

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE EVALUATION PANEL: BA HONS SCREEN PRODUCTION

8 May 2019

PANEL:

Professor A McKillop, Associate Dean (Education), Faculty of Life and Health Sciences, Ulster University (Chair)

Dr J Uhomobhi, School of Engineering, Ulster University

Dr G Pritchard, Dean of School of Media, Ravensbourne University, London

Mr D Sinforiani, Senior Teaching Fellow, Media, Communications and Culture, University of Stirling

CHAIR OF THE COURSE PLANNING COMMITTEE:

Mr A Hook, Associate Head of School of Communication and Media

HEAD OF SCHOOL:

Dr C Rhys, Head of School of Communication and Media

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr B McArthur, Academic Office, Ulster University

1 INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider a new proposal, a BA Hons in Screen Production, brought forward by the School of Communication and Media. The programme would be offered in full- and part-time modes and have Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) and Associate Bachelor's (AB) degree exit awards. The full-time programme would include an optional Diploma in Professional Practice or Diploma in International Academic Study. For those students opting not to take the placement or study abroad

year, an additional opportunity would be available to take 70 hours of work-based learning in level 5 module, *Screen Industries*. Placement/study abroad apart, all modules would be compulsory.

The Panel met initially with the Faculty senior management team comprising Professor R Fee, Associate Dean (Education), Dr C Rhys, Head of School of Communication and Media, and Mr A Hook, Chair of the Course planning Committee. The Panel then met with the course team.

The following report summarises responses to Panel questions provided by each of the teams that the Panel met with during the meeting.

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

- Agenda and programme of the meeting
- Guidelines for revalidation panels
- QAA benchmark statement for Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies (2016)
- Central University department reports on Library and IT resource matters
- Preliminary comments from panel members
- Programme documentation

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

Introduction

The Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences was established only two years ago following a reorganisation of University structures. At that time, the Faculty undertook a review of provision taking account of key indicators such as a reduction in demand, duplication of provision, competition between programmes, employability and student satisfaction data. As a result, a process of reformulation was undertaken based on employability, demand and existing staff expertise. A central theme running through all provision was an emphasis on social justice and students' place within society.

As a result of the review, two undergraduate programmes were withdrawn. The BSc Hons Creative Technologies at Magee was discontinued in 2017. A replacement programme, the BSc Hons Music, Audio and Sound Technology, launches in 2019. The BA Hons Media Studies and Production at Coleraine has been withdrawn with no 2019 entry. It was decided to move the Media presence on the Coleraine campus to the Belfast campus. Consequently, the BSc Hons Interactive Media will be moved to the Belfast Campus where it will join the current proposal where both will sit alongside programmes such as Animation and Games Design creating a hub of cognate programmes.

Staff Resources

There will be substantial sharing of teaching across cognate programmes on the Belfast campus. Regarding the new proposal, the appointment of a course director was imminent with an additional appointment of a (grade 6) technician in the short term. A further full-time academic appointment may be made in the longer term; this will be kept under review. Four core full-time staff will be available on the Belfast campus from September 2019. Support from part-time and visiting lecturers will also be available. Planning for first year teaching has already taken place and will be extended to years 2 and 3 on arrival of the new staff.

The new course director will be inducted on expectations and responsibilities regarding his role that will be essentially a leadership role. He will be responsible for the Screen Production programme only and will receive support through the University support mechanisms and through peer support.

Physical Resources

Prior to the meeting, Panel members were taken on a tour of the campus space that will be used to support delivery of the programme. The interior of the space has yet to be constructed but the Panel was shown plans of the facilities and details of equipment that will be in place prior to commencement of the programme. The external Panel members expressed satisfaction with the facilities that are due to be constructed between 1 July and 23 August. The Panel was assured that the available facilities and equipment will meet industry specifications and were based on employer

feedback on the type of facilities that would be required to prepare students adequately for the workplace.

