

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE EVALUATION PANEL FOR MEd HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTICE

19 October 2018

PANEL: Dr M Keenan, Associate Dean (Education), Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment, Ulster University [Chair]
Dr R Telford, Lecturer in Sports Development, School of Sport, Faculty of Life and Health Sciences, Ulster University
Professor P Parker, Deputy Director, Department for Learning Enhancement and Development, City, University of London
Dr G Martin, Programme Leader, Academic Professional Development, Institute for Education, Bath Spa University

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

1 INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider a proposal from the Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice (CHERP), under the auspices of Access, Digital and Distributed Learning, to offer MEd Higher Education Practice in part-time mode on all campuses from January 2019.

The Panel initially met with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) (Professor P Bartholomew), the Director of the Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice (Professor D Hazlett) and the Chair of the Course Planning Committee (Dr R Curran). The proposal 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 Evaluation Panels;
- (iii) the QAA Statement for Master's Degree Characteristics (2015);
- (iv) a report from the Library;
- (v) preliminary comments from Panel members;
- (vi) Academic Office notes on regulatory and standards matters.

3 BACKGROUND

Participants will register on the MEd Higher Education Practice having already gained 60 credit points from completion of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice (PgCHEP) or equivalent. Successful completion of a further 120 credit points will allow participants to achieve the MEd. The MEd programme offers seven modules: six 30-credit point modules and one 60-credit point project module. Participants can choose any combination of 120 credits for the MEd award and may exit after completion of 60 credit points with a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education Practice (PgDHEP). The programme is available to Ulster University staff only.

Applicants for the programme must have achieved Descriptor 2 (D2) (UK Professional Standards Framework) or above, awarded within the last five years. Applicants awarded D2 or above more than five years ago must demonstrate how they have remained in good standing. In addition, there are minimum requirements that participants must meet in terms of their work-based opportunities in order to undertake the programme and meet the assessment criteria. These include, for example, direct engagement with learners in a Higher Education context, leading programme curriculum design and responsibility for leading themed areas identified for enhancement.

MEETING WITH SENIOR STAFF

4 HOW THE PROPOSAL FITS WITHIN THE FIVE & FIFTY STRATEGIC PLAN

The Panel began by asking the Senior Staff to outline how the proposal fitted within the University's Five & Fifty Strategic Plan. The Senior Staff advised that the MEd programme had been designed to support staff in meeting the challenging targets set out in the Five & Fifty Plan with regard to delivering excellence in teaching and learning and developing leadership capacity for ongoing enhancement. The Senior Staff explained that the modules within the programme had been designed to encourage participants to take on work-based challenges and produce outputs that would impact positively on the work of others and the student experience. The programme was part of an ongoing Professional Development Framework, providing the next step for those who had completed the PgCHEP, and would support and develop staff to deliver a high quality experience to students.

5 TITLE

The Panel queried the rationale for choosing a Master of Education award and was advised that this award had been chosen to distinguish the programme as a professional qualification and to differentiate it from the Master of Arts or Master of Science awards already held by staff. The MEd award indicated that a different approach had been taken to this Master's programme which did not require completion of a final dissertation or project. The title 'Higher Education Practice' linked the programme with the PgCHEP. In response to a further question from the Panel, the Senior Staff advised that the choice had been made to locate the programme in CHERP rather than the School of Education in order to distinguish it as a professional programme.

6 SUCCESS OF PROGRAMME

The Panel enquired if the success of the programme would be defined in terms of how many completed the full Master's programme or the completion of individual modules. The Senior Staff stated that the MEd constituted a formal framework and could be more actively promoted as a full programme than as stand-alone modules. The programme as a whole focussed on enhancing and facilitating leadership capacity and capability and additional modules would be brought on board as the programme developed. The Panel was advised that the MEd programme would be deemed to have been a success when participation of staff in this programme was perceived as a potential solution to problems facing the Faculties. The aim was to persuade management within Faculties to view the participation of staff in the MEd programme as a means of providing solutions to problems and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.

7 ADDED VALUE OF MEd

The Panel asked the Senior Staff to explain how the MEd added value. The Senior Staff responded that the PgCHEP module *Shaping the Curriculum in Higher Education* had been piloted to provide support for staff in relation to the new Curriculum Design Principles. Forty-four members of staff had taken the pilot module and, whilst not all undertook the assessment, over half had completed the module. Subsequent emails received from staff enquiring about further development opportunities indicated that staff would be keen to undertake the MEd.

