

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE EVALUATION PANEL AT CITY COLLEGE, DOHA, QATAR

20 June 2019

PRESENT: Professor Paul Bartholomew, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), Ulster University (Chair)
Professor Stephen McClean, Associate Head of School of Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Life and Health Sciences, Ulster University
Professor David Edgar, Professor of Strategy and Business Transformation, Glasgow School for Business and Society, Glasgow Caledonian University
Dr Paul Ferri, Senior Lecturer in International Entrepreneurship (Management), Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow
Mrs Nic Bartholomew, Lecturer in Higher Education Practice, Quality Enhancement Ulster University

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs Carol Reid, Faculty Partnership Manager, Ulster University Business School
Ms D Troy, Academic Policy and Standards Officer, Academic Office, Ulster University

1 BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

The panel was convened to consider the following proposed provision.

- Diploma in International Foundation Studies (with Pathways) (FT/PT)
- BSc Hons Business Studies (Level 6) (FT/PT)
- MSc Marketing (with PgCert/PgDip exit awards) (PT)
- MSc Management (with PgCert/PgDip exit awards) (FT)
- Master of Business Administration (MBA) (non-executive) (with PgCert/PgDip exit awards) (FT/PT)

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

1. Course submissions;
2. Guidelines for Evaluation and Revalidation Panels;
3. QAA subject benchmark statements for Business and Management (2015) and Business and Management Master's degree characteristics (2015);
4. Reports from Central Departments (Library and IT);
5. Preliminary comments from Panel members.

3 TOUR OF FACILITIES AND PRESENTATION

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Panel undertook a tour of on-site facilities and resources. This was followed by a presentation by City College which provided some background information, an overview of the institution and plans for the future.

4 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

4.1 Resources

Whilst undertaking the tour of facilities, the Panel had been advised that the noise level when students were in the building could be high. As a consequence, they enquired if any sound insulation or softer furnishings had been considered to ensure that noise levels between classes were not disruptive. The Senior Team advised that there were no issues in relation to classes being disturbed by excessive noise – acoustics had been tested during the redesign of the library space where the general noise of staff/student interaction could be heard, however, noise levels were not excessive. Panel walls and ceilings were already insulated but if any issues would arise in the future, they would be addressed.

It was also noted that the main student social areas were going to be moved to the ground floors and this would also keep noise levels on the teaching floors to an acceptable minimum. The Panel suggested that use of different furniture and materials would also help absorb some of the noise, as well as making the teaching spaces more learner friendly and flexible.

The Panel enquired what facilities were available for students to undertake group work and independent learning and was advised that students were able to use the library and the computer lab. The team had significant experience in this regard through many years delivering BTEC programmes. Sufficient space was available for both the incoming and the following year. Based on projected numbers, some excess space would be available, so capacity was not an issue.

The Panel asked if any formal mechanism was used to monitor occupancy and room allocation and was advised that nothing of this nature was in place as it was not currently required but software could be used moving forward. They did, however, indicate that any cohort over 17 students would require a split into two groups and this would inherently have staffing implications.

The Senior Team advised that from the new academic year, the College would move from two to three shifts – 9.00 am to 1.00 pm; 1.30 pm to 5.30 pm and 6.15 pm to 10.15 pm - and this would introduce significant capacity into the building. The option to teach into the weekend was also available, if required.

4.2 Vision and Mission

The Panel enquired how City College had aligned its vision and mission to that at Ulster and why Ulster University had been selected as a potential partner. The Senior Team stated that the 'fit' between the two institutions was of fundamental importance and they felt that Ulster as the civic university and the Ulster University Business School's (UUBS) focus on practical application and entrepreneurship was clearly aligned to that at City College.

City College had undertaken considerable time and effort in seeking out a suitable partner from a list of 150 institutions (across the world) approved by the Ministry of Education. This list had been narrowed down and Ulster University fitted all the College's criteria. A suitable partner needed to be able to offer courses that would add value to the country and governmental projects. Not least, City College's Principal was an Ulster graduate. The civic contribution which was key to Ulster University as well as its focus on contributing to the Northern Ireland economy and community, very much aligned to those at City College.

