

## UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

### REPORT OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL MEETING FOR SUBJECT UNITS 1E: ACCOUNTING AND 5P MARKETING AT BELFAST METROPOLITAN COLLEGE (TITANIC QUARTER)

17 APRIL 2018

PANEL: Professor P Hanna, Associate Dean (Global Engagement), Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment (Chair)  
Mrs V Ellis-Vowles (Marketing), Senior Lecturer, Lincoln International Business School  
Dr K Munro (Accounting), Senior Lecturer, University of Northumbria  
Professor G Armstrong, Head of Department of Accounting, Finance and Economics, Ulster University Business School  
Professor H Farley, Associate Dean (Education), Ulster University Business School  
Ms R Dickson, Associate Head of School, Belfast School of Art, Ulster University  
Ms N McAllen, Student Representative, Belfast Metropolitan College

In attendance: Ms C Reid, Subject Partnership Manager, Ulster University Business School  
Mrs K McCafferty, Academic Office, Ulster University

#### 1 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The Panel met to consider the revalidation of the following provision offered at the Belfast Metropolitan College, Titanic Quarter campus:

Foundation Degree in Accounting (with CertHE exit award)  
Foundation Degree in Marketing (with CertHE exit award)

The two programmes will be offered on a full-time basis only from 2018. All modules are compulsory and students are required to complete 40 credit points of Work Based Learning in the Second Semester of the Second Year.

The Panel suggested a minimum of 12 students but the University has established that the minimum be set at 15. The Panel agreed that the maximum number of students should be 24.

The following progression routes are available to students:

Graduates of the FdSc in Accounting may progress onto the BSc Hons Accounting (FT/PT) following the 2 + 2 model. Graduates of the FdSc in Marketing graduates may progress onto the BSc Hons Marketing (FT/PT) following the 2 + bridging + 1 model. Students will be required to have achieved an average mark in all modules set by Ulster University. This mark may vary each year.

The Panel went on a guided tour of the resources to support the delivery of the programmes and was impressed with all the facilities accessible by the students.

Initially the Panel met with the Senior Management Team and then with a group of past and present students. The Panel then met with the Course Team to discuss the programmes in detail.

## 2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

- Course Submission
- Ulster University Guidelines for Revalidation Panels
- QAA benchmark statements for Accounting (2016); Business Management (2015) and Foundation Degree Qualifications and Characteristics (2015)
- External Examiners' Reports for the last two years
- CA4 statement from the Subject Partnership Manager
- Preliminary comments from Panel members

## 3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

### 3.1 Overview

The Panel noted that Belfast MET was the largest college in Northern Ireland and was fully committed to delivering foundation degrees. The Senior Team recognised there was a lack of qualified people at Levels 4 and 5 and that foundation degrees met this need. The Panel noted the College was very committed to the programmes and had a strong collaborative relationship with Ulster University since 1996.

The Panel noted both programmes would be delivered on a full-time basis from 2018 only. The Senior Team advised the Panel that the part-time route never recruited. This was mainly because the School already offered a range of other alternative part-time qualifications.

### 3.2 Progression Routes

The Panel noted the progression routes to study at Ulster University but asked why students on the FdSc Accounting would be required to follow the 2 + 2 model and students on the FdSc Marketing the 2 + bridging + 1 route.

The Senior Team informed the Panel that the first student cohorts graduated in 2017. The Panel noted the students were asked for their opinions on possible progression routes. The Panel heard that the accounting students had stated that they would prefer the 2 + 2 model as it would give them more time to adjust to life at University.

The Panel noted that the feedback from the marketing students was completely different. The Senior Team discussed possibilities with Ulster University and it was agreed that students could choose the 2 + bridging + 1 route or follow the 2 + 2 route.

### 3.3 Electronic Management of Assessment and Feedback

The Panel asked at what stage the College was at in relation to providing opportunities for online submission of assessments and the provision of electronic marking and feedback. The Senior Team explained that students submitted all their coursework through the VLE. The Panel also noted that the College was currently in the process of moving from 'blackboard' to a new system called 'Canvas'.

