ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE EVALUATION/REVALIDATION PANEL: REVALIDATION OF SUBJECT UNIT 2K PRODUCT DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF MA ANIMATION

15 May 2018

PANEL: Dr D Barr, Head of School of Education, Ulster University (Chair)
                                    Mr J Marley, Subject Partnership Manager, Faculty of Life and Health Sciences, Ulster University
                                    Ms M Downey, Vice President, Academic and Student Affairs (Belfast), Ulster University
                                    Dr N Spencer, Senior Lecturer, Northern Design Centre, Northumbria University (Product Design)
                                    Professor I Campbell, Associate Dean (Teaching), Professor of Computer Aided Product Design, Loughborough University (Product Design)
                                    Ms L Sharrock, Senior Lecturer in Animation, University of South Wales (Animation)
                                    Mr C Williams, Associate Dean of Computer Animation and Head of the National Centre for Computer Animation, Bournemouth University (Animation)

REVALIDATION UNIT
CO-ORDINATOR: Mr Martin McGinn, Belfast School of Art (Product Design)

CHAIR OF THE COURSE
PLANNING COMMITTEE: Mr Alex Parkin, Belfast School of Art (Animation)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Brian McArthur, Academic Office

1   INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider the following provision within Revalidation Unit 2K Product Design and to evaluate the undermentioned new proposals.

Provision

To consider existing programme:

BDes Hons Product and Furniture Design (FT/PT) (BT)
(Proposed new title, BA Hons Product Design)

To consider new proposals:

MA Product Design (FT/PT) (BT)
MA Animation and VFX (FT/PT) (BT and DL from 2019/20)

BA Hons Product Design

1.1   The BA Hons Product Design was the only programme undergoing revalidation. It was formerly titled, BDes Hons Product and Furniture Design. It was proposed that the title be changed to BA Hons Product Design, a title considered appropriate by the Panel (see paragraph 3.3 below).

1.2   The full-time programme includes an integrated foundation year comprising a mix of 20- and 40-credit point level 3 modules. All modules in the programme are compulsory with an optional

DPP, DPP[I] and DIAS. The programme would be offered in full- and part-time modes and has AB and CertHE exit awards.

MA Product Design

1.3 The MA Product Design was presented for evaluation. APAG, at its meeting on 27/9/17, agreed that the proposal proceed to planning and evaluation (min 17.108), the issue of availability of suitable accommodation for the programme be revisited with the evaluation panel and that the Faculty would be expected to make a decision on recruitment in light of known capacity.

1.4 The issue of suitable accommodation arose out of a concern regarding the School's campus-based delivery generally relating to the apparent lack of space for new programmes on the Belfast campus, as all bookable rooms for the next academic year were already block-booked for existing programmes. It was noted however that redundant room bookings were at that time being removed from the system and a space audit was expected to be carried out. It was also noted that the pressure on space should be alleviated on completion of the new Belfast campus. The issue was discussed with senior staff – see paragraph 3.1 below.

1.5 The MA Product Design builds on the undergraduate degree from which it would expect graduates to progress into the MA (as well as from other external sources). It comprises five compulsory modules, four 'taught' and a final 60-credit point project module. The 'taught' modules are an equal mix of 20- and 40- credit point modules. The programme would be offered in full- and part-time modes and a PgDip exit award would be available.

MA Animation

1.6 The Animation programme was originally proposed (CA1) with the title, MSc Animation and VFX, but was presented as MA Animation. The Panel considered the title appropriate. At its meeting on 21/11/17, APAG agreed that the proposal proceed to planning and evaluation (min 17.128) and agreed that the Faculty complete a Digital Learning Resource Agreement in advance of the evaluation if it sought approval for the DL mode (received). It was also noted that additional staff would be required – see paragraph 3.1 below.

1.7 The programme comprises five compulsory modules, four 'taught' and a final 60-credit point project module. The 'taught' modules are an equal mix of 20- and 40- credit point modules. It would be offered in full- and part-time modes, and, from September 2019, it was intended to introduce a fully online version. No exit awards would be available.