4.3 Minimum and maximum cohorts

The Senior Team advised the Panel that numbers were constrained by the current site which could accommodate a maximum of 220 students. Currently, the academic team for these programmes comprised five full-time staff, supported by eight administration staff. The Senior Team recognised that going forward they would be required to build on the staff team but were committed to doing so.

The Panel were advised that the College was currently investigating other buildings in other areas of the city that could be bolted onto current facilities and which could also be more convenient for the Master's students. The Senior Team provided assurance that they would not be restricted in terms of resources if numbers were to grow.

The minimum student numbers to ensure a vibrant community of learners were confirmed by the Senior Team as 6 or 7. The Chair stated that this would be acceptable initially for the IFP but that an absolute minimum of 12-15 students would be expected for each of the Business programmes.

The Panel acknowledged the staff development opportunities available to full-time staff, however, enquired what was available to sessional and part-time academic staff. The Senior Team advised that BTEC requirements led to the setting of a minimum amount of time aside annually for all staff. This was in addition to online opportunities and face to face training for staff. Moving forward, the College's staff development focus would be on research and scholarly activity and a model of 50% teaching, 40% administration and 10% scholarly activity would be used to ensure that all staff remained current. The Senior Team assured the Panel of their commitment to this.

It was also confirmed that the librarian would be fully supported to undertake the professional librarian qualification available through Ulster University.

Specifically in relation to sessional staff, the College's preference, where possible, was to employ full-time staff rather than part-time, with the former generally employed on two-year contracts. A locality policy was in place in Qatar although the College was not affected by this.

The Panel enquired if there was any aspiration for staff to engage with the UK Professional Standards Framework (Advance HE) and was advised that the professionalism of academic staff would be strongly encouraged through UKPSF as well as through the QAA. Some staff had already published but others had not, but research and peer reviewed publications were important to ensure that teaching was research-led and informed. There would also be opportunities for Ulster academics with particular expertise, to work with City College staff to encourage publication and build confidence in this regard. As indicated previously, a 10% research output would be expected for all staff.

The Chair pointed out that Ulster had one of the highest levels of engagement with UKPSF in the UK and that this was important in terms of collegial discourse and may well be useful in terms of demonstrating quality assurance with the Ministry of Education in Qatar. It would be important for staff to seek Fellowship moving forward.

The Senior Team advised that the Ministry already checked the qualifications of all staff and there was a requirement to hold at least a Master's level award to teach higher education. A well-established and formal structure was already in place for staff training and development. The Pearson BTEC methodology currently in place in the College already had a built-in

mentorship process. Investment in staff and staff retention was essential for the student learning experience.

The Senior Team stated that there were significant opportunities for both institutions to learn from each other and that institutional strengthening was a key part of City College's vision for this partnership.

4.4 Stakeholder Engagement

In respect of stakeholder engagement and how this had contributed to date, the Senior Team advised that guest lecturers were utilised to speak to students on existing programmes. The current curriculum was predominantly BTEC and not employer-led, however, enhanced stakeholder engagement would be a key feature for the future and for higher education at City College. This would be within the parameters of the approved Ulster curriculum.

The Chair noted that it was essential that City College staff liaised with their Ulster counterparts in relation to accommodating variances in assignment and assessment tasks. Sufficient flexibility existed to do so in order that the curriculum worked within the Qatari context; not to do so would only disadvantage students.

4.5 Market and demand

The Senior Team provided some context as to the different segments in the country in which a number of different scholarly systems operated. This resulted in different groups of students coming from different systems, alongside professionals and others coming from outside Qatar. They also provided some additional details of the different student journeys and the broad propositions expected for each.

In terms of marketing the programmes, the Senior Team advised that the Foundation programme was stand-alone and would be marketed as such. There was a vocational pathway through HNC/D and then the more academic three-year degree programme which was aimed at students who had completed the equivalent of A-Level study but students progressing from BTEC Level 3 would also be actively targeted.

The Senior Team confirmed that they would adopt the Ulster University style guidelines in relation to all publicity and marketing material and that all such material would be approved by Ulster prior to publication.

4.6 Strategic issues

In terms of the strategic nature of the partnership, the Panel enquired if IFP graduates would be actively encouraged to progress to an Ulster University campus as an international student. The Senior Team confirmed that this would be the case and that the London and Birmingham campuses were very attractive to Middle Eastern students.