4 MEETING WITH THE COURSE TEAM

Employer Involvement

A consultation process as a preliminary to programme design began some two years ago. The process included workshops with local industry representatives, interaction with an industry Facebook group operated by one of the large local broadcasters, consultation with directors of local companies and included feedback from the BBC Head of Recruitment. Questionnaires had also been sent out to company directors. When all the information had been accumulated, a second level of analysis took place and from this process, the design and content of the programme began to take shape.

Content - Programme Identity

Regarding the 'identity' of the programme, it was suggested that since the programme comprised a 'broad church' of disciplines, this created a danger that student learning would be too thinly spread to ensure an appropriate depth of learning and the programme might be considered to have no 'unique selling point'. The Team stated that the content comprised two main themes, documentary and short television drama with cultural studies and storytelling acting as a 'spine' across the whole programme. This reflected the situation in industry within Northern Ireland, a situation that limited graduate opportunities locally. In addition, these two themes represented the two main funding strands available in the region. Furthermore, a broad base of learning at undergraduate level was a rational approach that enabled students to 'test the water' across the media field and prepared graduates for specialisation at postgraduate level should they wish to progress further with academic study. Once Screen Production was established, the intention was to develop a Master's programme that would provide a progression route for graduates. The available staff expertise had been a further consideration as was the gap in industry where there was an identified need for a programme of this type. The Team also suggested that students preferred the broad-based approach, as did employers, who preferred graduates with a broad skills base which they considered an advantage in their employees. The Team pointed out that the programme could not be designed

as a training programme for a particular employer or set of employers and that academic underpinning across the field was a necessary ingredient.

It was pointed out that at the final level of the programme, students would have an opportunity to specialise between drama and documentary in modules, *Preparation for Major Project* and *Major Project* (totalling 80 credits at level 6).

Content – TV History

Students have indicated that they are enthusiastic about studying the development of infrastructure around TV drama. This was an area that changes rapidly. For or this reason, the focus within the curriculum would be around storytelling so that technology changes would have no bearing. By this means, graduates would gain knowledge of the history around this area, would understand how a genre works, would be aware of the requirement to think about their audience and would have an appreciation, in the democratic sense, of how media operates. How to tell stories resonates in all these different contexts. To take an alternative approach would risk a 'fad-ish' approach. A consistent approach was required in producing graduates who were able to tell stories in different contexts and employing different representations.

Delivery Model

The Panel noted that delivery of the full-time programme was heavily 'front-loaded' in that the first two semesters each contained two 20-credit point modules that would be delivered over six weeks and suggested that this would be a highly intense introduction to the programme for new students. The Team replied that the content in each semester would include two long-thin theory modules and one practice module delivered every six weeks. The 6-week modules were intended to introduce students to issues that they needed to know and understand at the outset such as 'camera', 'composition' and core storytelling which would be underpinned by the theory modules running alongside. Years 2 and 3 would build on this learning so it was important that students received a sound foundation during the first year. The use of the 6-week modules was considered the best means for students to quickly assimilate the foundational information that they would be required to learn before progressing further through the programme.

The Team pointed out that in the 6-week modules, students would be supported during the initial 4 weeks through master classes and workshops followed by 2 weeks of academically supported delivery around creative output. Module assessments would be completed within the six weeks, but these would be small assessments. For example, students might receive an assessment brief on a Monday and be required to submit the assessment by Friday of the same week. This limited timeframe would replicate industry working and would instil in students a professional understanding of the different cycles of working that take place within a workplace.

Part-time students would be able to cope with the 6-week modules because they would be taking only one or two modules per semester. During the admission process, the demands of the programme would be made clear to part-time applicants. Prior experience in cognate programmes would indicate that part-time students were normally highly committed and therefore no difficulties in this respect were anticipated.

The two long-thin modules that would run throughout the first year were designed to help students understand the links between, and integration of, theory and practice. This approach would mitigate students' tendency to 'pack away' or compartmentalise knowledge covered in modules completed over the normal 12 weeks.