1.8 At the outset of the meeting, Mrs Aine MacNeill, Instructional Design Consultant, Office for Digital Learning, gave a short presentation regarding the support available from ADDL in the development of the proposed fully online programme.

1.9 The Panel met initially with the Senior Management Team comprising, Professor F Lyons, Associate Dean (Research and Impact), Professor K Fleming, Head of Belfast School of Art, Ms R Dickson, Associate Head of School, Mr M McGinn, Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator for Product Design and Mr A Parkin, Chair of the Course Planning Committee for the MA Animation. The Panel then met with a student group comprising current students on the BDes Hons Product and Furniture Design and finally, with the course teams to discuss the provision in detail.

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

- Agenda and programme of the meeting
- Guidelines for revalidation panels
- QAA subject benchmark statement for Art and Design (February 2017)

- QAA Characteristics Statement for Master's Degrees (September 2015)
- External examiners' reports for the last two years
- Provision documentation

The following report is a summary of responses to Panel questions provided by each of the groups that met with the Panel during the meeting.

3   MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3   Introduction

3.1   Product Design has been a feature of the School's provision for a long time while the undergraduate Animation programme was first introduced in 2012. The development of postgraduate provision in both areas resulted from industry demand. The School's vision was to be a leading art and design community with a reputation for creative confidence, academic excellence, world leading research and regional and global relevance. Creative industries was an area with enormous employability potential and one in which the University was investing. It was an area where there was burgeoning research and was regarded of strategic importance at the highest levels of the University. Dialogue has taken place with industry about how to bring together a range of creative areas and a number of key areas have been identified for collaboration within both academia and the industry.

3.2   A review of space within the Belfast campus completed during the previous semester had confirmed sufficient capacity to accommodate the new provision. Space had been identified to consolidate the main teaching cohort and would allow for 'one-to-one' sessions, access to workshops when tutors were present and studio access "24/7".

3.3   The decision to change the title from 'Product and Furniture Design' to 'Product Design' was a decision based on industry feedback, comparison to other courses in the sector but ultimately because of feedback from past and present students. The Panel considered the proposed title appropriate.

<u>MA Animation</u>

3.3   While the undergraduate Animation programme focuses exclusively on 3D animation, the Master's proposal will primarily focus on 2D animation but will be open to other disciplines. The programme will seek to attract graduates who are new to animation from disciplines such as graphic design and illustration. Those students would be directed along a 2D animation pathway in line with their undergraduate skillset.   Applicants with an animation background will have a higher skillset in, and knowledge of, animation, and would be able to focus their studies in different mediums within the subject. The aim was to open the programme to different skillsets and artistic exploration.

3.4   Skills gaps in students from a non-animation background would be identified during induction. Through workshops and 'one-to-one' sessions, technical support would be provided for the development of requisite skills. A further upskilling opportunity would be available during professional practice modules. This would however depend on students' own project plan which students would be able to discuss with their tutors. Moreover, students would be able to take part in joint workshops on one day per week with MFA Design students.

3.5   While it was acknowledged that the programme had primarily, but not entirely, an Irish industry focus, should the Irish industry contract, the programme's focus would be changed accordingly to a more global focus ensuring employability opportunities would not be limited to the local market.

3.6 The proposed fully online version of the programme would be developed for both full-and part-time delivery. The Access, Digital and Distributed Learning department would provide support for its development.

3.7 Regarding staff, a number of posts, including one for a Professesor in 2D Animation were currently advertised both locally and internationally. Appointments would be made prior to the start date of the programme.

4   MEETING WITH STUDENTS

4.1 The Panel met with a group of full-time students from the current BDes Hons Product and Furniture Design. Each year of the programme was represented. The following are summaries of their responses to issues raised by the Panel.

