UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL: REVALIDATION UNIT 9A2 EDUCATION

23 January 2019

PANEL:

Professor H Farley, Associate Dean (Education), Ulster University Business School (Chair)
Mrs U Chaney, School of Nursing, Ulster University
Mr K McStravock, President, Students' Union, Ulster University
Dr S Burton, Director of Teaching Innovation, Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University
Dr G Husband, Lecturer in Professional Education and Leadership, University of Sterling

REVALIDATION UNIT CO-ORDINATOR:

Dr T Irwin, School of Education, Ulster University

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr B McArthur, Academic Office, Ulster University

1   INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider the following provision within Revalidation Unit 9A2 Education.

- Certificate in Teaching [PT] [JN/ME]
- PgCert in Education (Further Education) [PT] [JN/ME]

The Certificate in Teaching (CiT) and PgCert Education (FE) are the only acceptable academic qualifications recognised by the Department for the Economy (DfE) and are mandatory contractual requirements for those working in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector. The programmes should be taken within the first three years of obtaining a permanent contract of employment within the sector with the CiT required by those working in private training organisations and the PgCert Education (FE) a requirement for those working in the FE sector.

2   DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

- Agenda and programme
- Guidelines for revalidation panels
- QAA subject benchmark statement for Education Studies (2015).
- External examiners' reports for the last two years
- Preliminary comments provided by panel members
- Revalidation documentation

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

The panel met initially with Faculty senior management comprising, Professor R Fee, Associate Dean (Education), Professor D Barr, Head of School of Education and the Revalidation Unit Coordinator, Dr T Irwin, before meeting with a group of current students and one recent graduate, and finally with the subject team.

3   MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

Introduction

The programmes were a long standing and successful part of the School of Education's portfolio of provision. During the lifetime of the provision, a strong collaborative partnership had developed with its college partners in the FE sector. The provision aligned with the School's emphasis on the development of non-MaSN provision, its focus on employability and its widening access agenda as evidenced by the diverse backgrounds of the student cohorts on these programmes. The programmes were relevant to the needs of the sector, FE colleges and students, and were an important part of the School's aim to provide teaching education through to Master's level. Graduates of the CiT were able to progress into the Postgraduate Certificate and on successful completion of which, were able to obtain 60 credits of exemption from the Schools MEd Education should they wish to progress their studies.

Proposed changes to the provision

The reason for the proposed title change to the postgraduate programme from 'Postgraduate Certificate *in* Education' (PgCert) to a 'Postgraduate Certificate *of* Education' (PGCE) was that the 'PGCE' prefix was a more readily recognisable qualification in the teacher education marketplace. It also aligned with the School's other teaching training provision and better reflected the programme's teacher education focus. The external panel members were supportive of the proposal.

The structure of the CiT had been changed from six 10-credit point modules to two 30-credit point modules in order to facilitate design of a learning, teaching and assessment strategy that was more reflective of practice. Currently, it was difficult to design teaching and assessment across three separate modules whose content was clearly related and difficult to teach as discrete topics. The use of 30-credit point modules facilitated a more 'joined-up' approach both in terms of learning and teaching and of assessment. In addition, the use of larger modules better suited the block delivery model that was interactive and research informed.

Demand

Demand for the provision has remained relatively high during the current approval period albeit with some fluctuation from year to year due largely to budgetary constraints in the FE sector. Overall, demand remained high. There were regular meetings with the DfE whose advisors have guided the provision over many years in line with the DfE's strategic priorities and who contributed to the development of the provision for revalidation. While the majority of students came from the FE colleges, approximately 30 students per year were from the non-FE sector.

Learning and teaching

The diversity of backgrounds within the student cohorts was regarded as a major strength of the provision as it brought a richness to the student experience. Inter alia, it facilitated peer learning. For example, mixed groups from the same background and those from mixed backgrounds were established and students were required to teach in front of their group. This provided an opportunity for peer learning, including for example, on what approaches worked in their classrooms and how technology could enhance teaching. Learning from others' experiences was an important feature of the programme's learning and teaching strategy.

Staff

Only the course director of the programmes was a full-time member of staff. This reflected the position in the other PGCE programmes within the School. In the past, there had been three full-time staff. However, one of those had been re-appointed and would be in post for the next academic year. In addition, there was one permanent member of staff on an annualised hours contract and three from the FE sector on casually paid hourly contracts who were highly experienced and committed teachers. The staff deficit will be addressed within the next 18 months. In the meantime, there was a sufficient complement staff to ensure a rich student experience.

Action research

While a focus of the provision was action research, an informal, classroom-based approach was taken that did not require formal approval through the University's Ethics Committee. However, staff were very conscious of, and made students aware, of surrounding issues such as confidentiality, consent and data protection.

4   MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with a group of five students, four from the current provision and one recent graduate. A wide-ranging discussion took place in areas including cohort diversity, mentoring in the colleges, teaching observation, the use of Studiosity and Turnitin, and the support provided by staff.

The students were generally complimentary of their learning experience although there were varying experiences of college mentoring whereby not all had received the same level of support. The diversity of the cohort was regarded positively, teaching observation described as "terrifying" but "very useful", and the use of Studiosity and Tunitin as beneficial although two students had not heard of Studiosity. Generally, teaching staff were supportive and approachable.

The change in the CiT structure to two 30-credit point modules was welcomed and "made sense" and the view was that the new competency-based assessment strategy would suit some students but not others.

