

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 5LAii MARKETING (PG/FT) (QAHE Birmingham and London)

1 May 2019

PRESENT: Professor Ruth Fee, Associate Dean (Education), Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Ulster University [Chair]
Mrs Ursula Chaney, Lecturer, School of Nursing, Ulster University
Dr Darryl Cummins, Head of Department of Management, Leadership and Marketing, Ulster University Business School
Mr Dan Bennett, Marketing Management Course Leader, Brighton Business School
Dr Lorna Stevens, Snr Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Marketing, School of Management, University of Bath
Ms Marilena Balint, Student Representative, QAHE

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr Peter Green, 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 provision.

- MSc Marketing (with PgCert and PgDip exit awards) (Birmingham and London) (FT)
- MSc Marketing (with GradCert, PgCert and PgDip exit awards) (extended Master's) (Birmingham and London) (FT)

The MSc Marketing and MSc Marketing (extended Master's) have been delivered in full-time mode at QAHE London and Birmingham campuses since September 2013 and 2016 respectively. There are three intakes per year in September, January and May at the London campus and two in Birmingham in September and January.

The extended Master's integrates the Graduate Certificate in Marketing which comprises 60 credit points undertaken during the semester prior to entry. Its purpose is to bring international students in particular, up to the required standard for entry to Master's level study.

The MS Marketing also offers an Advanced Practice pathway which provides students with the option to undertake an additional 60 credit points through an Applied Consulting Project or Internship. Students choosing either option do so in the semester prior to undertaking the final Applied Marketing Project.

The two 'home' courses were revalidated at Ulster in November 2018.

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

1. Course submission;

2. Guidelines for Evaluation and Revalidation Panels;
3. QAA subject benchmark statement for Business and Management (Master's) (2015);
4. Preliminary comments from Faculty Partnership Manager and Panel members.

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3.1 Background and Rationale

The Panel asked the senior team to outline QAHE's vision for the partnership with Ulster for the next five years. The senior team advised that the partnership with Ulster was QAHE's longest established. In recent years numbers had unfortunately declined, however, much work had been done in collaboration with Ulster colleagues to address this and they could now report that intakes were on the rise and a 120% increase in applications.

The MSc Marketing course was delivered at both the London and Birmingham campuses and it was hoped that the three intakes currently at London campus in September, January and May could also be extended in Birmingham where the course currently had only two intakes in September and January.

The revalidation changes which had been introduced by the revalidation of the 'home' courses were welcomed by QAHE, not least the introduction of the Advanced Practice pathway which proved particularly attractive to the international market.

Postgraduate provision was very important to QAHE's portfolio with the ability to attract students directly to this level but also to provide progression opportunities from existing Ulster undergraduate provision and those from other partners. These programmes were important for growth of provision but it was necessary to ensure that existing courses were firmly embedded before any plans for extending into other programmes would be considered.

3.2 Resources

i. Staff

The panel noted that any plans for future growth would require additional staff resources to support and deliver the programmes. The senior team confirmed that currently over 80% of all current teaching staff were full-time permanent with the remainder on either freelance or zero hours contracts, with the latter used solely as a way to employ those who did not have self-employed status.

Of the 150 teaching staff in the Business Faculty, approximately 50% taught directly on Ulster programmes, with a small number of those having the specialist knowledge to deliver specific marketing subject material. For consistency, they also tried to maintain the same module co-ordinators for the full year but with multiple intakes this was sometimes not possible.

The senior team informed the panel that they were in a position to recruit additional staff should the need arise.

ii Physical

Prior to the meeting, the panel had undertaken a tour of facilities at the London campus and had been particularly impressed with the new student hub and asked if the needs of staff were being equally met. The senior team outlined the resources available to staff included a fully equipped staffroom in the building opposite with allocated desks and PC, a range of

meeting spaces and video conferencing facilities. Small staff rooms were also available in the main building and were all within easy access to the central QAHE teams. All managers also had access to laptops.

These resources were replicated at the Birmingham campus with the video conferencing facilities allowing staff to connect between the two sites.

3.3 Staff Workload

The senior team advised the panel that students were timetabled on campus for two day blocks each week, from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm. Some staff also taught overtime in the evening or at weekends but this was not mandatory and undertaken only with the individual's consent. Staff were required to be on campus five days per week in order to be available to meet students and undertake other course related administration. Lecturers with no additional responsibilities undertook 16-18 hours of teaching per week.

3.4 Staff Development

The senior team assured the panel that the wellbeing of staff was paramount and went on to advise of the very rich staff development programme for all staff. The Research Co-ordinator role now facilitated a more cohesive and collaborative approach to research with number of staff currently being funded to undertake PhDs and numbers were growing in relation to HEA fellowship, which was strongly encouraged by management.

