

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 3D FOOD, NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

29 November 2018

PRESENT:

Professor Heather Farley, Associate Dean (Education), Ulster University Business School (Chair)

Dr Patricia Heavey, Lecturer and Course Co-ordinator Health Science and Nutrition, Athlone Institute of Technology

Mrs Annemarie Knight, Programme Director, Dietetics, Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, King's College London

Professor Andrew Salter, Professor of Nutritional Biochemistry, Division of Nutritional Sciences, University of Nottingham

Mrs Deborah Sloan, Academic Programme Leader, Centre for Flexible and Continued Education, Ulster University

Mr Andrew McAnallen, Ulster University Students' Union

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 Dietetics (FT) (CE) (BDA)
- BSc Hons Food and Nutrition (with CertHE in Science for Nutrition and AB in Food and Nutrition (FT) (CE)
- BSc Hons Human Nutrition (with CertHE in Science for Nutrition and AB in Human Nutrition) (FT) (CE)
- MSc Dietetics (with PgDip exit award) (FT) (CE)
- MSc Human Nutrition (with PgCert and PgDip exit awards)(FT/PT)
- PgCert/PgDip/MSc Food and Nutrition (FT/PT) (DL)

All courses are offered at the Coleraine campus, with the exception of the PgCert/PgDip/MSc Food and Nutrition which is delivered fully online, by the School of Biomedical Sciences within the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences.

Further to re-approval by the Teaching and Learning Committee following the previous revalidation in 2013 (min 13.97 refers), the BSc Hons Dietetics and MSc Dietetics had implemented several departures from the University's regulations. These departures were required for professional registration after graduation, and arose from the additional 100 credits of Clinical Practice assessed on a pass/fail basis in the final year of each course. The title of the CertHE Science for Nutrition exit award for the BSc Hons Food and Nutrition and BSc Hons Human Nutrition had also been approved by the Committee in October 2013 (min 13.97 refers). The Team would seek re-approval from the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee (ASQEC) of these departures.

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

1. Course submission;
2. Guidelines for Evaluation and Revalidation Panels;
3. QAA subject benchmark statements for Agriculture, Horticulture, Forestry, Food, Nutrition and Consumer Sciences (2016); Dietetics (2017), Master's degree characteristics (2015)
4. Preliminary comments from Panel members.

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3.1 Background and Rationale

The Panel asked the Senior Team to outline how the provision fitted in within the overall Faculty strategy. The Associate Dean (Education) advised that the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences had a very broad portfolio in which this provision fitted very well. The provision was well established and very solid in terms of recruitment. The Faculty's overall strategy was to continue to grow numbers in terms of sustainability and in particular non-MaSN, within the School of Biomedical Sciences. The programmes offered flexibility in respect of mode of delivery - full-time, part-time and fully online – with the School being one of the early adoptors in fully online course delivery.

The School was very research intensive and research expertise informed and was very much linked to the curriculum. A number of leading experts in their field were teaching on the programmes and this both enhanced and enriched the student experience. Employability was also a key aspect of these programmes and this was further enhanced by the HCPC and other professional body accreditation.

3.2 Demand and intakes

The Panel noted the desire to grow numbers going forward and enquired how this would be done in a very challenging and competitive environment. The Senior Team advised the Panel that evidence of demand existed and that significant investment had also been made in the healthcare service which should result in additional posts being available for graduates – this would be a key aspect in student recruitment. The drop in numbers in Food and Nutrition programmes was noted. The Panel was assured that the Faculty closely monitored course intakes but that it was also mindful of the spread of the MaSN across the School. This decrease was seen as a one-off and it was the Team's view that these numbers would pick up again going forward. The Senior Team informed the Panel that a number of initiatives were in place to increase numbers, including Taster Days and the work being undertaken by the School Liaison Officer. There was potential for growth and any resource requirements would follow as required.

Increasing international student numbers was reported as a key strategy and considerable investment had been made by the University in the Global Engagement Department. The School also had an academic lead for global engagement and it was hoped as a School, to use existing staff research strengths and links in different parts of the world to maximise international student recruitment.

The Faculty did not stand still and it was proactively marketing these programmes regionally, nationally and internationally. The new support structure in the Faculty also greatly facilitated this.