The Panel noted that the College did not currently have the software to accommodate electronic marking but that they were moving in the right direction. The Panel noted that a Steering Group had been set up to look at the features of 'Canvas' in supporting electronic assessment and feedback.

### 3.4 Staff Development

The Panel enquired about Staff Development opportunities and asked how staff kept up-to-date with developments and issues in their subject areas.

The Senior Team explained that Staff Development was a separate component from the curriculum. The Panel noted an annual budget was made available for staff to attend conferences and that each member of staff was required to complete 30 hours of CPD each year.

The Panel noted that all staff were involved in the development of new curriculum and that they met with employers regularly. The Senior Team informed the Panel that the recent QAA report for the College had commended the engagement of staff with employers. The Panel was impressed with the many areas of good practice and the connections the staff had with industry but felt this had been under sold in the documentation.

### 3.5 Student Support

The Panel enquired about support for students who hoped to progress to university and noted at the start of the programme the Course Team went through potential progression routes as part of 'Pre-Entry Advice and Guidance' (PEAG) which was a mandatory session for all students.

The Panel also noted that during the second year of the programme students were advised of the opportunities available to them. Visits to Ulster University were also arranged. The Subject Partnership Manager came in to speak with students and inform them of their options. The Panel noted that a high percentage of students went into employment.

The Panel heard that many students secured work through their Work Based Learning employer and that other students were more interested in part-time progression routes.

The Panel also noted that the Course Team consisted of 4 chartered accountants and marketing practitioners who were all suitably qualified to inform students of potential career opportunities.

## 4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with a group of past and present students to find out more about their experience on the programmes.

### 4.1 Resources

The Panel asked the students about resources and library access and noted that all computers had up-to-date software. Library access was considered good. The students explained that they were notified when a book was back in for lending and that limited access time was given to key texts.

The Panel heard that staff access was good. The students stated that staff replied to their emails promptly and were considered very supportive and approachable.

#### 4.2 Assessment

The Panel noted that students on the FdSc in Accounting had more examinations. Some of the students on the second year of the FdSc in Marketing indicated that there had been many deadlines just before Christmas. The Panel noted that the students informed staff about the heavy workload and the issue was addressed. Generally, the students felt the assessments were well spread out.

#### 4.3 Group Work

The students stated that they would prefer to self-select their groups later on in the programme but were happy to be told which group they were in at the start. The students informed the Panel that they had done some peer assessment and enjoyed it. The students felt it was a fair process.

#### 4.4 Work Based Learning

The Panel enquired about Work Based Learning and noted that the students started preparing early on in the programme. The students explained that they had to complete a CV and were encouraged to send their CVs to potential employers as there was a lot of competition for placements.

It was noted that if students were unable to find a suitable placement, staff stepped in and provided assistance.

#### 4.5 Programme Structure

The Panel queried the number of modules taken during Semester One of Year 2. The programme structure appeared to suggest that students studied four modules and only completed Work Based Learning during Semester Two.

The students advised the Panel that this had been the case and felt that at times it had been a lot of work and created many deadlines before Christmas. The students stated that they would have preferred the assessments to be more spread out.

#### 4.6 Student Support

The Panel asked the students about the transition from school to college and noted that they had found the support at the start very useful. The transition had been smooth and guidance had been provided on settling into college. Classes were small and everyone got to know each other quickly.

The graduate students also stated that the programme had helped with the transition to University.

#### 4.7 Concluding Comments

The students felt that the programmes provided a good stepping-stone from school to university. The majority of the students stated that they planned to progress to university.

Overall the students felt that the support they received was very good. The support from the VLE was excellent, particularly if a class was missed. Staff were considered to be very supportive and the total experience was felt to be good preparation for progressing to university.

The only negative issue raised was in relation to the timetabling of classrooms. The Panel noted that this issue was addressed promptly.

## 5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

Although the Panel met with the two Course Team's separately, the issues discussed were common and have been compiled together under the headings below.

