

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE EVALUATION PANEL UNIT 2Bii: GAMES DESIGN (UG/PG) (BT)

13 May 2019

PANEL:

Dr Patricia McClure, Associate Head of School of Health Sciences, Ulster University (Chair)
Dr Charlie Hargood, Principal Academic in Games Technology, Department of Creative Technology, Faculty of Science and Technology, Bournemouth University
Ms Rhoda Daly, Senior Lecturer in Games Design, School of Journalism, Media and Performance, University of Central Lancashire
Dr Alison Hampton, Lecturer, Department of Management, Leadership and Marketing, Ulster University

REVALIDATION UNIT CO-ORDINATOR:

Mr Brian Coyle, Senior Lecturer, Belfast School of Art, Ulster University

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs A Guarino, Academic Policy and Standards Officer, Academic Office, Ulster University

1 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The Panel was convened to consider the following provision:

- BDes (Hons) Games Design (with CertHE and AB exit awards and with Optional DIAS, DPP & DPP[I]) (FT/PT)
- MA Games Design (with PgDip exit award) (FT/PT)

The proposed provision aims to produce graduates or postgraduates with specialist training in the area of Games Design, who would identify themselves with a variety of career pathways such as Game Systems Designer, User Interface Designer or Level Designer, and which could lead to self-employment, professional Game Designer, or establishing an SME. The provision will be offered at the Belfast campus. An online distance learning option is planned to be introduced at a later date.

The BDes (Hons) Games Design will be offered from September 2020 in full-time mode over three academic years (6 semesters) and part-time mode over six academic years (12 semesters) at the Belfast campus. An optional associate award of DPP, DPP(I) or DIAS would be available for full-time students after successful completion of year 2. The main module sizes range from 20 - 40 credit points, apart from the final major project which is 80 credit points. There are no optional modules; choice is offered to students when selecting a final year project. There are two exit awards associated with the programme. Students who successfully complete 120 credit points of level 4 modules may exit with a CertHE Games

Design. Students who successfully complete 240 credit points of level 4 and 5 may exit with an AB Games Design.

The MA Games Design will be offered from September 2019 in full-time mode over three semesters of study and part-time mode over six semesters of study, at the Belfast campus. The main module sizes range from 20 - 40 credit points, apart from the final major project which is 60 credit points. There is one exit award associated with the programme. A PgDip may be awarded to students who successfully complete 120 credit points. The MA would be awarded after subsequent satisfactory completion of the 60 credit points research project (180 credit points total).

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

- Agenda and programme of the meeting;
- Course submission;
- Guidelines for Evaluation Panels;
- QAA subject benchmark statement for Art and design (2017);
- Preliminary comments from panel members; and
- Reports from central University departments on Library, IT and digital learning matters;

Prior to the meeting, the Panel was taken on a tour of the facilities available to support delivery of the provision by the Chair of the Course Planning committee, Mr Brian Coyle. The Panel found the tour to be beneficial and informative and considered the space provision to be impressive.

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3.1 Background and Rationale

The Panel asked the senior team to elaborate on how the programme sits within the strategic plans and priorities of the Faculty. The Associate Dean (Education) described the 2017 amalgamation of the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Social Sciences and Belfast School of Arts into the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, which brought about a robust review of the totality of the programmes. The provision in Belfast, which would include Screen Production, Interactive Media, Animation and Games Design, will sit in one bespoke hub, with shared staff, expertise and facilities across the provision. In relation to staff resources, the senior team assured the Panel that plans are in place for further recruitment in addition to the appointment of Mr Brian Coyle (in October 2018) and a very recent appointment of a technician who has yet to take up his post.

3.2 Stakeholders' Involvement

In response to the Panel's query regarding the stakeholders' involvement in the design of the provision, the senior team stated that the programme was designed to address the needs of local, national and global industry following consultations with local employers and wider industry consultations with agencies such as Northern Ireland Screen. Global

games networks, such as Games NI, were also consulted to identify the specific skill set required from a games designer.

3.3 Projected Intake and Marketing Strategy

The senior team discussed the marketing strategy of the provision, describing significant engagement with local colleges and employers, both indicating high demand for the provision. The Panel noted that the projected intake was a conservative one for both programmes. Specifically, high demand from local colleges for second year entry to the undergraduate provision was mentioned.

Promotion of the MA, planned for delivery from September 2019, was outlined. This included advertisement in degree shows, attendance in gaming conventions, digital marketing through online media and advertisement via Northern Ireland Screen. The senior team acknowledge the challenge of recruitment for the first cohort, due to the short time span.

3.4 Professional Accreditation

The Panel asked the senior team if they were planning on pursuing professional accreditation, expressing the benefits it would provide for marketing purposes. The senior team expressed their intention of seeking such accreditation from either Creative Skillset or TIGA, adding that this was taken into account at the provision's design stage.

3.5 Staff Resources

In response to a query from the Panel, the senior team outlined the staff recruitment plans for the course team, adding that staff working together across the four courses (Screen Production, Interactive Media, Animation and Games Design), would allow for a cross over of talent to ensure a high level of content delivery and student experience. The senior team assured the Panel that, as this has been targeted as an area for growth, further resources will be injected under the strategic investment fund should student numbers grow. The Panel noted that the course team was considering inviting visiting lecturers from industry to provide specialised skills, as a temporary measure to fill in the gaps in specialised staff.

