

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE EVALUATION PANEL FOR THE BSC HONS MUSIC, SOUND AND TECHNOLOGY (FT/MAGEE)

24 October 2018

PRESENT: Dr Alan Brown, Associate Head of School of Engineering, Ulster University (Chair)
Dr Manuella Blackburn, Snr Lecturer in Music, Liverpool Hope University
Mr Richard Duckworth, Assistant Professor of Music (Music Technology), Department of Music, Trinity College, Dublin
Ms Stephanie Dunleavy, Lecturer, School of Nursing, Ulster University

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms D Troy, Academic Policy and Standards Officer, Academic Office, Ulster University

1 BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

The panel was convened to consider the following provision:

- BSc Hons Music, Sound and Technology (FT, Magee)

The proposed BSc Hons Music, Sound and Technology was being brought forward by the School of Arts and Humanities within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. It will be delivered at the Magee campus, over three academic years in full-time mode only. There are no exit awards.

The course comprises 6 compulsory 20 credit point modules in each of years one and two. There is an optional DPP/DPP(I)/DIAS in year three. In final year, students will undertake one compulsory 20 credit point module in semester one - Creative Business, and two options from three, followed by two compulsory 20 and 40 credit point modules respectively - Final Project (Theory and Practice) and Final Project (Practice).

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

1. Course submission;
2. Guidelines for Evaluation and Revalidation Panels;
3. QAA subject benchmark statement for Music (2016);
4. Reports from central departments (Library and IT);
5. Preliminary comments from Panel members.

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3.1 Resources

The Panel was content with the hardware resources in place to support the programme, however, requested confirmation that there was a similar commitment to software. The Senior Team provided assurance that the Faculty was fully committed to investing in the creative industries and significant investment had already been made in this area. Of particular note was the strategic investment of £11m made by the University in establishing a

Creative Industries Institute and the success in securing £13m funding in collaboration with Queen's University Belfast and industry partners, all of which would be of direct benefit to this course. Other funding bids were also ongoing and this fully demonstrated the Faculty's commitment in this area. Given the ever-changing nature of a very resource intensive industry and one that required constant investment and reinvestment this was key to success. A £10k investment had already been used to update one of the two sound studios and steps were already being taken to optimise how studio space would be used. It was also noted that lab spaces were open until 11.00 pm and also at weekends. The level of free lab space was currently approximately 50% and this provided both flexibility and sufficient time for students to work independently. It was also possible for the School to book external spaces to support its programmes and the work that students were doing.

Timetabling of lab and studio space was also currently being reviewed to ensure that these spaces were managed appropriately to develop independent learners with increased learning outside of direct taught sessions.

In terms of equipment, a number of strategies were in place both at Faculty and School level loaning equipment to students as well one investigating more experimental online learning. Discussions were already ongoing with the Department of Access, Digital and Distributed Learning (ADDL) with regard to the latter. It was the ambition to be at the cutting edge but the resources to underpin this were key and the full commitment of the School and Faculty to achieve this was assured.

The BSc Hons Music, Sound and Technology was a strategic priority programme for the Faculty and an annual cycle of investment to underpin the programme was already in place.

In relation to the capacity of software licences, the Senior Team advised that current Adobe cloud licences covered staff and student use on-campus only, however, discussions were currently ongoing with the provider to extend this to home use also for next academic year when this course would be first introduced.

3.2 Intakes

The Senior Team confirmed that the projected intake of 25 students remained. Capacity was available for more, however, this figure was realistic for now. It was hoped that through strong links with further education colleges that these numbers would grow going forward.

In respect of a current maximum intake, the Senior Team advised that this would be dependent on the quality of student experience and available lab space. Significant numbers over 25 would result in double teaching and this was not what the team wanted for the first cohorts.

In the shorter term, a wide range of external specialists were available to provide additional expertise and support for programme delivery, however, longer term it would be the intention to recruit an additional post to the School. One post was already being advertised imminently.

In summary, the minimum intake was 20, the maximum 30, with a target of 25 students.

3.3 Shared curriculum

The Panel noted that a number of modules were shared with other programmes and enquired as to the impact on resources or size of cohorts. The Senior Team confirmed that a number of modules were indeed shared with the BMus Hons Music, however, these were

a combination of lecturer and lab based so a full cohort was never in each area at the same time.

The School was also looking at strategies for economies of scale across its provision, for example, in relation to Business Enterprise Skills and had already secured four high profile guest speakers. A suite of modules around this area were currently being developed in collaboration with the Career Development Centre, which would be taught across all undergraduate programmes in the School. This facilitated inter-disciplinary working across drama, music and cinematic arts and was essential for the creative industries, as well as facilitating flexibility across subject teams.