### 5.1 Assessment

The Panel asked the Course Team to elaborate on their assessment strategy and noted that they had taken into account the recent curriculum design principles implemented at Ulster University. Each module had a maximum of two pieces of assessment and the types used varied from reports, portfolios, class tests to presentations. The Panel noted that the Course Team had also asked for feedback from the students on the types of assessments they had enjoyed and felt beneficial. The Course Team explained that Group work was incorporated at levels 4 and 5 as the skills gained from this activity were considered important for both employment and progressing to university.

The Panel felt the assessment load for students was heavy in the FdSc in Accounting and asked if there was a need for two pieces of assessment in each module. The Course Team explained that they felt students benefited from the assessments throughout the semester. They were considered good indicators of how students were progressing and also highlighted those students who were struggling. For technical subjects like accounting the Course Team felt that two pieces of assessments was important.

The Panel asked if the mid-semester assessments needed to be assessed and heard that students liked to receive a mark. The Course Team explained that the mark helped students see how they were getting on and helped to motivate them. The Course Team also felt that the assessments helped with attendance rates.

The Course Team emphasised that students knew from the start of the programme what was expected and the range of help and support they would get.

The Course Team confirmed that the computer-based assessments would take place mid-way through the module.

The Panel asked if the Accounting Technicians Ireland (ATI) exemptions were mapped to the FdSc in Accounting and noted that exemptions had been considered. Business Management had also been incorporated into other modules.

### 5.2 Programme Content

The Panel commented on the heavy workload in Semester One, Year Two of the FdSc in Accounting. The Course Team explained that for students to gain exemptions they had to be assessed in certain areas. The Course Team informed the Panel that the students were well prepared for the examinations and that the weightings were driven by the exemptions.

The Panel asked if employers provided feedback on the types of skills they would like students to have and noted that one skill that employers had raised was in relation to experience of 'Excel'. The Panel heard that an 'employability' component had been incorporated into the programmes as a separate qualification and included 'Excel'. Skills to help students present themselves appropriately while on placement were also being addressed. Students on the FdSc in Accounting also completed additional awards, for

example, SAGE, Microsoft office. Although these additional skills were not a requirement of the foundation degrees the Course Team felt they were beneficial to the students.

### 5.3 Work Based Learning (WBL)

The Panel asked for clarification on when Work Based Learning took place and noted that it ran during the Second Semester of Year 2. The Course Team informed the Panel that core skills were addressed in Semester 1 and helped the students during their WBL. The Panel noted that the employers had been impressed with the skills students possessed and many were kept on and offered employment. The Panel noted that 40-45% of students progressed into employment.

The Panel asked how students secured a WBL placement and noted that they were encouraged to look for a position themselves. The Course Team explained that they advised the students to keep their CVs up-to-date and to take ownership of their placements and try to secure a position in an area they wished to work in. The Panel noted that the college also held a list of placement providers and that a placement interview could be arranged for students. The Panel noted that all placements were quality assured to ensure they were appropriate. The Panel noted that, so far, there had not been an occasion where a student had been unable to secure a placement.

The Panel asked if there was sufficient time to prepare the students before they went out on placement. The Course Team informed the Panel that there was sufficient time during which students experienced mock interviews. There was also time to provide feedback. The Panel noted that a lot of the placement preparation was completed before the end of first year.

The Panel commented on the scheduling of the WBL and the fact that the students had stated they completed four modules in semester one of the second year. The Course Team explained that this had been the case in the past. The Panel noted that students would not go out on placement until March. The additional module offered in the second semester would be completed through blended learning.

The Panel acknowledged the clarification and stressed that it was important that the structure be followed.

### 5.4 APEL

The Panel enquired about APEL and if someone who had been working in the industry could enrol on the programmes. The Course Team explained that they had one student in Year One who had come through the APEL route. The Panel noted that the student had suitable GCSEs and had been working for ten years. An interview took place and a CV and references were provided.