The Senior Team advised that one of the reasons why they had wanted to offer a degree 'top-up' in Qatar was for students to be able to avail of the opportunities that it would bring including taking part in exchanges. Students would be made very aware of all the options that Ulster had to offer.

The matter of the current arrangement with Portsmouth University was questioned and the Senior Team confirmed that they had approached that institution in relation to developing a full partnership arrangement but that this was not being pursued. The current articulation arrangement only would remain, the Senior Team also pointed out that a Foundation Programme should give a wide range of options for progression/articulation to students;

indeed, it was important to note that part of the contract with the Ministry was to provide a range of options for all kinds of students.

The Panel highlighted that Ulster University's expectation was that the number of students coming onto Ulster programmes each year from City College should be as set out in the business plan.

4.7 Equal opportunities

It was noted that the environment in which City College operated was very different to Europe and the UK in terms of diversity. The College, however, was very proactive in this regard in terms of providing additional support for particular student needs and making reasonable adjustments to cater for differing needs. It was noted that the culture made disclosure of any disability often difficult for students although it was encouraged at application, interview and acceptance stages. For this reason, many students did not self-declare but staff made every effort to provide appropriate assistance and support as they became aware of any support requirements.

The College also endeavoured to ensure that marketing material contained mix of gender and ethnicity and always portrayed a very international context.

When asked, the Senior Team advised that there were currently no student societies or a students' union as unions of any kind were not permitted in Qatar. Student events, however, were organised and the students themselves joined together for different activities and this was actively supported by staff.

4.8 Student voice

Activities such as those set out above included opportunities for the student voice to be heard as staff often also participated. Furthermore, a formal Staff Student Liaison Committee operated within the College and this provided another channel for students to provide feedback and raise issues.

In terms of student representation for academic provision, this would be achieved through module evaluations and feedback forms. Staff currently undertook evaluations three times during the year as well as feedback during class. The ongoing two-way process was essential for both staff and students alike.

4.9 Diploma in International Foundation Studies

Some issues raised by an external expert in advance of the meeting were discussed with the Team. It was not felt that an Arabic speaker was required, rather all courses were always taught in English and in the Team's view, this was the best method and had worked effectively to date. The focus was on the English language and the student expectation was that they would be taught by a native English speaker only.

4.10 Library

The issues raised in the Library report were discussed. The Senior Team committed to the recommendations therein, namely to additional £12k investment for additional stock; a recurrent budget of £5k; support for the librarian to undertake the professional librarianship course; and to extend opening hours into the evening.

It was noted that printing and scanning facilities were already available to students via the librarian.

4.11 VLE

The College currently used Canvas as its VLE. BlackBoard would be adopted in line with what was used at Ulster University and by Ulster students and any required training in this regard would be provided.

4.12 Start date

Discussion took place with regard to a January start date should the approval process require an extension. The Senior Team advised that they were actively pressing for a September start date with the Ministry and they hoped that this would be achieved. A later start date would also have implications in terms of synchronisation with Ulster assessments and examinations. It was noted, however, that most of the Ulster modules were delivered in both semester 1 and 2 so a January start could be accommodated, if necessary.

Both parties confirmed that each was committed to a September intake but also to a later January intake should the need arise within the approval processes.

5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAMS

5.1 Course delivery

The Panel asked the Course Team to outline how they saw the course being delivered and in doing so, how they would engage with Ulster colleagues. The Course Team stated that the development of a good working relationship from the outset was of fundamental importance. The Course Team would utilise Skype and email for example, to maintain regular communication with their counterparts at Ulster, in respect of course material, assessments and module handbooks.

The Course Team pointed out the very different context in the Middle East to that in the UK and it was important to set this out clearly and manage expectations at induction. They would use exemplar assessments, the plagiarism policy and the use of Turnitin as well as clearly communicating Ulster policies and procedures. At an early stage, the Team would ensure that all modules and assessments were culturally appropriate and make contextual revisions where required, in consultation with their Ulster module counterpart.

In relation to academic quality assurance, the Team would utilise student feedback surveys, double marking and Ulster moderation. For current provision, the Course Team already focused on student development and provision of formative feedback.

It was noted that examinations were not common in the Middle East and staff would ensure that students were well prepared and exam-ready by going through examination procedures and format, past papers and exemplar answers.