With regard to the potential impact of Brexit, this was an unknown at this time but the status of students from the Republic of Ireland was very much on the School's agenda.

The Senior Team were not in a position to confirm the minimum and maximum intakes at this time but that this information would follow.

3.3 Placement

The Senior Team advised the Panel that staff worked very closely with placement providers on an ongoing basis with a view to increasing the number of placement opportunities available.

3.4 Resources

The Panel enquired if the move of a key member of the Nutrition team to another post had been adequately filled and assurance was provided in this regard. The Senior Team also assured the Panel that should student numbers increase, any required resource would follow. The process now in place to do this was also much quicker.

3.5 Professional body accreditation

The Panel queried the value of professional body accreditation, in particular the Association for Nutrition and was advised that considerable debate had been undertaken in this regard but it was something about which many prospective students enquired. It would be kept under review.

4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with a representative group of fifteen students from across the provision. During discussions, the following was noted:

- The student group was very positive about the programmes and the Course Teams.
- The first year in the undergraduate programmes was very science based but the benefit of this became evident in later years. Those students coming onto the programmes with no Chemistry A-Level were reassured by staff and provided with additional tutorial sessions and support if required.
- Multiple assessments every two weeks were challenging, however, allowed students to see how they well they were doing on a regular basis which proved very useful.
- Many students were of the view that the introduction of some basic nutrition into year 1 would be both useful and welcomed.
- In relation to Food and Nutrition being considered Euro-centric, students indicated that the Consumer Studies module could be undertaken in final year. Some additional content around sustainability for example, could be introduced earlier in the programme, however, the course was already very full and it would be difficult to know where anything additional could be covered.
- The courses were challenging and the additional credit points required in some courses were accepted as being simply the nature of the subject area.
- Lecturers were very supportive and approachable in both the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and would always try to accommodate students where possible, for example, moving submission deadlines if required.
- Students were content with the diversity and quantity of assessment and there was a good balance between coursework and examinations.
- Most assessments were submitted electronically and feedback provided via BlackBoard Learn. Lecture notes were also posted in advance of classes.
- Feedback was variable between different lecturers. Students were not aware of how to get feedback on examinations.
- Group work assessment was viewed very favourably by all students. It could be challenging, however, everyone recognised its benefits alongside the ability to use peer assessment and to mix with other students with whom they may not ordinarily engage.

- Condonement was not used in the University nor was the uplift of borderline students. Students were required to re-sit failed modules and everyone was content with this as it ensured that they were up to the required standard moving forward through the course.
- All students were in favour of the new degree algorithm with 30% of Level 5 modules contributing to the final degree classification.
- All students were content with how their digital literacy skills were being developed.
- Those students who had undertaken placement commended the support provided in all aspects and stages of the placement process. All recognised placement as an invaluable experience and returned to final year well prepared.
- Staff had a good range of industry links and placements in healthcare settings provided a good range of experience.
- Some students engaged with extra-curricular activities including the Nutrition Society and a student Facebook site.
- All students recognised the benefits of professional body accreditation and were encouraged to register as student members. The professional bodies also provided access to a range of useful online resources.
- Students stated that the professional body accreditation was one of the reasons for applying for the course and a real course selling point.
- Students had opportunities to input into curriculum development, for example, through the Staff/Student Consultative Committee and feedback was taken on board, an example being a reduction in some module assessments.
- Study skills were developed throughout the course and the new module would facilitate this further. A separate module was useful to provide a focus on this area in particular.
- Staff research expertise really enhanced the programmes and it fed into teaching and delivery. This expertise was also very beneficial in terms of research projects, selection of topics and supervision.
- International student numbers were currently relatively low but students were not aware of any particular issues experienced by this group. An increase in international students was only viewed as a positive.
- All students felt well prepared in terms of employability and the support provided in terms of career guidance and future career choices.
- There were no issues on any aspects of student support – staff were able to assist personally or signpost students to the relevant area.

The Panel thanked the students for their engagement and wished them well for their future studies and career.