The panel were also advised of the regular all staff training programme held three times per year. Outside of the formal staff appraisal system which was used to identify staff development needs, staff could also avail of developmental activities and courses through the QA Academy.

4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The panel met with three students currently studying on the courses. During discussions, the following was noted:

- All were enjoying the course and had recommended it to others.
- As a new subject, the course had been challenging and at some times stressful but they had received a high level of support from lecturers and other staff (Careers, Library and ACE team) as required in relation to general course issues, academic writing and referencing, assignment planning, English language, interview skills, development of CVs.
- Students were aware of the availability of online support from Studiosity but none had used it to date.
- The support available from lecturers could not generally be faulted and the Course Director was particularly commended for her support and guidance.
- It was a very diverse student group from a range of educational and cultural backgrounds as well as a mix of ages and this really enriched the experience.
- Group work was a challenge for most when all members did not contribute equally or have a similar work ethic but a mechanism for peer assessment was available as well as the option to seek assistance or intervention from the lecturer as required.
- All felt a real sense of belonging and very much identified as an Ulster University student, with the latter being the deciding factor for some.
- As mature students, some were of the view that there were insufficient numbers of core and recommended texts available in the library and they felt this was not comparable to an Ulster student based in Northern Ireland. They recognised that there was a shift

away from hard copy to e-books at all Ulster campuses but the preference remained for the former.

- Students were able to raise issues with staff either directly or through the course representative on the Staff/Student Consultative Committee (SSCC), however, on occasion they were not made aware how or if matters were being addressed.
- All students were made aware of the course expectations from the outset.
- Some noted accessibility issues with Wi-Fi and noted that it may be due to the increase in numbers on the campus.
- The focus of the course content on product and lack of coverage of the service industry was noted as something which would enhance the course, not least given the growing focus on the experience economy.
- Students did not currently have a marketing society but were advised that assistance in setting up such a group could be provided by the Ulster Students' Union. This could provide amongst other things, opportunities for engagement, networking and peer support. Students were in favour of this, however, noted the diversity of the QAHE student groups and the practicalities of operating a society in practice.

The panel thanked the students for giving up their time and for their engagement in discussions and wished them well with their studies and future careers.

5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

5.1 Ulster/QAHE Partnership

The panel asked the course team to outline how the relationship between Ulster and QAHE campuses operated in practice and how parity of student experience was ensured. The course team advised that it was a multi-level relationship involving the two respective Course Directors, module co-ordinators and a dedicated staff team who maintained regular contact in all aspects of the course. All strategic decisions were made in consultation with Ulster colleagues.

In relation to the VLE, lecturers were encouraged to utilise the same resources on BlackBoard Learn as their Ulster counterparts, although this could often be complemented with any QAHE specific material to meet local and cultural needs.

A robust framework was in place for cross marking and moderation. A joint Ulster/QAHE planning day, which included student representatives, was held each year for both teams to discuss all aspects of the course and its delivery. This was a good opportunity for staff to meet face to face, share good practice and ensure parity of delivery and experience across all campuses. The QAHE course team assured the panel that they were very much involved in the development and delivery of the curriculum and that their voices were heard.

Part of the role of the dedicated QAHE Associate Dean was to ensure that the partnership operated effectively and to ensure consistency in delivery, course management and parity of experience at all campuses. QAHE also tried to ensure a member of staff would deliver on courses on a maximum of two partners in any semester. It was also noted that the Course Director for these courses was dedicated solely to Ulster programmes. The Associate Deans maintained oversight of staff workloads and overall partnership management on a practical level.

Noting that QAHE had a number of higher education partners, the panel informed the team that during the student meeting, students had no hesitation in identifying themselves as Ulster University students with a very strong sense of identity and this was to be commended. The team also recognised the collaborative approach by their Ulster colleagues which made the partnership with QAHE work well.

5.2 Physical Resources

The course team provided assurance to the panel that they were supported in all aspects of their work. They confirmed that flexibility in the working day already existed in that they could work from home and had quiet spaces away from students where they were able to work. Each permanent member of staff was provided with a desk and computer and 'hot' desks were available sessional lecturers. The new staff facilities away from the main building provided workspace away from students where they could work uninterrupted which this was really important. Management were very supportive and mindful of staff welfare and had an open door policy in the same way as the staff had for students. QA company also had in place an employee helpline of which staff could avail on a range of issues.

5.3 Internship and Professional Development Project

The panel commended the internship and other practical aspects of the course and asked the team to outline how the internship would be operated and managed in practice. The team advised that a dedicated team was in place for this purpose. Their role was to maintain and develop a database of employers and make students aware of the opportunities available. They held workshops and provided support and guidance on CV preparation and interview skills. Academic staff monitored students during the 12-week internship and ensured that the learning outcomes were being delivered and achieved. The library would proactively update the internship module reading list to ensure that relevant texts were available for students either in hard copy or electronic format but staff recognised that students on these courses preferred the former.

