

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 15Bi HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT (PG) (BT)

18 February 2020

PRESENT: Professor Chris Nugent, Head of School of Computing, Ulster University (Chair)
Dr Jolene Mairs Dyer, Lecturer in Media Production Ulster University
Dr Claire Haven-Tang, Associate Dean (Research), Reader in Tourism and Management, Cardiff Metropolitan University
Professor David Marshall, Professor of Marketing and Consumer Behaviour, University of Edinburgh Business School
Dr Ioannis Pantelidis, Principal Lecturer, School of Sport and Service Management, University of Brighton

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.

- MSc International Event Management (with PgCert/PgDip exit awards) (FT/PT)
- MSc International Tourism and Hospitality Management (with optional Advanced Practice pathway) and (with PgCert/PgDip exit awards) [*formerly MSc International Tourism Management and MSc Hospitality Management*] (FT/PT)]

Proposed new provision

- MSc Food Design and Innovation (with PgCert/PgDip exit awards) (PT)

All three courses were brought forward by the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management within the Ulster University Business School and will be delivered at the Belfast campus.

The MSc International Tourism and Hospitality Management and MSc International Event Management continue to be accredited by the Institute of Hospitality (IoH), having been successfully reaccredited in March 2019.

PgCert and PgDip exit awards are available for students on all three courses who exit early and having completed 60 or 120 credit points respectively.

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

1. Course submission;
2. Guidelines for Evaluation and Revalidation Panels;
3. The UK Quality Code's Subject Benchmark Statement for Master's degree characteristics (2015) and Master's degrees in Business and Management (2015);
4. Preliminary comments from Panel members.

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3.1 Background and Rationale

The panel met with senior staff from the Ulster University Business School - Professor Heather Farley (Associate Dean (Education), Professor Una McMahon-Beattie (Head of Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management) and Ms Mairead McEntee (Associate Head of Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management/Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator).

The senior team provided some background and context of how the courses fitted within the Faculty's and Department's academic plan. The Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management's portfolio, although not the largest in the Faculty, played a very important part within the overall portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Its provision was very practitioner focused and applied in nature and was very closely linked with and vital to industry and the overall sector. The Department also offered a number of short courses and other training directly to industry.

3.2 Projected intakes

The panel queried the projected numbers but was assured by the senior team that the projections were based on considerable market intelligence from stakeholder consultation which had identified a skills gap, working with Ulster's Global Engagement and Marketing Teams, as well as significant growth in the sector in Northern Ireland. There was a rapid development of global companies and the agri-food industry in Northern Ireland and these courses set to address the skills gap at this level. The Department anticipated significant growth in numbers within the context of these two industry sectors.

The growth in the hospitality and tourism industry in Northern Ireland was now also being recognised by the Department for the Economy and the demand for courses in this area was from those working in the industry wanting to upskill but also from those from non-cognate areas wishing to change career.

International and domestic recruitment were two key strategies and the Department continued to work closely with internal Marketing and Global Engagement Departments in this regard.

The new Advanced Practice pathway also added value and had attracted considerable interest. This pathway was part of an overall Faculty and University strategy to increase numbers, in particular international student recruitment, and had already proved very successful in other courses in the Faculty.

The projected intakes were ambitious but the team was confident that they were achievable. The minimum cohort size was confirmed as 12 students.

In relation to the new MSc Food Design and Innovation, the Department had engaged with stakeholders and sectoral partnerships in developing the course and in relation to prospective recruitment and this engagement would continue going forward.

3.3 Course consolidation

The senior team explained the rationale for the consolidation of the MSc International Tourism Management and MSc Hospitality Management into the MSc International Tourism and Hospitality Management. The new consolidated course was indeed a management course but the content was delivered in the context of the industry and the sector and the specific areas of tourism and hospitality. The senior team assured the panel that neither area would be compromised by the merged course. It was essential to offer a course that worked within

resources but that remained attractive to prospective students and the Department was of the view that this was what they had developed.

In relation of students converting from undergraduate courses, historically one or two students had progressed, however, a marketing campaign targeted on non-cognate areas was ongoing and the Department was seeing a real interest from a broad range of other areas.

3.4 Two intakes

In light of the small numbers and any need to double teach, the panel queried the plan to have two intakes per year (September and January). The senior team advised that this was a wider Faculty and University strategy to facilitate greater student choice and flexibility and to increase international student numbers. The course did not have any pre-requisites so could be delivered in any order, although students were required to undertake one specialist module per semester and the only module having to be taught twice was the Dissertation. The block teaching delivery also greatly facilitated two intakes and targeted marketing campaigns for each intake were ongoing. The two existing courses were aimed at both the domestic and international markets but the new Food Design and Innovation programme was aimed mainly at the domestic market.