5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAMS

5.1 Revalidation

The Panel asked the Course Team to outline the key course changes for the revalidation and the motivations for these changes. The Team had been assisted by the Centre for Higher Education and Research Practice (CHERP) which had provided an opportunity to reflect on the views of all stakeholders and this had very much fed into the development of the revised curriculum. The Team outlined how the programmes had been revised including the introduction of a new employability module, more nutrition content in year 1 as a result of student feedback as well as additional nutrition in relation to the food industry in year 2. In reviewing the curriculum, the Team was very mindful of professional body requirements and had worked very closely with each one to ensure that all key topics were included more explicitly in the curriculum, for example food sustainability.

5.2 Professional Bodies

The Panel enquired if the Team saw professional body accreditation as a real benefit, in particular querying the value of the Association for Nutrition (AfN). The Team stated that the application process for some professional bodies could be extremely demanding and costly and discussions often took place with regard to their value. Having surveyed students, the Team found that in the region of 30% of students viewed AfN as a benefit, however, it was a selling point for prospective students and necessary for the School's recruitment strategy.

5.3 Demand and internationalisation

The Panel enquired who the stakeholders were and what plans were in place for growth. The Team advised that stakeholders included alumni, current students, client groups and the workforce throughout Ireland with the latter's expertise having informed and reviewed not only the curriculum but work placement handbooks. The Team also availed of stakeholder expertise in other ways through guest lectures and graduate opportunities.

In relation to dietetics, a Health service workforce plan was being developed to put an additional fifty posts in place across the five Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts and this would greatly enhance graduate opportunities.

The intention to grow international student numbers in particular was noted and the Panel asked how this would be managed going forward. The Team informed the Panel that international students from Hong Kong already bridged into final year of both the BSc Hons Food and Nutrition and Human Nutrition programmes – this was a long established relationship and worked very well. Support was available from central University departments, including the Centre for English Language Teaching (CELT). Should international numbers increase significantly, the School would require additional resource.

International recruitment was a key priority and would bring a real richness to the curriculum and the student experience. The Course Team needed to be mindful that an increase in the number of international students would require review of some of the module content to ensure that it had a global rather than Euro-centric focus.

The Panel noted that intake to the undergraduate Food and Nutrition programme had shown a decline but was assured by the Team that steps were already being taken to improve the number of conversions next year.

5.4 Entry requirements

The Panel noted that differing levels of science were required on entry across the provision and asked how students would be supported to ensure that they were at the required standard. The Team informed the Panel that this was a matter of which staff were very much aware and took steps to provide additional tutorials as well as putting other measures in place to support these students, including one-to-one assistance by PhD students. The Biochemistry module was deliberately undertaken early in the programme and knowledge was built upon as students progressed through the course. To date, no substantive issues had been experienced with students passing the module.

The Course Team further advised that they organised taster sessions for prospective students to alleviate any fears in relation to the science aspects but the Team was certain that chemistry was an essential part of the undergraduate provision. Students coming onto the Nutrition programmes required only one science at A-level, however, they brought other knowledge such as business skills which was also an important aspect of the programme and a career path that some would choose to go down rather than a traditional science route.

5.5 Extra-curricular activity

The Panel enquired if any extra-curricular activity including subject societies, for example, were available for students and if any plans were in place for the future in this regard. The Team advised that some outreach activity had taken place in which students were involved, for example, the development and delivery of a nutrition education programme for primary schools. Such opportunities developed and enhanced student employability. Students had also set up an Ulster Foodies Facebook site.

The Nutrition Innovation Centre for Food and Health (NICHE) held an annual meeting and postgraduate students were funded to attend which provided excellent networking opportunities. Students were also able to attend British Dietetics Association (BDA) events and BDA representatives visited the University to speak to students. There were also a number of Institute of Food Science and Technology (IFST) events throughout the year in which students could participate.

5.6 Course identity

It was noted that the cohorts from different programmes were co-taught for some modules and the Panel asked how a sense of cohort and course identity was ensured. The Team advised that course specific inductions were held; in the first year study skills module (Introduction to Nutrition, Study Skills and Biostatistics) all students were taught with their own particular cohort to ensure that they identified with their own subject area. Students were exposed to their profession at an early stage of each which provided an understanding of how their specific role fitted in with other disciplines.

The Panel informed the Team that students had identified the lack of nutrition content in the first year of the programme but was advised that the new Nutrition, Study Skills and Biostatistics module introduced students to the subject of nutrition. The module title with the inclusion of 'nutrition' would also explicitly inform students that nutrition would be covered in the module.