Securing placement

- Majority of students find their own placement locations
- Vast majority of placements are local although one student went on placement to Colombia
- Placement greatly benefits study in final year
- Aware of placement opportunities outside of product design
- Well prepared for placement

Final destination

- Set up own business
- Progress to Master's degree but after a spell in industry
- Work in kitchen design although may be tempted to further study at Master's level
- Need a break from academic study
- Work in industrial design and maybe a Master's degree at some point in the future
- Aware of Ulster's new Master's proposal

Opinion on new programme title, 'Product Design

- Good title
- Inclusion of 'furniture' in the title tended to limit market
- 'Furniture' only a relatively small part of the programme

Staff support

- UCU strike detrimental impact – bad time of year with approach of end-of-year assessments
- Additional absence during Easter holidays exacerbated the situation
- Additional teaching offered to make up for lost time
- Extra classes offered during first week of the Easter break

Assessment – how required performance demonstrated

- Briefed fully on what was expected and how to achieve it
- Encouraged to improve performance through feedback
- Encouraged to "push yourself"
- Shown examples of good work from previous year to demonstrate what was needed to achieve good results

5   MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

<u>BA Hons Product Design</u>

Changes to the programme

5.1   One of the major changes has been the addition of Ms Janet Coulter, lecturer in Fashion and Textile Design, to the teaching team. This has added new knowledge to the programme and exposure to new materials. More is now included relating to the engagement of design makers not only in individual design production but also in the small-scale and mass production of goods. Through links with local companies, there would be an opportunity to engage in a design project off-campus and become involved in volume manufacturing and new emerging technologies. Many students in final year, in responding to their needs, would be able to use both the available expertise within the School and that of external experts.

5.2   There has been significant investment in physical resources. Recently the school hosted the 'Virtual System in Multimedia' conference when staff were involved with both the organisational and scientific committees. They exhibited research and collaborative 'R&D' with industry as part of the immersive technology exposition. Most staff have an industry background in their respective disciplines and continue to provide consultancy services through Innovation Ulster Limited, the University's knowledge and technology venturing company. In addition, staff have experience working with a wide range of major commercial companies such as Mercedes, Randox, British Airways, Avis and Hertz, as well as with local SME's and entrepreneurs. Staff therefore remain current on emerging technologies and their diverse use including their use as an aid to problem solving.

Entry requirements and growth

5.3   The initial offer standard for entry to the programme would be three A levels at grade B or above. Applicants would also be required to provide a portfolio of work and undergo an interview regarding their suitability to undertake the programme. A wide range of skillsets would be relevant, for example, skills in fine art, technology and design, and construction engineering.

5.4   Because of the MaSN cap, the major area for growth would be through recruitment of national (Great Britain) and international students. The addition of international students greatly enriches students' learning experience. Given current resources, a cohort of 40 students would be the maximum feasible intake. Destination data indicated that 77% of last year's graduates achieved graduate positions and 75% to 80% of those were design roles within the creative industries.

5.5   The Panel suggested that given the broader technical base of students and the limited market for pure design jobs, there might be an opportunity to develop the programme to produce for example, engineering designers. The Team suggested that in its current form, the programme would provide students with a diverse range of skills that would open up many employment opportunities beyond pure design.

Placement

5.6   In the current year, 75% of students opted to take the placement year. These were a diverse range of types. In recent years, there was an adequate number of placement locations including placements outside Northern Ireland. Such were the benefits of placement, consideration would be given to making the placement year compulsory in the future. Those students who opt out of the placement year have other opportunities to engage in work-based learning within most project modules in Year 2.

Interdisciplinary working

5.7 A number of opportunities would be available for interdisciplinary working. The new programme would offer a clear and shared vison for Architecture at Ulster with embedded opportunities for interdisciplinary working and extra-institutional engagement. At the outset, students would engage in workshop projects with, for example, Architecture and Fine Art students. This would provide opportunities for cross-fertilisation of ideas. Early in the programme, in *BIM Fundamentals*, workshops would be used to introduce students to modelling tools and technologies used across interdisciplinary design and construction teams. Students would be taught in a multi-cohort setting to maintain the interdisciplinary and collaborative ethos of the module. In addition, in the final year project, students would work alongside technical design students. The Panel noted the absence of multidisciplinary working with, for example, medical, politics or engineering students. The Team pointed out that the 4-campus structure at Ulster made this a difficult undertaking but it was something they would wish to do in the future. Discussions would take place with students as to how multidisciplinary work might be taken forward and consolidated within the programme where there were obvious synergies.