The Panel noted that the same process was followed for mature students. The Panel also noted that the college consulted with the Subject Partnership Manager. If it was not possible to APEL candidates onto the programme they were directed towards alternative qualification, for example, Access programmes.

The Panel noted that the Central Admissions System within the college was able to identify those students who had come through the APEL route. The Course Team also advised the Panel that they were reviewing their Access programmes to provide suitable progression pathways.

## 5.5 Group Work

The Panel commented on group work and noted that the Course Team felt self-selection was beneficial to students. The Panel noted that the Course Team had selected the group members in the past but they did not work particularly well. The Course Team explained that as part of the induction process 'icebreakers' were used to help students get to know each other.

The Panel asked how individual group marks were determined and noted that a standard group normally comprised four students. Fifty percent of the marks was allocated to the group and the remaining fifty percent to the individual. The Panel noted that there was also provision made for peer assessment and that the tutor observed the group. The Course Team explained that the marks came from three or four different sources and that group minutes were also taken into consideration.

## 5.6 Programme Development

The Panel asked the Course Team who they had approached when reviewing the provision and considering how to enhance content and delivery. The Panel heard that discussions had taken place with current and past students. Feedback from WBL employers had also been useful in reviewing the programme and making adjustments to reflect industry needs.

The Panel also referred to the 'Lecturers into Industry' scheme that provided staff with the opportunity to update their knowledge and skills. The Course Team also informed the Panel that many of the staff were involved in other ventures that allowed good practice to be shared, for example, membership of the CIM programme, Higher Level Apprenticeship mentoring. The Panel also noted that past students were invited to come in and speak with students.

## 5.7 Pre-Requisites

The Panel commented on pre-requisites and in particular recent communication from Ulster University that stated 'any reference to pre-requisite modules which must be passed as a condition of progression to the next year of study, unless this is a professional body requirement be removed'.

The Course Team stated that they felt they needed to stand over having the pre-requisites in the FdSc in Accounting. The Panel heard that students needed to have the right skills and that the pre-requisites were considered necessary. The Course Team informed the Panel that the students were fully aware that they needed to pass certain parts of the programme before progressing any further.

## 5.8 Modules

### Essentials of Marketing

The Panel felt that the first Learning Outcome for the module included two main topics. The Panel felt that the learning outcome should be separated to create two distinct learning outcomes.

### Services Marketing

The Panel noted that the second piece of assessment for the above module was submitted in Week 10 and felt this would mean no students would turn up for the remaining two weeks of the semester.

The Course Team explained that they provided feedback at the end of the module and that there would be no teaching in the last two weeks.

The Panel asked what happened to the hours that had been allocated for the module during the last two weeks and noted one to one appointments with the students took place at this point. The Panel felt that it looked like the module only lasted ten weeks and asked the Course Team to review the date for submission of work.

### Digital Marketing

The Panel commented on Learning Outcome 4 of the above module and advised the Course Team that if they did not mention specific applications in their description it would give them more scope around what they could cover. The Panel suggested that the Course Team could make the learning outcome more general and indicate to students examples of some of the applications they may encounter as part of the programme.

## 6 CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel commended the Team on the following:

- The positive comments from the students about their programmes and the level of support provided by staff
- A robust provision that reflected industry needs
- The strong industrial and professional links that have been established
- An enthusiastic and engaged Course Team
- The overall student support provided throughout the duration of the programmes
- The Pre-entry Advice and Guidance session (PEAG) which was considered very good practice

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the provision be approved for a further five years (intakes 2018/19 to 2022/23 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 **15 June 2018** for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

### Conditions

- (i) That the Course Team clarify the structure of Semester 2, Year 2 of both programmes and ensure modules are delivered in the Semester stated in the documentation;
- (ii) that the regulatory and standards matters identified by the Academic Office be addressed (appendix).

### Recommendations

- (i) That a review of the teaching and assessment schedule for the 'Services Marketing' module be undertaken to ensure the advertised contact hours are met.

## APPRECIATION

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