Additional induction sessions were required for multiple intakes, however, it had already been working well in the Department and with no additional resource requirements. Induction for both cohorts was identical and specific activities were built into induction and the three day teaching blocks to ensure that students developed a cohort identity.

3.5 Competition

The senior team informed the panel of its main competitors in relation to all three programmes but pointed out the uniqueness of the new Food Design and Innovation programme and its focus on business and management which would fill an identified skills gap. The Faculty had invested heavily in this area and was fully supportive of the programmes offered by the Department. The marketing and promotion for all courses was crucial in allowing prospective students to see the vast opportunities available through undertaking one of these courses.

4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The panel met with a representative group of six students from across the two existing Master's programmes. During discussions the following was highlighted.

- The international student had chosen to study at Ulster because of family connections in Northern Ireland.
- Induction for the international student had been one to one for the course and joint with other international students for the international orientation.
- No issues were raised in relation to the January start and it had been a very smooth process.
- Staff were very helpful and supportive in all aspects and had an open door policy. They responded to and actioned queries in a timely manner.
- All students viewed the new Advanced Practice pathway as a good addition to the programme and felt that it would provide additional opportunities to apply knowledge and skills. It would also increase employability and application of learning.
- The module content was very industry relevant and the new consolidated course would only make it more relevant.
- Students were supported fully by staff in relation to linking with employers and internship opportunities through the strong staff networks and industry contacts.

- The internship that some had undertaken at the end of the undergraduate course had greatly encouraged them to progress to the Master's programme.
- Both full-time and part-time students welcomed the use of block teaching which allowed them to balance study around work and other commitments, although at times it was a challenge.
- Students indicated that group work could be challenging, however, they were all aware of the many learning benefits of group activity and the skills it developed. The individual mark within group work was, however, important and the University had a policy in place to ensure that this was the case.
- Assessment was varied and relevant and feedback was provided in a timely manner.
- A formal system was in place to allow students flexibility to request an extension for an assessment, however, students suggested that the scheduling of assessments and submission deadlines be reviewed for part-time students as it was currently the same as for full-time - this could be difficult to balance around work commitments. If the scheduling was re-set from the outset, it would remove the need for individual students to request an extension.
- All students confirmed that they were enjoying the programmes.

The panel thanked the students for their engagement and wished them well in their studies and careers.

5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAMS

5.1 Block delivery

The panel asked the course team to provide some more details on how block delivery worked in practice for full-time and part-time students and over the two intakes. The team explained that block delivery had been introduced in the Faculty a number of years previously and within these courses at the last revalidation. It received very positive feedback from students who were able to focus on one module at a time and worked well to allow students to balance study with other commitments. Flexibility existed through the University's EC1 process to allow additional time for assessments for any student, including part-time, and this would be kept under review. The study load for full-time and part-time students was different and although submission dates were the same, the number of modules being studied in any one semester was fewer for part-time. The Department did not however, anticipate as a course team that the part-time assessment schedule would be different.

5.2 Assessment strategy

The course team outlined to the panel the overall assessment strategy for the courses and the good range of methods used to reflect the industry and its practical focus and application. Innovative approaches were used to ensure assessment for and as learning and the critical reflection expected at Master's level, for example the professional conversation. Truly authentic assessments were used throughout all courses to ensure that students were fully equipped and confident to transform their professional practice.

The course team confirmed that the time allowed between assessments was sufficient for staff to mark and provide feedback to students. There was a 15 day policy in place in the University but with small numbers, feedback was often provided earlier.

The panel queried the rationale for a 100% assessment piece in HTM713 Contemporary Issues in Tourism and Hospitality. For some students, depending on when they commenced the course (September or January) this may be the first module, and one with a 4,000 word assignment, that they encounter after only four weeks on the course. The course team

assured the panel that all students were fully supported and this was augmented by the role of studies advisor, to include a fully structured induction and support with study skills.

The panel was of the view that there should be an opportunity for students to scaffold and build towards undertaking a such a large piece of work but that the structure did not afford this. Furthermore, if the January intake was directed at international students, their start week was often delayed into the semester which would add further to the pressure. The course team informed the panel that it was currently being considered that all Master's block teaching would not commence until week two.

5.3 Group work

The course team advised that their experience in using group work in block delivery had been good to date and that this type of activity lent itself well to these courses. All students were allocated a mark for individual contribution, in line with University policy and peer and self-assessment were also used. Early intervention ensured that any issues were addressed at the outset and that no students were disadvantaged. In small cohorts, groups were of different sizes and different methods were used to select groups or pairings. It was also noted that elements of group work were applied in a formative way in most modules outside of the summatively assessed pieces.