The Team aimed to create an Ulster University environment from the outset. This included access for staff and students to the Ulster library resources and BlackBoard. Students would also be provided with training in this regard as well as a full library induction. Every effort would be made to make students more research aware and how to access the many journals which would be available to them.

With regard to relationship building with Ulster colleagues, the Course Team was of the view that this could be well progressed within two months and communication between Ulster and

City College module co-ordinators was of key importance. This responsibility would also be incorporated into the City College teaching contract.

The Panel asked how student expectations would be managed, for example, explaining to students the concept of capped marks for re-sits. Again, the Team advised that everything would be set out very clearly at induction and academic issues would be embedded as part of tutorials. The City College Team would also be in regular contact with Ulster in relation to guidance on policy and procedure. Regular workshops would be held in relation to academic writing and plagiarism.

When asked how the City College Team felt about delivering someone else's module content, it was acknowledged that although they were aware that this was the model to be used, it could be a challenge, however, they hoped going forward that they may be able to have more of an input into future developments. The Team were also aware that they could contextually develop and adapt current module content and assessment.

The Panel stated that during the first year in particular, it was important that the module learning outcomes were not compromised – the quality assurance was already in-built and this had to be maintained going forward.

The Course Team advised that they had already undertaken considerable groundwork in relation to Ulster University including their understanding Ulster's policies and procedures; module and course handbooks; and reading lists. They were also clear on Ulster's examination procedures and would have a nominated examinations officer at City College who would liaise directly with Ulster in all aspects of examination processes. Examination material would be held securely and examinations would be synchronised with Ulster exam timetables and academic calendars. The Panel commended the Team on the work they had undertaken to date.

5.2 Master's Level learning and teaching

The Panel enquired as to the Team's understanding of Level 7. The Team advised that students at Master's level generally had considerable employment experience, for example, those undertaking the MBA, and it was about finding solutions to real business problems. The strengths of individual students and their own professional knowledge would bring a new dimension to learning and teaching.

The Panel noted the significant amount of independent learning which was acknowledged as not the cultural norm in the Middle East. They enquired how students would be supported in this regard. Student transition would be carefully managed, and the Team would ensure from the outset that students would get into the habit of reading - this would be emphasised at induction. It was important to encourage a research ethos and that an appropriate environment was provided to facilitate this.

The Panel pointed out that Level 7 was about critical thinking and analysis and enquired how the Team would ensure that these skills were nurtured and developed. The Team explained that they would use live case studies and sharing of best practice but that all staff were extremely motivated and would also use the expertise in the classroom from the students themselves.

5.3 VLE and digital literacy

It was noted that Ulster's VLE, BlackBoard, would be used by students on these programmes. The Course Team informed the Panel that some staff had knowledge of this platform, but that training could be provided as required.

In relation to digital literacy, students could avail of the Microsoft Office suite of applications and were guided on how to maximise use of Office 365. Other mechanisms were used to develop digital literacy skills including group work and presentations. Students had also recently been involved in the filming, editing and production of a College marketing video.

The Team confirmed that online assessment and feedback was already utilised as standard practice at City College.

5.4 Student voice

The Course Team informed the Panel that there were many channels through which students were able to provide feedback and raise issues but that Ulster processes would also be adopted in this regard. Staff were very approachable and operated an open-door policy. They could be contacted via email and appointments could be arranged to meet with individual students. All staff were very student focussed and strove to provide an excellent student learning experience.

Students did not have a dedicated studies advisor, however, could approach the Course Director and make a one to one appointment. This could be accommodated due to the small numbers.

5.5 Professional Development

The Team advised the Panel that in relation to their own professional development they would utilise peer observation and various CPD opportunities including BTEC seminars but that going forward they would work with Ulster in relation to participation in conferences and presentation of research papers.

5.6 Staff Induction

In relation to staff induction, the Team advised that this involved a general HR induction followed by another with City College and then an introduction to the course team. It was a very friendly environment in which to work.

5.7 Philosophy and Values

When asked about City College's philosophy and values, the Team advised that it was a learning organisation with values integral to the student experience. Going forward, they would also take Ulster's values on board in the delivery of these programmes and consider any impact this would have on both staff and students.

5.8 Health and Safety

The Team confirmed health and safety was of paramount importance. This was widely acknowledged and was a standing staff meeting agenda item.

