

- 1) Consider changing programmes to linked PgCert / PgDip / MA degrees to permit initial registration on the Certificate programme in an effort to encourage and increase demand.
- 2) Consider revising module sizes to 20-credit point modules for easier alignment with other provision within the School in creating shared modules.
- 3) Make clear the distinction between 'curation' and 'public engagement' in modules, *Cultures of Curatorship, Exhibitions: Practice and Evaluation* and *Communication and Learning in the Museum*.

## 7 APPRECIATION

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