5.7 Course structure and content

The significant science content of the provision was noted. The Panel asked if this was a challenge for students and the Team responded by stating that they needed to ensure that the courses met all the competencies of the relevant professional body. Many modules were optional and this provided students with the choice of taking a traditional science or business route. The Team was of the view that the course structures were how they needed to be and it was managed well. The reduction in the number of assessments across all modules would greatly assist students in all years in the incoming academic year.

The Panel raised the matter of the new employability module Future Orientated Professional Skills Development, and queried the rationale for this to be a stand-alone module rather than employability being embedded through the programmes. The Team provided assurance that employability was embedded throughout and provided some examples but overall they felt that this stand-alone module added value by providing a focus on employability.

5.8 Feedback

The students had noted a variance in feedback between modules. The Course Team advised that the now fully implemented electronic assessment and feedback policy would provide a much more standardised approach across all courses. In relation to feedback on examinations, the Team advised that students normally only received a mark and this was the

focus for most students, however, they could make an appointment to discuss the paper with the relevant lecturer. If a student failed an exam, the member of staff would make contact with the student. The Team informed that Panel that they endeavoured to highlight to all students what constituted feedback in its many forms and its importance in assisting with their progress.

The Panel raised the matter of condonement which was not used in the University and the facility to uplift a borderline student, for example, with a 69% mark. The Team concurred that the latter would be beneficial and that they had been unhappy with the removal of the viva voce at undergraduate level a couple of years previously.

5.9 Placement

All students had been very positive in relation to all aspects of placement including the fact that it could be paid or unpaid, and the Panel asked if anyone undertook the study abroad option (DIAS). The Team advised that uptake of the DIAS was historically low. In relation to an unpaid placement, the Team stated that students were very aware of the value of placement to both their studies and future career and sometimes due to the nature of the subject, placements were unpaid. Paid placements, however, were very much promoted but the payment was not generally the focus, rather the experience and opportunities that it afforded. Staff were very aware of potential financial pressures and tried where possible to place students near to home.

5.10 Mode of Delivery

The Course Team explained the nature of delivery of the programmes, whether blended or fully online. In relation to the latter, the MSc Food and Nutrition was delivered by distance learning with the exception of one module which students could choose to undertake on-campus. E-learning was very well resourced within the School in respect of support, e-tutors, staff training and by Library and Office for Digital Learning colleagues.

5.11 Employability

The School's employability figures were excellent and the Course Team was confident that posts would be available for graduates of these programmes, specifically including the area of dietetics. When asked, the potential impact of Brexit was an unknown quantity for everyone.

5.12 Staff resources

The Panel asked if the Team felt that they were adequately resourced. They stated that vacancies of whatever nature were not always wholly replaced or made in a timely manner so any additional staff were always welcome. Staff were under pressure in terms of balancing teaching and research to maintain the highest standards. The recent University restructuring had also impacted significantly in terms of administration support, in particular relating to placements.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the programmes on the following:

- i) The comprehensive documentation provided for what is a very strong portfolio of programmes;
- ii) Strong evidence of research informed teaching and the development of research awareness amongst the students;
- iii) The excellent level of professional body accreditation for the programmes;

- iv) The excellent support provided to students in relation to a wide range of issues and in particular, for placement;
- v) The high level of employability;
- vi) The strong engagement with stakeholders within a very vibrant network.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the programmes 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 28 February 2019** for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

- i) That all issues identified by the Academic Office and detailed in the appendix to the panel report are addressed;

Recommendations

- i) That staff resources are kept under review if the intention for growth in numbers, in particular international student numbers, is realised (sections 3.2, 3.4, 5.3 and 5.13 refer);
- ii) The *Introduction to Nutrition, Study Skills and Biostatistics* module is a positive addition to the programme, however, consideration should be given to providing discipline specific content earlier in the programme and making this more visible to students (sections 4, 5.6 and 5.7 refer);
- iii) If international student numbers increase going forward, that some of the module content will need to be reviewed in light of the changing student demographic (section 5.3 refers);
- iv) To keep the employability module *Future Orientated Professional Skills Development* under review with a view to how employability is embedded throughout the programmes and not only as a stand-alone module (sections 5.1, 5.7 and 5.11 refers).

7 APPRECIATION

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

DT 03.12.18