3.4 Mode of Delivery and exit awards

It was confirmed that the course would be delivered in full-time mode only from academic year 2019/20 and if demand became evident for a part-time mode, this could be considered and approved through and a programme revision.

It was noted that there were no exit awards from the programme. The Senior Team advised that these may be introduced at a later time, however, discussions during the development process had questioned the benefit of exit awards to students and their value in the market place. The School wanted to offer the premium route only at this time.

3.5 Placement

The Panel commended the introduction of the optional paid placement or study abroad, Diploma in Professional Practice/Diploma in Professional Practice (International) and Diploma in International Academic Studies respectively and that this was a very attractive aspect of the course to prospective students. When asked how many students would historically have taken up placement, the Team advised that this had typically been in the region of 8 – 10. Acknowledging the value of placement in student development and learning, a more focused process was now in place with a member of academic staff in the role of Placement Co-ordinator.

Students were responsible for sourcing their own placement, with the process augmented by academic staff and colleagues from the Career Development Centre. Considerable work had already taken place and the Team was confident that a sufficient number and variety of placement opportunities would be available for these students of which to avail, with the emphasis being on their employability. Students would be made aware of the critical value of placement and the transferable skills that would be developed during that time. Some students may choose not to undertake placement and could proceed directly from year 2 to final year. Uptake of the DIAS option had historically been quite low, however, it was anticipated that this would increase going forward.

Students were supported in a number of ways before and during placement with tripartite agreement between the student, employer and University in place from the start of the process.

To conclude the Senior Team meeting, the Associate Dean (Education) noted the drive, enthusiasm and passion of the Course Team for this course from the outset including how it dovetailed into existing provision and for which the Faculty was fully supportive.

4 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

4.1 Curriculum Design Principles

The Panel noted that twelve modules had not been reviewed in line with the curriculum design principles in that a module normally would have no more than four learning outcomes – outcomes in these modules ranged from 6 to 23. The principles also set out that a module should normally have two items of assessment and again, some modules had not been reviewed in this regard. It was acknowledged that some of these modules were shared but that a review would be undertaken across all modules prior to resubmission of the documentation.

4.2 Learning Outcomes

The Panel noted the extensive use of ‘develop a deep understanding’, in some modules but in particular in the programme learning outcomes. It was acknowledged that this language was used in the QAA Subject Benchmark, however, it was important that outcomes were framed in such a way that they were assessable. The Team would undertake a review of learning outcomes in the revised course document.

4.3 Shared modules and resources

The Team confirmed that six modules in the course were shared with other courses, mainly the BMus Hons Music but that there was more than sufficient capacity for scheduled and independent use of the studio and lab spaces. These modules were optional in the Music programme and involved small numbers so capacity was not an issue.

The Course Team assured the Panel that all students, regardless of background, were equally well prepared to undertake the two music modules – MUS302 and MUS506. Staff were well experienced in combining cohorts with students from traditional music and non-traditional backgrounds and in fact students from this course would be more aligned than those from that which it had replaced.

4.4 Pre-requisites

A number of pre-requisites were stated for the Scoring for Screen module, with the one applicable to this course being compulsory meaning that it had to be studied by all students. It was suggested that the Team should take cognisance of the University’s new guidelines on pre-requisites which must be studied (rather than passed) and remove any unnecessary pre-requisite modules.

The Team noted that the assessment for the Scoring for Screen module allowed students to customise the task depending on their area of interest. When asked to define ‘score’, the Team explained that this was around the idea of short film/screen composition rather than a traditional score per se and a traditional scoring background was not expected in students on the Music, Sound and Technology course. If, however, students from such a background wished to use traditional scoring skills, this could also be accommodated.

Coding was already part of the course, however, the Team advised the Panel that live coding was an area in which a new module was currently being developed for the future.

4.5 Reading/Listening Lists

The Panel noted issues around currency and breadth of a number of the module reading lists. The Team advised that the listening lists were augmented with, for example, Spotify and what was included in module descriptions simply covered what was held in the Library. These would be reviewed as part of the other post-meeting requirements.

The Team advised that they were currently discussing issues such as the possibility of developing collections within the School and it was recognised that this was work required for the future. Good links existed with contemporary music collections and students already had access to this.

4.6 Gender Balance and Diversity

Discussion took place with regard to the gender balance and diversity in terms of the staff team as well as the course. The Team was aware of the issue and advised that the split in the School's provision had been 70/30 male to female in earlier years, however, in music it had now shifted to 60/40 female to male students. Similar gender balance issues were evident in other institutions in the Republic of Ireland.