Curriculum Design Principles

5.8 The starting point for revision of the programme had been the QAA benchmark statement for Art and Design, and the University's '5 and 50' strategy. In anticipation of revalidation, the PVC (Education) had provided feedback on the Principles to the course team. As a result, the programme had been aligned with the Principles as far as possible although, it was suggested, regarding Art and Design programmes, this could sometimes be difficult because of the nature of the subject and the teaching and assessment strategies employed. Regarding the inclusion of the 80-credit point module, *Design Consolidation*, this would be taught over two semesters. There would be safeguards in place at the end of the first semester to identify those students who were failing. It was pointed out that since its introduction, the failure rates in the programme had gone down while achievement of 2.1 grades had gone up. Due to the module's success, other programmes had adopted a similar approach.

MA Product Design

Development and internal progression

5.9 Development of the programme had been informed by regular, ongoing engagement with employers and alumni working in the creative industries. It was an extension of the undergraduate programme and was related directly to industry needs. It would provide students with the opportunity to engage in academic research, design thinking methods as well as design making, and the creative skills demanded by employers. The programme content would expose students to knowledge in the 'thinking', 'makings' and 'writings' of design. Each module would have a heavy emphasis on practice-based content and outcome, with written components focusing on reflective writing and primary research into industry standards. How to identify commercial opportunities would provide added value in the programme. The final major project would provide the opportunity to incorporate the acquired skills into an original project that would reflect each student's professional interests and ambitions. The outcome would not necessarily need to be a 'product' but may also be a written outcome. The programme could provide a pathway to PhD study. Many companies invest heavily in research and development and want to maintain a research-based approach from graduates joining their companies.

Module content

5.10 In response to a Panel suggestion that module content was too broad, the Team replied that this was deliberately so, that the intention was to attract applicants with a non-design background. A generic approach would allow students to use different skills in their project work.

Fully online / part-time delivery

5.11   The intention was to introduce a fully online version of the programme for the 2018/19 academic year although further discussion was needed. To this end, discussions within the School and engagement with ADDL would take place over the coming months. Teaching staff already had expertise in online delivery through existing fully online undergraduate provision. The practice-based foundation of the programme would present a challenge and this was an aspect that still had to be thought through.

5.12   The part-time programme would be delivered concurrently with the full-time programme. Part-time students would take one module per semester attending on one half-day per week.

MA Animation

Delivery modes

5.13   The programme would be delivered in full- and part-time modes with teaching on one day per week. In recognition of the changing nature of the student population, the Team wished to offer a programme that was accessible to a wide range of potential students. However, a full-time commitment to the course would be expected. Part-time study would fit alongside full-time delivery, with a single module per semester delivered over six semesters. This alignment would allow part-time students to share class time with full-time students.

5.14   From September 2019, a fully online version of the programme would be available. Delivery would be conducted through the Blackboard Learn virtual learning environment. The Panel queried how elements of the programme such as group working and peer review would be facilitated online. The Team replied that these issues would be worked through with ADDL over the next year. A discussion followed around various aspects of the fully online mode. The Panel suggested that the fully online programme needed more 'fleshing out' particularly around how assessment would be dealt with. English language requirements would be another issue for consideration (although it was pointed out that the entry criteria already required an appropriate level of competency in English). The Panel suggested that there was a lack of narrative around the fully online proposal in the programme document particularly regarding how students would achieve the technical and practical skills embedded in the curriculum.

Progression / content

5.15   In response to the Panel concerning module, *Timing for Animation*, it was explained that this would be the first major module that students would take. Its function would be to provide revision for those with an animation background and for others, an intensive introduction to key concepts of animation production. The programme's 'taught' modules were designed to prepare students for the final 60-credit point project module that would bring together all the threads of learning acquired during the earlier modules.