Regarding assessment in the long-thin modules, while summative assessment would take place at the end of the module, formative or summative assessments would take place before the end of the first semester to enable staff to monitor students' progress and to identify those students who may require additional support during the second semester.

The delivery model would also include the following.

Flipped classrooms: Learning materials, including industry documents, would be placed online in advance to allow students to prepare for lectures during which various student-led activities would take place. This approach was welcomed by students in other cognate programmes.

Interdisciplinary working: Students would have the opportunity during the programme to work with external clients and with charities which had no media department within their organisation.

Soft skills: Soft skills would be learned in several ways, for example, through group working and during workshops.

Programme Learning Outcomes

The Team explained their approach to the development of the programme level learning outcomes and their relationship with the module level learning outcomes as follows. The programme learning outcomes were based on the outcomes detailed in the QAA benchmark statement for Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies (2016). From there, the Team had worked down to module level and had developed module learning outcomes that linked back to the programme level outcomes. Four learning outcomes had been included for each module although not specifically designed with particular programme level outcomes in mind. In mapping up to the programme outcomes, each module had addressed 6 to 8 programme outcomes. Each module's assessment strategy would ensure that each module learning outcome would be assessed.

Assessment

The Panel suggested that there was over-assessment in the level 5 modules, *Documentary* and *Drama*, that the production of short documentaries (3 pieces of work) and dramas (two pieces of work) involved a great deal of work and, in the interests of producing higher quality output, consideration might be given to reducing the number of assessments in each case. The Team pointed out that the assessment load across the programme was in line with the University's assessment workload guidance but would give consideration to the Panel suggestion.

In response to a Panel query, the Team explained that in the above assessments, which were group activities, individual contribution would be able to be identified and marked because parts of the production process would be undertaken by individuals. In addition, at the end of the process, students would be required to produce an individual written critical reflection of their involvement in the process.

Entrepreneurship

A discussion took place regarding entrepreneurship within the programme and included a conversation around means of securing sponsorship and the identification of funding opportunities. Within the programme, students would be exposed to entrepreneurship in the 70 hours of work-based learning in module, *Screen Industries*, and during the 1-year placement. Within the curriculum, entrepreneurship would be addressed in several ways including:

- learning and teaching content that would deliver entrepreneurial skills in dealing with audiences, clients, consumers, markets, sources et cetera;
- module content that would address issues such as critical thinking, networking, team working and the role of technology in developing opportunities and leadership;
- direct engagement with media entrepreneurs through guest lecturers;
- opportunities for students to engage with 'live projects' for charities or other groups.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the Course Team on:

- Their teaching ethos that was student-focused and the team's general openness to the constructive feedback during the meeting.
- Origin and culture of the programme involving a civic commitment to skills and knowledge to meet the needs of the growing and rapidly changing screen media sector and industry.
- Strength of the media and critical analytical modules at levels 4 and 5 which will be important foundations for the student for academic progression and to inform their practice
- Range and extent of industry engagement that has helped tailor the programme to the needs of a rapidly changing landscape, also highlighting the importance of ongoing development of the programme once established.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the BA Hons Screen Production 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 Wednesday, 19 June 2019, for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

The programme would be allocated to Revalidation Unit 19A1 Media (Undergraduate).

Conditions

1. That all issues highlighted in the appendix to the panel report are addressed.
2. That confirmation of staffing levels, including technical support, necessary for a September 2019 start, is received along with a strategic overview of the key roles and duties of staff to support the programme and, in particular, those of the Course Director.

Recommendations

1. Given the anticipated growth of the programme (and additional student intakes each succeeding year), that staffing levels, particularly relating to technical staff, and physical resources, be continuously monitored to ensure maintenance of a high-quality student experience.
2. In line with discussions with the Panel, that consideration be given to delivery of level 4 modules, *Screenwriting* and *Art and Craft of Editing*, be delivered over 12 weeks rather than the proposed 6 weeks.
3. That the volume of assessment be reviewed with the aim of reducing levels to ensure high quality output and to enable a reduction in staff and student workloads.

6 APPRECIATION

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