A data-centric approach had been taken in developing the programme. Professor Bartholomew pointed out that 70 of the University's programmes were currently in Special Measures and that action plans, involving 831 separate interventions, had been drawn up. Staff were thus already engaging in the enhancement agenda. The programme was giving academic credit for work that was already being carried out and aimed to empower staff to address problems that were being encountered.

The Chair enquired how the programme would provide support for Faculties in terms of the Continuous Assurance and Enhancement Cycle (CAEC). The Senior Staff explained that the use of data had been incorporated within each module and that the modules aimed to support participants in their understanding of how individuals can work within a team to make enhancements. The data prompted staff to look at what was happening and devise methods to improve and enhance. The structured programme would also be valuable in terms of its inter-disciplinarity.

8 SUSTAINABILITY OF OPTIONAL MODULES

The Panel queried how sustainable the optional modules were, given the relatively small teaching team. The Senior Staff advised that there had been an increase in the number of CHERP staff and that there were now nine members of staff. The Panel was informed that a team teaching approach would be adopted and that priority modules would be offered at key points. As the programme became established, the Course Team would become more aware of staff priorities. A member of staff from Employability was on the Course Team and it was envisaged that staff from other areas would contribute to modules. Student Support staff were involved in the *Enhancing Student Experiences through Inclusive, Collaborative Partnership* module and it was hoped that those in Management and Leadership roles within the University would contribute to the *Academic Leadership for Enhancement in Higher Education* module.

Professor Bartholomew advised that the staff workload model was currently being re-assessed and that those who wished to undertake the programme would be supported to do so. The Panel was assured that the size of the teaching team delivering the MEd was comparable with teaching teams delivering similar courses at other universities.

9 DISSEMINATION OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Panel noted from the course documentation that the programme would incorporate an Annual Sharing Event. The Senior Staff stated that this event would allow staff to influence the practice of colleagues by sharing work they had undertaken in modules and outputs from assessments. Professor Bartholomew highlighted the two stages of dissemination: firstly the act of dissemination itself and secondly the provision of targeted support for those who wished to take and use what had been disseminated.

MEETING WITH THE COURSE TEAM

10 PgCHEP

The Panel asked the Team to elaborate on how the PgCHEP underpinned the MEd programme. The Team explained that the achievement of D2 was a requirement for new staff during their probationary period. Those with little or no experience of teaching undertook the PgCHEP to gain D2 whereas those with teaching experience gained D2 through the Enhance Professional Development and Recognition Scheme. The MEd would allow staff to further develop their skills within a structured and supportive framework and sustain motivation for learning and teaching.

11 MARKET

The Panel queried why the MEd was available to Ulster University staff only. The Team advised that the decision only to offer the programme internally had not been based on the capacity of the Team but on the fact that the programme was so closely aligned to the Institutional Strategy. This did not however preclude the possibility of the programme being delivered to a wider market at some point in the future.

12 DEMAND

Given that staff workloads for the year had already been set, the Panel asked if the Team was confident that the programme could attract 25 participants for the January 2019 start. The Team stated that, whilst 25 participants could not be guaranteed, there had been numerous expressions of interest. The Team's aim had been to align the modules to staff priorities and formalise work already being done by staff by placing it within a structured framework. All modules were predicated on work-based practice and the programme would support staff with work they were carrying out as part of their teaching role.

13 ADMISSION CRITERIA

The Panel queried if those who had gained D2 without completing the PgCHEP would be exempt 60 credit points of the MEd. The Team confirmed that this would be the case but that applicants were required to have been awarded D2 within the last five years otherwise they would have to demonstrate how they had remained in good standing. The Team explained that the PgCHEP learning outcomes were based on the criteria of D2 so any applicants who had achieved D2 would have met all of the PgCHEP learning outcomes. The Team stated that this had been discussed at length prior to the evaluation event and that within the internal market for the MEd programme there were those who held D2 but had not completed the PgCHEP. Some of these members of staff had achieved Senior Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy and the Team was confident that these applicants would have met the PgCHEP learning outcomes. The Panel queried how the Team would be confident that those who had gained D2 at another institution had achieved the PgCHEP learning outcomes. The Team stated that such applicants would be required to demonstrate good standing.

14 MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM COHORT SIZES

The Team confirmed a maximum cohort size of 25 participants and a minimum cohort size of eight.

15 VIABILITY OF MODULES

The Panel noted that the course document stated that a minimum of eight participants would be required to ensure a module's viability and queried if the modules would run with less than eight if, for example, a participant had to withdraw. The Team stated that the programme would be promoted as actively as possible and that, within the flexible postgraduate framework, staff might take modules as stand-alone modules. The Team assured the Panel that it was committed to delivering the modules to those who had signed up for them, even if the numbers fell below eight as a result of withdrawal. The viability of the modules would however be kept under review.