It was important that to address any imbalance, the course was promoted to all genders through marketing material and the involvement of all staff in those processes. Furthermore, it was hoped that the staffing balance may be addressed in any new staff appointments. The Team advised that a more balanced approach was also facilitated externally through the use of a range of guest lecturers and keynote speakers.

The Panel noted that it would be useful to develop a formal strategy in this regard or including it as part of the marketing strategy. The Team advised that the overall School was much more balanced in terms of gender, whilst at the same time recognising the issue and noting that to address it was challenging.

4.7 Marketing and promotion

The Panel asked the Team to set out how it would communicate and market the course, in particular to those coming directly from school and 'A' level. The Course Team advised that a marketing 'push' was currently being developed. This would involve not only direct talks in schools but a range of workshops to fully show what the course was about, the first of which was taking place next week on the area of electronics. It was essential that the right students were recruited and that they were fully committed to course. Significant effort and groundwork in respect of community engagement was also underway – this engagement was critical in promoting the course. It was further noted that there was a vibrant music scene in the North West and this new programme would also provide opportunities for those already in the industry to study locally.

4.8 Entrance requirements

The Panel enquired if an interview formed part of the application process but was advised that this was only applicable for APEL which also required alongside it a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate previous knowledge and skills.

4.9 Software Skills

The Course Team confirmed that software skills were taught from the basics in year one. The dynamic of the class would be assessed and additional tutorials could be provided to any students who required further assistance in this area.

4.10 Assessment

Group work was used as a method of assessment in a number of modules and where this contributed to a student's final degree classification, it was noted that the University's Policy on Group Work stated that an individual's contribution should be at least 25% of the mark.

The Team advised that the students were given the opportunity to decide whether the mark was individual or combined and they found that students generally contributed well to group tasks. Modules also generally involved an individual assessment element. Peer assessment was also utilised but the Team were very aware of and able to identify any issues early in the process. Engagement with online systems also facilitated tracking of individual student's contribution.

The Panel stated that it was essential that robust processes around the assessment and marking of group work were in place and that they were applied consistently across modules.

4.11 Feedback

The School's policy on feedback was a turnaround of 14 days (the University's policy was 15 working days but this was currently under review). Although the exemplar assessment schedule was missing from the course document, the Team confirmed that assessment was well spread across the year. An assessment calendar was also in place and was used by staff to avoid assessment 'bunching'. If any such cases became apparent, timings could be adjusted accordingly.

4.12 Students with additional needs

The Team confirmed that a wide range of additional support was available through the Student Support Department for any students who required it. Elevator and chair lifts provided access to the School's studio space.

When asked if it would be possible for a student with profound hearing loss could undertake the course, the Team advised that they would have to look at adapting individual modules. They advised that a blind student had undertaken the previous Design course and they had been able to be accommodated with assessments being specially adapted to their particular needs.

4.13 CPD

The Panel asked for clarification on the CPD element of the course and if this involved the creation of a portfolio. The Team advised that this was part of personal development planning and not linked to the whole programme nor was it a required element.

4.14 Student Societies

The Panel asked if there any student societies were in place as these could bring about many social and academic positives. Support could also be provided by the Students' Union or by staff mentors within the School. There were no better ambassadors for a programme than the students. The Team advised that none were currently available, however, this was something that could be considered and supported going forward.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the programmes on the following:

- i) The ambitious course which would be delivered to a very high standard by a very committed course team;
- ii) The widening participation opportunities which the course facilitated in attracting students from a wide range of backgrounds;
- iii) The introduction of the optional placement or study abroad;

- iv) The inter-disciplinarity opportunities with other courses in the School;
- v) The good blend of practical, theoretical, aesthetics and coding in the course;
- vi) The very timely course, in particular the success in gaining creative clusters funding which will be of direct benefit to this new course.

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 to 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.

Minimum and maximum intakes

The minimum intake was 20, the maximum 30, with a target of 25 students.

Conditions

- i) That all issues identified by the Academic Office and detailed in the appendix to the panel report are addressed and specifically those issues included therein which were also raised by the Panel in relation to review of module learning outcomes and assessment in line with the curriculum design principles and the currency of reading and listening lists.

Recommendations

- i) To keep the gender balance under review to include marketing, staffing, student cohorts and placement opportunities (section 4.6 refers);
- ii) To draw up and include in the documentation a table for software upgrade cycles, similar to that already in place for hardware (section 3.1 refers).

7 APPRECIATION

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