4 MEETING WITH THE COURSE TEAM

4.1 Curriculum Design Principles

The team outlined the scaffolding nature of the course structure delivery, explaining that the content would become more complex as the students advanced through the provision. The first year would ensure basic understanding of the principles of Games Design. The second year would introduce team work in the first semester and multidisciplinary team work in the second semester. In year three, students would have the opportunity to apply the skills acquired to the major project, potentially leading to self-employment.

4.2 Course Structure

The Panel expressed concern regarding the intense one-day delivery of the MA programme. The team explained that, in the MA Animation programme, this was the students' preferred structure as it saved the students, some of whom commute long distances, to make the journey more than once a week. They assured the Panel that as delivery was not solely

comprised of frontal lectures, and as the day included many breaks, this structure has proven to be manageable for the MA Animation students. The Panel felt that such an intense long working day would be to the detriment of the students both in relation to the student experience and the ability to absorb the delivered content, pointing out that students would often prioritise convenience over learning experience. The Panel commended the team for consulting students in the design of the provision, yet recommended the structure be changed to a two-day delivery.

In relation to the undergraduate provision, the team clarified that students would normally be on campus five days with delivery concentrated over two or three days, depending on the module sizes.

The Panel questioned the decision to deliver two 40 credit points modules, *Launch Title* and *Mobile Game Development and Production*, in one academic year of the PT provision of the BDes programme. The team explained that the decision to deliver the modules, which involved group work, in the same year was made to allow students to benefit from the networking developed in the first semester module by carrying it over to the second semester module. The team felt the familiarity would prove beneficial for the students. The Panel was of the opinion that the opposite might be the case if the group did not get along. In addition, a change in the group composition would provide students with further learning potential. The team assured the Panel that, where needed, in cases where the group did not work well together, there would be scope for movement and change in the composition of the groups.

4.3 Placement

The Panel asked the team to outline the students' preparation for placement. The team explained that students would be provided with support from the initial stages of preparation for placement. Preparation relating to employability and placement would start early on with school wide and course wide activities throughout the year. Career Services would deliver talks to 2nd and 3rd year students and provide guidance and support in an array of areas such as mock interviews, mock panels and CV writing. In addition to the support from the Careers Service, there would be a dedicated member of staff within the Faculty, supporting this process. Students would be given informative talks from industry as well as valuable advice from representatives of NI Screen who would come to advise on industry requirements regarding such things as desirable skills and portfolio preparation. The team added that preparation of students for employability and placement would also be embedded within the provision's various modules. This would include reviewing portfolios, preparation for pitching ideas, etc.

The team clarified that the Placement and DIAS were both optional and that full-time students would have the option of either choosing one of these options or directly progress to their final year in their 3rd year of study. The team added that, due to exceptional circumstances, there had been instances in the past, in other programmes offered by the School, when students who could not complete the DIAS were allowed to complete the DPP instead.

4.4 Learning Outcomes

The Panel was of the view that the programme learning outcomes presented in the course document were broad and vague with substantial overlap. The team agreed to redesign the programme learning outcomes to ensure they are specific and distinct from one another.

In regard to the module learning outcomes, the Panel commented on the deviation from the curriculum design principles recommended norm of four. In addition, the Panel explained that it was difficult to ascertain the content and delivery level of each module, as instead of specific, level appropriate module learning outcomes, the module description only included a reference to the related programme learning outcomes. The team agreed to include in all of the module descriptions, specific, level appropriate, learning outcomes, in line with the curriculum design principles.

4.5 Promotion of the Provision

The Panel highlighted that normally a Games Design degree, being an artistic games course, would include both Games Arts and Games Assets. As these are not planned to be fully covered by the provision, the Panel recommended the focus on Games Design be clearly stated in the course document and all promotional material.

4.6 Modules

The Panel discussed the content of the various modules with the team.

Gameplay Scripting

The team acknowledged that the current content description was broad for a first-year module and assured the Panel the module content would be tailored to suit a level 4, year 1 semester 1 module.

Gameplay Scripting, Game Prototyping and Launch Title

With the absence of specific module learning outcomes, the Panel felt it was impossible to ascertain the difference between these three technical modules and asked the team to revise the module descriptions to ensure they are distinguishable and linked to specific skill sets.

Games Study

The Panel asked the team to review the module's coursework outlined in the module description, querying if a 2000 words research essay is sufficient for a 20 credit point module.

Launch Title

The Panel commended the excellent multi-disciplinary approach which is representative of the games industry framework and is key to developing professional practice experience.

The Panel requested the team outline the logistics for the delivery of the module which would include students from different courses and different modules, with potentially different objectives, learning outcomes and assessments. As the team acknowledged that the particulars of this collaboration were yet to be established, the Panel requested the team review the structure of the module to ensure a suitable framework to manage the diverse range of students and assessments that may be involved in this collaboration.