Progression from the CiT to the Postgraduate Certificate represented a large step up in level that required additional support. An 'academic skills' workshop at the outset of each programme would be welcomed.

5   MEETING WITH SUBJECT TEAM

Preparing for revalidation

In preparing for revalidation, feedback was sought from FE colleagues (who were also members of the provision's course committees), DfE advisors, current students, both informally and through the Staff/Student Consultative Committees. One aim of the revalidation had been to align assessment requirements across the School's teacher education provision. Being the only provider of teacher education across the three levels was a unique selling point. It was therefore thought sensible to align the curricula, structures and strategies as far as possible which also facilitated the sharing of resources. Graduates of the provision were qualified to teach in the post-14 education or training sector in a full-time or part-time capacity so were qualified to teach in a post-primary setting.

Assessment strategy

It was decided to change the assessment strategy in each programme to a competency-based framework rather than the current percentage marking. Furthermore, given that not all the cohort would be starting from the same place, and recognising the need for a balance between academic theory and practice, a move to a competency-based framework appeared appropriate. This would reflect the approach taken in teacher education elsewhere in the School and with the General Teaching Council's competence framework. Also, currently the collaboration element seemed to be missing which a competency-based approach would facilitate and allow students to act with greater freedom.

Under the competency-based approach, when marking assignments, work would be assessed against three basic criteria, knowledge, understanding and reading, and would then be given an overall mark of competent or not competent. This approach would take some of the pressure off students and make the work more creative and enjoyable. Initially, colleagues on the School's PGCE provision would be able to give staff the benefit of their experience.

Digital technology

Use of technology was now an integral element of teaching activity and was embedded within the curriculum of both programmes. This was important given that the online environment was becoming ever more prevalent. Technology specialists contribute to both programmes through guest lectures and both programmes contained opportunities to explore technology enhanced delivery methods. In addition, students experienced in the use of technology would be invited to demonstrate its various uses to their peers. Disparity in technology skills existed across the sector with some workplaces having well-developed technology arrangements whilst others have only limited resources. Many colleges however have now set targets for dedicated online teaching time and some have 'Virtual Services Teams', ICT champions and digital mentors who mentor colleagues in the use of technology. It was therefore important that students become accustomed to and knowledgeable about online teaching. However, it was important that they learn it was not simply a matter of setting aside time for teaching online but to reflect on why online teaching might be a better option, whether it added value and whether it worked online.

Observed teaching

In each programme, students would undertake an observed teaching session in each semester. In the Postgraduate Certificate, there would be an additional session involving their college mentor. Further sessions could be arranged if recommended by the mentor. Moreover, at the end of the postgraduate programme, another observed session would take place involving both University and college staff. Added to those, within the classroom, mini teaching sessions would be arranged when students would perform in front of a small group of their peers and tutors and would receive feedback from both. The teaching sessions would not be summatively assessed; rather they would provide a developmental and formative function. In preparing for the session, students would be required to produce a lesson plan and scheme of work and afterwards, feedback received would be used to inform a written reflective piece as part of their module assignment.

Action research

Postgraduate students would have an opportunity to carry out action research in the form of a small-scale action research project. The research would relate to a specific pedagogical issue or challenge within the student's own workplace. Students would be able to choose their own area for investigation. They would be provided with guidelines for the conduct of their research and tutors would provide advice throughout. They would also be shown good examples of past projects. The best projects would be disseminated to the other colleges and, where appropriate, college funding made available to realise the project.

Diversity of cohort

Given the diversity of the student cohorts, there was a mix of abilities and levels of previous academic achievement. In addressing this, during initial induction, skills gaps would identified and remedial action taken through the provision of additional support sessions. Support in this area had been strengthened in recent years through provision of an academic skills tool-kit on Blackboard Learn. The recent addition of the Studiosity software further enhanced online support. Moreover, when students were in college, further support would be provided and a Learning and Teaching Advisor appointed.

Progression from CiT to PgCert

The students had identified an issue concerning the step up from level 4 to level 7 upon graduating from the CiT and progressing into the Postgraduate Certificate. The Team stated that the difficulty was recognised and a structure was in place to very early identify those students requiring extra support. An area on Blackboard Learn was dedicated to instruction on academic skills. In addition, each student would have an Advisor of Studies appointed. A library induction would take place at the outset of the programme and, where necessary, extra tuition could be arranged through the Student Support Department. Furthermore, students would be able to avail of the Studiosity software. In response to a suggestion that not all the students were aware of Studiosity, the Team emphasised that tutors did talk about it with *all* students.

Staff - professional development

Staff were encouraged to continue with their own personal development and some of the College-based staff present outlined examples of their continuing professional development activities through, for example, attainment of a relevant postgraduate degree.

6   CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the Subject Team on the following:

- Strong commitment to the values of Further Education and evidence of real collaboration across an established community of practice
- Great opportunities for peer learning celebrating the diversity within the cohorts
- Evidence of impact through strong dissemination of practice both within the University and throughout the FE sector
- Critical and appropriate use of digital technologies within the learning, teaching and assessment strategies

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the provision within revalidation unit 9A2 Education 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 8 March 2019 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

1) All issues detailed in the appendix to the panel report to be addressed.
2) The competency framework governing the design of the provision to be made more explicit together with how it will be addressed through the provision's learning, teaching and assessment strategy.

Recommendations

1) Ensure that students are made aware of the support available through the Studiosity software, for example, inter alia, through inclusion of a reference in the provision's online student support area.
2) Keep under review the operation of provision's new competency-based assessment strategy.

7   APPRECIATION

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