5.9 Diploma in International Foundation Studies (IFP)

The Panel noted that the two English language modules were compulsory, however, enquired how students with a higher level of English language could be accommodated within the programme. The Course Team confirmed that students already holding the required level of English language could enrol. The Panel were of the view that FCE014 Project-Based Learning and FCE100 Extended Critical Thinking for Undergraduate Study be added into the City College programme as alternative modules for these students.

The IFP was an intensive course but the Team provided assurance that there were no timetabling or capacity issues.

There was a considerable amount of group work in the course which the Team acknowledged was always a challenge, however, the benefits in terms of developing communication, team building and problem-solving skills greatly outweighed the challenges. Students were required to sign a form to confirm that they had contributed equally to the group assignment. Cultural issues also played a part in group activity and a matter to which the Team was always mindful.

The Panel noted an issue raised in the external report that reading, writing, speaking and listening were being taught separately but that they should be integrated to reflect the fact that they never existed in isolation. The Team was of the view that the method used currently was effective in ensuring that material was covered systematically and logically but they would keep this under review.

5.10 Collaborative Partnership

The Ulster Faculty Partnership Manager (FPM) confirmed that a budget was set aside within the Ulster University Business School for the FPM and Associate Dean (Education) and some members of academic staff to visit City College, Doha and meet staff face to face as the partnership would develop.

In relation to graduation, the Course Team were extremely enthusiastic in relation to the potential graduation of the first Ulster students from City College and stated this would be seen as a real occasion for both staff and students. The Chair confirmed that a senior officer from Ulster would preside over proceedings.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the programmes on the following:

- i) The strong commitment and enthusiasm of both the Course Team and Senior Management;
- ii) The excellent staff relationship with students;
- iii) The enthusiasm for the partnership;
- iv) The good start that the team has made in relation to collaborative working.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the following programmes be approved for delivery at City College, Doha, Qatar for **five** years (intakes 2019/20 to 2023/24):

- BSc Hons Business Studies (Level 6) (FT/PT)
- MSc Marketing (with PgCert/PgDip exit awards) (PT)
- MSc Management (with PgCert/PgDip exit awards) (FT)
- Master of Business Administration (MBA) (non-executive) (with PgCert/PgDip exit awards) (FT/PT)

And that the Diploma in International Foundation Studies with pathways be approved for **three** years (intakes 2019/20 to 2021/22) to align with revalidation Unit 31B, 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 17 July 2019** for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Note: Approval is subject to Senate and Council approval under Ordinance XXVIII: Recognition of Institutions for the purpose of offering approved programmes of study leading to University Awards.

Minimum cohorts

- 6 - 7 for Diploma in International Foundation Studies.
- 12 - 15 for all Business programmes.

Conditions

- i) That all issues identified by the Academic Office and detailed in the appendix to the panel report are addressed;
- ii) That the College puts in writing its commitment to the library resource requirements, namely £12k investment in library stock for the business programmes; a £5k recurrent budget; and support for the librarian to undertake the professional librarian qualification (section 4.10 refers);
- iii) That the Ulster University Business School provides an action plan to evidence the teaching of criticality as an academic subject (section 5.2 refers);
- iv) That two modules, FCE014 Project-Based Learning and FCE100 Extended Critical Thinking for Undergraduate Study, are added to the Diploma in International Foundation Studies to accommodate students who already hold the required level of English language (section 5.9 refers);

Recommendations

- i) To put in place a more formal CPD process for staff to encourage increased uptake of and fuller engagement with UKPSF and as part of staff development activity to consider the inclusion of Certified Business Manager Educator and Certified Membership of the Association of Learning Technologists (section 4.3 refers);
- ii) Given the emphasis on collaborative learning, to undertake a review of the furniture and furnishings in the current building with a view to investing in appropriate furniture to create an enhanced learning environment which can then be moved to the new facilities (section 4.1 refers);
- iii) That the module evaluation report is reviewed to include an additional section inviting the module co-ordinator to reflect on cross-partner engagement;
- iv) That the UUBS consider developing an operational handbook for staff.

6 APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked the Panel, in particular, the external members, and the Course Teams for their valuable contribution to the revalidation process. The Chair also thanked Senior Management, including the College Principal, for the hospitality and welcome provided to the Panel for the duration of their visit to Doha.