

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

Paper No ASQEC/19/1f)

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

13 March 2019

Agenda Item 4.5

EXTENSION OF APPROVAL

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Access Diploma South West College: Social Sciences and Humanities

COVER SHEET

Action is required of the Committee as indicated below.

To consider a request from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences for a one-year extension of approval.

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REQUEST TO EXTEND APPROVAL AND POSTPONE REVALIDATION

Form CA6b)

SECTION A: FACULTY REQUEST

FACULTY: Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

SCHOOL: Applied Social and Policy Sciences

SUBJECT UNIT NUMBER AND NAME: 30B4 Access Diploma in Social Sciences & Humanities (South West College Dungannon and Enniskillen Campuses) South West College.

MONTH/YEAR CURRENTLY SCHEDULED: Academic Years 19/20

PERIOD OF EXTENSION REQUESTED:
(eg one year to include the September 2018 intake)

One year to include September 2019 intake until academic year 20/21.
Faculty recommendation in terms of scheduling semester 1 October to December 2020.

COURSE(S):
(Identify specific courses unless the whole unit)

30B4 Access Diploma in Social Sciences & Humanities with Cert in Adult Learning Exit Award Enniskillen Campus.

30B4 Access Diploma in Social Sciences with Cert in Adult Learning Exit Award Dungannon Campus (Omagh from 17/18 currently suspended).

REASON FOR REQUEST:

The Associate Dean for Education on behalf of the Faculty is requesting the one year extension. The School of ASPS have four Access Diplomas within their collaborative provision. By granting the one year extension all four courses will be revalidated in the same academic year. This will provide the opportunity for the course teams to engage with the new curriculum design principles and to avail of workshops and inputs from CHERP, the Faculty via the Faculty Partnership Manager and the School via the AHOS.

CURRENCY AND VALIDITY:
(Please confirm that the curriculum remains current and valid and provide evidence of this (eg extract from most recent external examiner reports and those of relevant professional, statutory and regulatory body)

The curriculum provision within the Access Diploma course is of a very high standard. The modules delivered relate very closely to each other and reflect a highly considered and reflective approach to curriculum design. Modules within either the pure Social Science pathway at the Dungannon campus or Social Sciences and Humanities pathway at the Enniskillen campus reflect a comprehensive and detailed overview of key subjects, and central concepts, models and ideas within these. Module content also reflects a contemporary and up to date knowledge base which relates well to current debates and issues. This is further evidenced and supported by the External Examiner and SPM reports.

External Examiner Report (17-18)

“The individual programme module descriptors, reading lists, syllabi and specific learning outcomes communicate a coherent statement as to overall programme aims, content and structure that is relevant and appropriate to study at this level (L3 QAA). The acquisition of critical thinking and analytic skills are a hallmark of any successful university access programme. These skills are clearly prioritised within the Communications Module in Semester 1 and strategically built upon within subsequent modules. The combination of modules covered, including the important requisite Maths module, allows for a large range of progression opportunities available to students. This was evidenced by the successful route-ways and destination programmes identified by students across an impressive range of disciplinary and professional fields and included Nursing, Social Work, Social Sciences and Law.

Teaching and learning innovations include a breadth of assessment modalities and strategies. These are accompanied by clear communication across teaching teams as to assessment focus and their particular contribution to the overall access award. The teaching teams evidenced significant expertise in relation to Access Education. The needs of this particular student cohort are significant and require particular expertise and understanding, both of which are present in abundance across the teaching teams. There is an eagerness to engage in conversations relating to pedagogy and teaching and learning innovations.

I am pleased to report that the quality of overall (summative) written feedback given to students is of a very high standard and is consistent across all modules. The feedback given by many tutors was constructive, appropriate and supportive. It is established practice for students to meet tutors to discuss feedback and grades. Students commented on how effective and accessible this process was. As this is an important element in the student learning process it should be fully acknowledged and commended and in particular programme co-ordinators should be commended for establishing this culture of collaboration with students.”

STANDARDS AND QUALITY:

(Please confirm that quality is high and there are no concerns. Provide evidence of this through external examiner reports and annual monitoring datasets and reports)

Student achievement remains at a very high standard. Many students from 65-75%, attain an Access Diploma with Distinction (over 70%), with the remainder receiving an Access Diploma with Commendation (60%+). Many students progress into HE, 80-85%, particularly those courses listed above. The Access course has consistently promoted a strong ethos of academic self-improvement and HE progression, and indeed most Access students achieve a very high standard in their final award classification, and readily transition into Higher Education.

Retention rates can be an occasional concern, although it needs emphasising that SWC attracts a very high proportion of its students from the lowest socio-economic profiles and that many of its Access students experience very challenging personal circumstances and encounter very socially adverse issues, which can clearly impact on the above.