16 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Panel asked the Team to outline the extent and nature of stakeholder engagement in the development and design of the programme. The Team stated that a series of workshops had been held and current issues facing the sector had been taken into account. The Team had consulted with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the PgCHEP external examiner, and a focus group had been organised with those undertaking the *Shaping the Curriculum in Higher Education* module. In addition, an online survey had been carried out among CHERP users, Associate Deans (Education) and Heads of School. An iterative process of curriculum design had followed and the stakeholders consulted again. A mock evaluation event had also been held. The outcomes of the stakeholder engagement had been included in the course document as an appendix.

17 CONTENT

17.1 Choice of Modules

The Panel was of the view that the programme might benefit from the inclusion of core modules and queried the rationale for designating all modules as optional. The Team explained that the programme was aimed not only at academic staff but also at staff from central departments, such as the Library, Employability or Student Support. It would therefore be impossible to offer core modules to match the priorities of such a diverse group of participants.

The Panel enquired how the modules had been chosen and was advised that the modules had been developed to address a combination of what was happening across the sector as a whole and Ulster's own Institutional priorities. The Panel queried why modules addressing areas such as pedagogic practice and use of technology / flexible learning had not been included, but was informed by the Team that the use of technology had been embedded throughout the modules. Examples were given of how modules PHE709 *Enhancing Assessment Design and Feedback* and PHE711 *Leading Team-based Curriculum Design* incorporated the use of technology. The Panel was informed that all of the PgCHEP modules were delivered by blended learning so staff would be aware of various technologies.

The Chair enquired which module dealt with Special Measures and the Continuous Assurance and Enhancement Cycle and was informed that module PHE712 *Enhancing Student Experiences through Inclusive, Collaborative Partnership* focused on designing a solution to a problem using an enquiry-based approach. The Team explained that the

philosophy behind most of the modules included in the programme was to encourage staff to think more collectively and take collective ownership of a problem and its solution in order to enhance the student experience.

17.2 PHE715 *Transforming Professional Practice in Higher Education* (Negotiated Project)

The discussion then turned to the project module. The Panel welcomed the inclusion of the piece of coursework on dissemination strategy and artefact but queried what sort of artefact could be produced within the 2,000-word limit. The Team explained that the artefact would be used as part of the MEd Annual Sharing Event and could take the form of, for example, a poster or abstract for a journal. The Panel also queried if participants could develop an article for publication instead of the 6,000-word project report, and was advised that the report could be turned into an article or proposal. The Panel then enquired why the project module had five learning outcomes, instead of the standard four, and was informed that the project was designed around five steps of action learning, hence the five learning outcomes.

18 STRUCTURE

18.1 Module Size

The Panel was of the view that 30 credit points in one semester would be a heavy workload for staff in addition to their teaching and queried why the modules had not been presented as long-thin across the full year. The Team stated that support would be provided for participants who required additional time to complete a module. When the 20-credit point *Shaping the Curriculum in Higher Education* PgCHEP module had been piloted, staff had reported that they spent more time on the module than the notional hours and considered the assignments to be too short. Consequently the decision had been taken that the MEd programme should comprise 30-point modules. The Team explained that for the September intake, an induction would be held for each module in June. The Team assured the Panel that there would be on-going evaluation of the programme and the delivery of the modules would be kept under review.

18.2 Flexibility

The Team advised that there was flexibility within the MEd programme to accommodate workloads and other commitments of staff. The University's flexible postgraduate framework allowed staff to retain credit points from stand-alone modules and complete the MEd at a later date. Some staff might choose to take modules that were appropriate for them at a certain stage in their career.

19 DELIVERY

19.1 PHE710 *Developing Excellence in Learning & Teaching*

The Panel noted that the modules were described as 'blended' and enquired how this would work in practice. The Team explained that a flipped approach would be taken with the use of online environments to convey factual information so that face-to-face class time could be used more effectively. One module, PHE710 *Developing Excellence in Learning & Teaching*, would be delivered fully online. It was envisaged that there would be smaller numbers taking this module and a flexible approach would be taken with the possibility of online sessions being complemented by one-to-one coaching.

19.2 PHE713 *Enhancing Employability and Enterprise in Higher Education*

The Team explained that module PHE713 *Enhancing Employability and Enterprise in Higher Education* aimed to encourage staff to think outside of the University and develop partnerships with enterprise. The module's Design Thinking Workshop would be delivered in an industry location.