5.16   The Panel suggested that if the thread running through the programme had a predominately 2D animation focus, the modules and their content made perfect sense. However, given that it appeared that there would be a wider focus to accommodate students with different skillsets, a different narrative would be needed. Clarification was needed in the teaching and learning strategy around how delivery of the curriculum to a diverse student cohort would be achieved. The Panel suggested that if the programme was to have a 2D focus, it was essential that the Wacom Cintiq Companion tablet was available.

5.17   Regarding work-based learning opportunities, students would be able to engage in work-based learning in module, *Animation Production*.   The purpose of the module was to provide students with an advanced understanding of animation production processes. As part of the assessment, students would be set project briefs that would require engagement with local industry.

6   CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The Panel commended the Teams on the following:

BA Product Design

- Demonstrable progress in encouraging student uptake of the industrial placement year
- Embedding of reflective practice and professional development activities in the modules
- Range of assessments which are appropriate to the needs of the programme
- Positive student feedback regarding individualised support provided by staff

MA Product Design

- Unique and interesting Design Protocol module
- Range of assessments which are appropriate to the needs of the programme

MA Animation

- Clear focus on 2D Design running through the programme
- Quality of the documentation in terms of brevity and conciseness which makes for clarity and transparency
- Close links with local industry
- Articulation of the overall assessment strategy which is clear and fit for purpose

6.2 The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the provision within Subject Unit 2K Product Design be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2018/19 – 22/23) 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 Tuesday, 26 June 2018, for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

6.3 The Panel also agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the MA Animation in full- and part-time modes only be approved for a period of four years (intakes 2018/19 – 21/22) in line with the revalidation schedule for unit 2B Animation, 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 Tuesday, 26 June 2018, for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

6.4 The Panel did not approve the proposed *fully online* MA Animation and recommended that a new proposal be brought forward for consideration when the programme has been further developed.

Conditions and Recommendations

BA Hons Product Design

Conditions

1) that all issues identified in the appendix to the panel report be addressed;
2) that the number of programme level learning outcomes for the AB exit award be reviewed in terms of their number as compared with the (lower) number for the Honours degree award;
3) that the number of learning outcomes within each module be reviewed to ensure parity across the programme.

<u>Strong Recommendation</u>

1) that a narrative be included in the revised document outlining how the Curriculum Design Principles were taken into account during development of the programme and, where there has been a departure from the Principles, include a rationale for same.

<u>Recommendations</u>

1) that the programme level learning outcomes be reviewed to provide greater clarity as to the skills and knowledge that is expected to be developed through successful completion of the programme;
2) that the currency of the module reading lists be reviewed.

MA Product Design

<u>Condition</u>

1) that all issues identified in the appendix to the panel report be addressed.

<u>Strong Recommendation</u>

1) that the programme title be reviewed taking account of similar programmes offered elsewhere, the breadth of content and the cohort diversity, and the probable diversity of outcomes.

<u>Recommendations</u>

1) that a narrative be included making more explicit the rationale and ethos of the programme in line with discussions with the panel;
2) that it be made explicit within the teaching and learning strategy the approach to be taken in delivery of the curriculum to a combination of students with and without a relevant background and/or qualifications in the subject area;
3) that it be made explicit, where in the curriculum there will be opportunities for collaborative, team-based working.

MA Animation

<u>Conditions</u>

1) that all issues identified in the appendix to the panel report be addressed.
2) that the ethos and focus of the programme be made explicit (i.e. 2D Design v 3D Design) together with the programme's 'unique selling point' which distinguishes it from competitors.

<u>Recommendations</u>

1) that the curriculum be reviewed to ensure that it adequately reflects those characteristics detailed in category 3 of the QAA Characteristics Statement for Master's Degrees (2015).
2) that it be made explicit in describing academic progression through the programme how the modules fit together and culminate in the final project module;
3) that potential graduate destinations outside of the Northern Ireland Animation industry be highlighted to demonstrate future proofing of the programme in the event of a turndown in the local industry.
4) that the currency of the module reading lists be reviewed and consideration be given to the inclusion of text, 'Illusion of Life'.

7   APPRECIATION

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