BDes Games Design Major Project

The Panel expressed concern regarding the substantial size of the Major Project module, specifically mentioning the higher potential for failure that might accompany an 80 credit point module. The team explained that this structure has been successfully introduced across the majority of the courses within the School, adding that although the summative feedback was only given at the end of the module with the submission of the final project, formative feedback was provided around the Christmas period and throughout the year. Consultation with students on the various courses offered by the School indicated satisfaction with this structure. Support of the structure was also given by the external examiners of the Fine Art provision. The Panel was assured that the students would be made aware of the potential risk of failure, given the size of the module, and it being delivered in the final year of the programme. Close engagement between the students and tutors would ensure timely support where concern of failure arises.

The Panel was of the view that a single submission point would create a vulnerability for failure and suggested the team considered a formal summative assessment mid-way to motivate the students. As no dissertation was attached to this module, the Panel suggested the inclusion of a written component.

4.7 Assessment

The Panel sought further clarification in regard to the team's assessment strategy. They felt the module descriptions did not offer clarity regarding the various assessment items, many of them involving creating a game, and asked the team to elaborate on component parts, word count and nominal hours.

The Panel suggested the team considered a portfolio or 3-4 smaller projects with summative feedback offered throughout the module instead of the one more challenging project at the end of the module, feeling that this would both motivate and benefit students. The team discussed the innovative assessment procedures that were in place and were already being used across the School. This was exemplified by the use of continuous open dialogue and peer assessment.

4.8 Group Work Assessment

The Panel was of the view that, although difficult to assess, group work was a valuable employability skill and queried the strategy relating to group assessment. The team confirmed they would adhere to Ulster University's policy on group work, explaining that in modules which contribute to an award classification, at least 25% of each student's assessment would be based on his or her individual contribution.

The Panel asked the team to clarify in the course document which modules would incorporate group work assessment, feeling this was not clearly articulated in the module descriptions.

4.9 Reading Lists

The Panel commented on the large scale of the required reading list within the various modules, suggesting those be revised to ensure they are closely linked with the module content and reassessed in relation to the allocation of which items would be required and

which would be recommended. The team assured the Panel that all required books would be purchased and available in the University library.

4.10 Induction and Student Support

The Panel asked the team to outline how induction would be delivered. The team assured the Panel that although the initial one-week induction would be delivered at the beginning of the course, short inductions would be delivered throughout the provision. The induction would not just be delivered by the course team but student services would also be involved. To ensure cohort identity and integration, in addition to social events during induction, such as film screening and game sessions like treasure hunt, the team would hold 'game jams' which would help bring all year groups together.

In response to the Panel's query, the team explained that during induction, students would be given the opportunity to raise any disability or difficulty with which they might need support. In addition, if applicable, special support and allowances would be offered to any student suffering from any disability. The team added that although there would not be a specific dedicated member of staff, there were clear protocols in place and students would be able to approach members of staff, representatives of the Student Union or members of the University's Student Support Services.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the team on the following aspects evident from the evaluation:

- The strongly defined rationale and context of the course;
- The links with industry and collaboration with other programmes within the University;
- The international links across universities providing a strong scope for student collaboration;
- The impressive space provision.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the provision be approved for a period of two years (intakes 2019/20 – 2020/21) to align with the revalidation schedule for Unit 2B Animation/Graphic/Interaction Design (the MA to be offered from September 2019, and the BDes from September 2020), 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 June 2019 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

- i) Address matters of detail and clarification as identified in the notes by Academic Office to the Panel;
- ii) Redesign the programme learning outcomes to ensure they are specific and distinct from one another;
- iii) Include specific, level appropriate, learning outcomes in all module descriptions, in line with the curriculum design principles;
- iv) Clearly identify the aspects of 3D modelling skills and techniques covered within the *Asset Development for Games* module;

- v) Review and define the content of the modules *Gameplay Scripting*, *Game Prototyping* and *Launch Title* to ensure they are distinguishable and linked to the Programme learning outcomes;
- vi) Define the scope of the *Gameplay Scripting* module to suit a level 4, year 1 semester 1 module;
- vii) Clearly articulate the assessment strategy within each module, providing elaboration on component parts, word count and nominal hours; and review the *Games Studies* module to ensure it is not under assessed;
- viii) Clearly identify the staffing plan and the skills required for the delivery of the provision; and
- ix) Revise the proposed intense delivery of the MA programme from a one, 9 hours, working day to a two-day delivery to enhance the student experience.

Recommendations

- i) Revise reading lists to ensure they are more closely linked with the module content; and reassess which items are required and which are recommended;
- ii) Make explicit in the course document and in the promotion of the course that the focus of this course is on Games Design;
- iii) Review the delivery of the two 40 credit point modules, *Launch Title* and *Mobile Game Development and Production*, in one academic year of the PT provision;
- iv) Review the structure of the module *Launch Title* to ensure a suitable framework to manage the diverse range of students and assessments that may be involved in this collaboration;
- v) Revise the *Major Project* to include a written report component;
- vi) Clearly articulate in the course document the development of students' employability skills; and
- vii) Expand on student induction and student support within the course document.

6 APPRECIATION

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