Students are also exceptionally well supported by the Student Engagement team who provide dedicated advice, information and support regarding Counselling service, finance, academic mentoring, careers and employment. The course teams are very well supported by a dedicated Quality Assurance Unit who rigorously monitor the quality of learning, teaching and assessment, along with the student experience.

External Examiner Report (17-18)

“It is my opinion that the quality of work produced compares very positively with the level of work expected under UK QAA Higher Access (AHE) courses. Given that the Access to HE Diploma is a qualification which prepares people without traditional qualifications for study at university (<https://www.accesstohe.ac.uk>) a key indicator here is the level of successful student progression to a range of HEIs in Northern Ireland and England, and also Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. Based on my experience of Access Programmes in the Republic of Ireland, student performance on this programme also compares favourably to the Level 6 (QQI) university access award.

The high performance of many students across both sites is reflective of the anticipated performance levels within University Access Programmes Internationally and reflects the particular commitment and ambitions of

this student cohort as commented above. It is however important to state that this level of engagement does not happen automatically and requires significant commitment and dedication on the part of the teaching teams and co-ordinators as they foster a sense of belief, confidence and capacity within their students. The teaching teams should be commended for this level of commitment.

There were examples of excellent work which would certainly have been appropriate at Level 4 (QAA), e.g. History, Studies in Contemporary Society, Social Research, Film Studies and Human Biology. I can confirm that the quality of this work is consistent with the level and quality of work required from Level 3 (QAA) students. Based on my conversations with students there was a keen sense that they had claimed ownership over their achievements and could monitor and self-evaluate their intellectual and skills' development. This resulted in increased confidence and ambitions. Their capacity as independent learners ready to engage fully in higher level university education was made apparent in the increased quality of work.

I met with student groups and these were impressive, articulate, engaged students. I was impressed with students' engagement and the high esteem in which they held the programme, lecturers and programme co-ordinators. Their feedback was overwhelmingly positive and they commented in particular on the hugely encouraging learning environment and the level of support, individual and group, provided. They commented on how approachable all tutors were and how this made a significant difference to their ability to juggle work/childcare/eldercare with study. Students communicated a high level of satisfaction with the timing of assignments/examinations and the balance of course work. Finally, students spoke of their own growth as learners and their ambitions for the future. They communicated an impressive and diverse range of progression plans/ambitions, destination institutions and career choices. Many had already received offers through the UCAS system and their grade profiles suggest a successful outcome for these students. This provides clear evidence of the success of this programme in making real access and progression opportunities available to these previously disenfranchised or excluded students.

Overall, this was an affirming, uplifting experience and reinforced the need for such programmes to exist and their specificities to be fully understood, appreciated and supported by the university. These programmes promote more equitable and diverse HEIs and indeed more equitable societies. Institutional acknowledgement of the specificities of access programmes and their importance to the vision and mission of the University of Ulster is crucial if these programmes are not simply to survive but are to flourish and their students with them. Such recognition is also important for the retention of excellent staff who are integral to this programme. Indeed, a key strength of this programme lies in the staff dedicated to its continued delivery and the articulation of its mission. I commend the teams on both sites for their dedication and commitment to endeavouring to make the best educational experience available to this important, if demanding, cohort of students. This Programme represent a vital route-way into HE for a diverse groups of students and thus provides a real and meaningful opportunity for the University of Ulster to help meet its ambitions vis-à-vis equality, diversity and inclusion."

PSRB (if applicable): Not applicable

(Please confirm that any deferral will be accommodated by the PSRB and that accreditation will be ongoing for the full duration of the deferral)

DEMAND:

Demand remains constant at approx 10-15 students per FT cohort and 15-20 students per PT cohort across both campuses. There would roughly be two applications for every place over the past five academic years. There is an effective selection process which involves a short interview followed by English and Mathematics assessments. Each applicant receives a composite score and offers are made based on these. The purpose of the English and Mathematics assessments are to ensure that there is a minimum or baseline level of competence which the course team can work with. If an applicant does not have this minimum level then she/he would not be suitable and would clearly struggle.

Demand fluctuates slightly but compared to five years ago, has been in slight decline.

FACULTY PARTNERSHIP MANAGER'S ASSESSMENT (for partner institutions only):

The FPM is fully supportive of the Faculty plan to extend the revalidation time frame by one year to include the 2019 intake (proposed new time frame semester October to December 2020).

The staff in the partner college involved in the delivery of the Access programmes continue to engage very positively with the Faculty Partnership Manager and Ulster as they have done for many years. In addition, staff engaged very positively with the previous External Examiner and took on board and actioned any feedback he gave in terms of enhancing the provision. Staff have a very positive working relationship with the current External Examiner (two years into her tenure) and she is supportive of the plan to extend the revalidation period by one year.