19.3 PHE709 *Enhancing Assessment Design and Feedback*

The Panel was informed that module PHE709 *Enhancing Assessment Design and Feedback* would mostly be delivered using interactive workshops to encourage dialogue between participants. The aim was to promote a community of practice where participants received formative feedback from each other.

20 LOCATION

The Panel enquired how the delivery of the programme across all campuses would be managed and was advised that the programme would be Jordanstown-based for administrative purposes but could be delivered at all campuses depending on where the participants were located.

21 ASSESSMENT

The Panel questioned if the nature of the assessment of modules, such as module PHE711 *Leading Team-based Curriculum Design* and module PHE714 *Academic Leadership for Enhancement in Higher Education*, might preclude some staff from taking them. The Team stated that module PHE711 had been developed to facilitate the curriculum design process but that the module was not restricted to this and could equally apply to the design of any programme of learning. With regard to module PHE714, the Panel queried if all participants would be able to undertake a strategic project. The Team stated that the assessment had been designed to be sufficiently flexible in order to accommodate leaders at all levels, not just at management level, and that the assessment was process-driven rather than product-driven.

The Panel noted that the module description for PHE709 *Enhancing Assessment Design and Feedback* stated, "Although it is anticipated that assessment artefact submissions will be text-based, participants may wish to negotiate alternative assessment artefacts ..." and enquired what guidelines were in place to ensure equivalence of assessment. The Module Co-ordinator advised that the module aimed to provide flexibility and that alternatives might be, for example, interview-based, an oral presentation or a videocast. Equivalence Guidelines had been produced and alternative assessment would be discussed with the Module Co-Ordinator and a mapping exercise carried out to ensure that the learning outcomes of the module would be achieved.

The Panel noted that the weightings of pieces of assessment varied across the modules and that the assessment of very few modules appeared to adhere to the Curriculum Design Principle of two pieces of assessment per module. The Team stated that the use of portfolios had been adopted as this method of assessment worked well in the PgCHEP programme.

22 ANNUAL SHARING EVENT

The Panel enquired what form the Annual Sharing Event would take. The Team explained that this would be held in semester one each year and participants who had completed modules would be invited to share the work they had undertaken for their assessment with prospective MEd participants, Heads and Associate Heads of School, Associate Deans and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education). The Team stated that the aim was to encourage staff to view the MEd programme as a means of enhancement and not simply an academic qualification. A similar type of event was held as part of the PgCHEP. The Team explained that the PgCHEP and MEd programmes were about Institutional growth and enhancement. The programmes encouraged staff from different disciplines to collaborate with each other and provided a forum for the cross-fertilisation of ideas and sharing of good practice.

23 PERSONAL TUTOR

The Panel enquired if participants would be assigned a personal tutor and was advised that they would not, but that all participants would be well supported by the Module Coordinators and their peers. The Course Director would assume the role of Advisor of Studies and those undertaking the project module would be assigned a dedicated supervisor.

24 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the Team on the following aspects of the provision:

- (i) for developing the programme, which provided an opportunity for staff beyond the PgCHEP;
- (ii) the opportunity for prospective participants to meet with the Team before committing to the programme;
- (iii) the potential of the programme to support and underpin Institutional priorities;
- (iv) the way in which the programme provided support for leadership and the growth of future leaders within the Institution;
- (v) the flexibility offered by the programme which enabled participants to take the 60-credit point project first;
- (vi) the emphasis within the programme on the sharing and dissemination of good practice across the University.

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 2018/19 (January 2019 start) – 2022/23), 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 30 November 2018 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Condition

That all of the points raised by the Academic Office in the Appendix be addressed.

Strong Recommendation

That the admission requirements for those holding recognition of achievement of Descriptor 2 (UK Professional Standards Framework) but who have not completed the PgCHEP be clarified in the documentation.

Recommendations

- (i) that the size of the modules, with their associated workload, and the timeframe (one semester) for completing them be kept under review;
- (ii) that the opportunities be maximised for the programme / modules in terms of the CPD framework;
- (iii) that the module description for PHE711 *Leading Team-based Curriculum Design* be revisited to make clear that the module relates to designing any programme of learning and is not restricted to designing a curriculum.

25 APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked the Panel members for their valuable contribution to the evaluation exercise. The Panel was also thanked by Dr Curran, Chair of the Course Planning Committee. Professor Bartholomew thanked the Team for developing a fit-for-purpose programme.