Group work was a key skill required for the industry and it was important for students to be given opportunities to develop these skills and any practicalities around this type of assessment would be addressed on an ongoing basis. Students had the opportunity through the capstone module on the Food Design and Innovation programme or the Dissertation in the other programmes, to produce an individual project.

5.4 Intakes

The panel enquired as to the basis on which the projected numbers were reached for the MSc Food Design and Innovation and were advised that it was as a result of extensive industry and stakeholder engagement and the identification of a clear gap in the market.

5.5 Internationalisation

The panel acknowledged the University's focus in increasing international recruitment but were unclear as to the justification for the use of 'international' in the two existing programme titles but not in the new course proposal. The team stated that the very nature of its customer base was international and this was embedded throughout all courses including through staff's own research, use of guest speakers, reading lists and journal material and the use of authentic international case studies. The tourism and hospitality industry was global by nature and the international narrative was embedded in all programmes. As a very outward looking Department, the 'international' aspect in the Food Design and Innovation programme title could be considered at the next programme review.

In relation to the European residential, the course team advised the panel that following course review, it had become clear that this was not an attractive option for industry or prospective students and its inclusion in the course was to be reviewed.

5.6 Research informed curriculum and teaching

The course team provided a range of examples as to how their own and others research activity informed teaching and was embedded into the curriculum. Students were provided with opportunities within the programmes to develop their own research skills and profile. Many staff were research active and had published in three and four star journals and students

would be matched with staff who had similar research interests. Ongoing consultancy work within the Department also informed research and course developments.

The Department was very applied in terms of research activity and opportunities for students to undertake applied research were always available. Staff were also mindful that some students may wish to pursue an academic pathway and a Master's route to PhD prepared students well. The Department had a very strong record over the last number of years in new PhD student numbers. Such opportunities were widely promoted through one to one conversations, PhD calls throughout the year and through other professional networks. The introduction of the stand-alone Research Methods module would greatly facilitate the development of research skills and encourage students to undertake research.

5.7 Curriculum Design Framework

The course team advised the panel how they had taken cognisance of and integrated the curriculum design framework and underlying principles in the review of the programmes and how they had fully engaged with colleagues from the Centre for Higher Education and Research Practice (CHERP). The team had found it to be a very useful process.

In relation to the recent re-accreditation with the Institute of Hospitality, the team confirmed that they were only required to provide an update of the documentation for the accreditation to continue for the current five year approval period.

5.8 Placement and internships

The course team informed the panel of the support and guidance available to students in relation to finding placements and companies to work with. They had a wide network of contacts in the industry and would be constantly enquiring about potential projects in which students could be involved.

The team did not envisage any difficulties in getting industry support for students on the programmes or in providing project opportunities which greatly enhanced the programmes and student experience. Access to contemporary data was also available through Mintel and contacts in InvestNI.

5.9 Modules

A number of issues were raised with individual modules as follows:

HTM730 Managing and Leading People

The reading list was missing.

HTM719 Business Sustainability and Innovation

The team confirmed that wider issues such as climate change and also finance were covered by this module.

HTM720 Food Culture, Choice and Environment

The feedback turnaround time should be consistent and in line with University policy of within 15 working days.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the programmes on the following:

- i) The high level of stakeholder engagement and the strong evidence of links with industry.
- ii) The collegiality of the course team.
- iii) The research teaching nexus and how research was embedded into the curriculum.
- iv) The innovative block delivery.
- v) The support provided to students who were real ambassadors for the programmes.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that all three programmes be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2020/21 to 2024/25 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 31 March 2020** for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Minimum intakes

- Minimum intake of 12 students per course.

Conditions

- i) That all issues identified by the Academic Office and detailed in the appendix to the panel report are addressed;
- ii) That the assessment in module HTM713 Contemporary Issues in Tourism and Hospitality is reviewed and separated out into two individually weighted assessments (section 5.2 refers);

Strong Recommendations

- i) To review the generic module descriptions to contextualise content in relation to the Hospitality, Tourism and Food subject areas (sections 3.2 and 5.7 refer);
- ii) That the assessment schedule for part-time students is reviewed (sections 4 and 5.1 refer);

Recommendations

- i) To consider exploring other professional accrediting bodies for Event Management and Food Design and Innovation;
- ii) To revisit some of the module titles to clearly differentiate between those at Level 6 on the corresponding undergraduate programmes;
- iii) To investigate and explore other possible titles for modules in the Food Design and Innovation programme with a view to developing other potential hybrid programmes.

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 20.02.20