There will be staff changes this academic year with the retirement of the two Course Directors in March in both the Enniskillen and Dungannon campuses. Experienced members of staff are in place in terms of succession planning. They have had extensive previous experience of delivering the access programmes and have worked well over the last five years with the FPM. The extension request will give them the opportunity to consolidate their roles as course directors and to immerse themselves fully in the revalidation process. This is the second revalidation cycle that the team will have experienced with the FPM. Team members have attended the Academic Office revalidation briefing and the workshop delivered by CHERP outlining Ulster's new curriculum design principles. The current Curriculum Manager who has been involved in the delivery of the Access Programme at the college for many years will continue to have educational oversight of the provision thus providing continuity and consistency.

There are no concerns regarding the quality of learning and teaching, the curriculum, assessment or the educational oversight of the provision. The External Examiner has commented positively on the provision in her report received for the last academic year, 2017/18. This has been outlined above in detail by Dr Alistair McCarley, Curriculum Manager at South West College. See further summary of additional comments extracted from the report below.

Marking and feedback

"I am pleased to report that the quality of overall summative written feedback given to students was of a very high standard. The feedback given by many tutors was constructive, appropriate and supportive" (The External noted minor variation of in-text qualitative feedback to weaker students which the team have addressed and taken on board)."

"The approach taken to internal marking for all modules delivered across both campuses, was both rigorous and impartial ."

Assessment

"The assessment criteria for each module, course work and examinations was clearly outlined "

"As indicated last year I am pleased to observe once again that in general there is a congruence between the methods of assessment employed and the aims and learning outcomes as specified in the programme documentation and course handbook."

Curriculum, structure and content of the course

The External Examiner commented positively on the curriculum structure and content of the course as highlighted in the extract from the External Examiner report in the currency and validity section above.

Student learning and quality of student work

"The acquisition of critical thinking and analytical skills are a hallmark of any successful University Access Programme. These skills are clearly prioritised in the communications module in semester 1 and strategically built upon within subsequent modules "

"As per my comments in my previous report 16/17 I was impressed by the quality of work I reviewed from both the full time and part time cohorts across semesters one and two. based on my conversations with students there was a keen sense that they had claimed ownership over their achievements and could monitor and self-evaluate their intellectual skills development. This resulted in increased confidence and increased ambition for themselves. Their capacity as individual learners

ready to engage fully in higher education was made apparent in the increased quality of work produced across the first and second semester. “

“I was impressed with the students engagement and the high esteem in which they held the programme, lecturers and programme coordinators. Their feedback was overwhelmingly positive and they commented on the hugely encouraging learning environment and level of support individual and group provided “

STANDARDS

“The assessment and marking schemes are set at an appropriate level reflective of level 3 Access Diploma (QA).”

“There was evidence that cross campus moderation has taken place and that standardised assessment criteria had been employed across both campuses and for all modules “

“In my opinion the quality of work produced compares very positively with the level of work expected under QAA Higher access courses.”

“Both the pre examinations board (progress board February) and the boards of examiners (June) were chaired in a most professional and efficient manner “

“Over all I was satisfied with the procedures and administration followed.”

Feedback from the External Examiner in terms of the enhancement of sampling have now been resolved.

In addition, there were no issues of concern raised at the recent Annual course review meeting. The team are energised for the next revalidation phase. They are highly committed to their students and are looking forward to future proofing the programme for the next five years. They provide excellent pastoral care to students with very personal and complex issues.

As with all Access Programmes, the team continue to monitor early leavers, progression, attrition on an ongoing basis. The revalidation will give the opportunity to revisit the two pathways on offer.

I have no hesitation in supporting the one year extension based on the External Examiner feedback, Annual Course Review feedback and my experience of working with the team over the last five years.

Susannah McCall. FPM

FACULTY CONFIRMATION:

SIGNED: _____
Associate Dean (Education)

DATE: ____28 February 2019

The completed form should be returned to the Academic Office, Room J410, Tower Building, Coleraine.

SECTION B: ACADEMIC OFFICE COMMENTS:

The external examiner’s reports indicate broad satisfaction with quality and standards as well as a responsiveness to her comments and recommendations. The Academic Office therefore endorses the proposal for a one-year extension of period of approval.

Gary Keddell

SIGNED: _____ DATE: 4 March 2010
Academic Policy and Standards Manager or Head of Academic Office

SECTION C: QUALITY ENHANCEMENT ASSESSMENT (reflecting annual monitoring data)

Sarah M H. Molyneux

SIGNED: _____ DATE: 5 March 2019
Head of Quality Enhancement

**SECTION D: ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE
(delegated authority from Senate)**

DATE OF COMMITTEE MEETING:

DECISION: Approve (Yes/No)

Late requests (in-year and no imminent Committee meeting) (actioned by Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) on behalf of ASQEC)

DECISION: Approve (Yes/No)

SIGNED: _____ DATE: _____
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)

DATE REPORTED TO ASQEC:

Academic Office
July 2018