5.4 Learning, Teaching and Assessment

The panel noted University discussions around the plan to move to assessment specific rubrics rather than generic, and the curriculum design framework and asked for the team's perspective on this. The team advised that there would be individual assessment rubrics for each module and that the University's policy on group work was also adhered to.

Leading on from this, the panel noted the significant level of group work in the courses and noted that this was not generally favoured by students. The panel enquired how students were prepared and supported in this regard. The team was very much aware of students views on this type of assessment and covered group work specifically as part of the extended induction to make students aware of the importance of developing communication, team working and problem solving skills as well as increasing employability. Mechanisms were in place to manage all group work activity and to feed back issues to staff. This also included the use of peer assessment to allow students to allocated marks to each member of the group according to their contribution. The ACE team also provided considerable support in all aspects of group work.

The panel noted that the exemplar assessment schedule had not been included in the course document and enquired how the assessment load was managed. The team informed the panel that the workload could be challenging for students but that the Course Director and Module Co-ordinators worked together to identify submission dates and align across the full course and year to ensure that assessments were staggered. The schedule was provided to students both in hard copy and electronically on BlackBoard Learn at the beginning of the semester to allow them time to plan accordingly. The ACE team and other support teams worked closely together and were available for students as required. All teams were able to cross-refer if a student was identified as having any difficulties, academic or otherwise. This was also particularly important in terms of compliance purposes for international students.

When asked about Ulster's curriculum design framework, the team confirmed that they had attended an event at Ulster the previous year which had set out what it involved and how it had reshaped the curriculum, for example, in terms of module learning outcomes, a reduction in assessment, and a revised marking criteria in relation to word counts. As this was franchised provision, all Ulster systems and processes were utilised at QAHE. The strong relationship between Ulster and QAHE colleagues and the constant communication between all members of both teams was key.

5.5 Employability

The panel commended the good practice of students developing their own LinkedIn profile and enquired how students were supported in developing work-related skills and preparing them for employment. The team advised that considerable support in all areas was provided by each of the different teams including the Careers team for example, through regular workshops, support via a dedicated App and via email. Employability skills were embedded and developed in each of the modules through a good balance of theory and practical assessments. The live case study was now also available to QAHE students.

It was also noted that the careers service was available to students up to one year post graduation.

5.6 Professional Bodies

The team advised that currently no members of staff held professional body membership, however, did attend CIM events and availed of some of the resources available. The team endeavoured to bring industry into the classroom through various means including the use of guest speakers and current, live case studies.

5.7 Research and scholarship informed curriculum and teaching

The team informed the panel that a Dean of Learning and Teaching was in place at QAHE who would oversee engagement with research and HEA fellowship with the latter strongly encouraged. The aim was that all staff would hold some category of fellowship by 2020 – currently this figure was at 29 – and those who had already been through the process provided coaching and mentoring to newer staff.

5.8 Digital Literacy

The panel acknowledged the diverse range of students coming onto this course, many of whom may have been out of education for some time and enquired how it was ensured that IT skills were developed to ensure that students had the necessary skills to work in the field. The team advised that one to one support could be provided as well as group sessions in the classroom. In relation to the business simulation exercise, the team informed the panel that a dedicated online team was available 24/7 to provide support for the software, with a manual also made available to students on BlackBoard Learn.

The panel raised the issue of Wi-Fi access raised by students and was advised that following recent meeting, steps to increase and improve access were already being taken.

When asked how the team managed the mixed ability of the diverse student cohort, the team advised that as student groups differed in terms of ethnicity, background, age, culture and language, that it was challenging. Ongoing multi-layer support was available for all, not only international students. The team stated that the diversity significantly enhanced the student experience and students complemented and supported each other.

The diversity of the student body was also a very rewarding experience for the staff and the importance of being able to manage this diversity was recognised in that it was part of the interview process for all new staff.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the programmes on the following:

- i) The ownership of the programmes by the Course Team, in particular the Course Director, and the close working relationship between QAHE and Ulster colleagues;
- ii) The strong focus on employability, careers and student support;
- iii) The strong understanding of the profile of the students and the impressive student support framework which was wrapped around the students;
- iv) The positive and active response to recent developments in Ulster's integrated curriculum design framework;
- v) The emerging scholarship and research culture, alongside staff personal and professional development frameworks.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the programmes be approved for delivery at QAHE London and Birmingham campuses for a period of five years (intakes 2019/20 to 2023/24 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 May 2019** for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Intakes recommended by Faculty

	September 2019 Intake	January 2020 Intake	May 2020 Intake
Home/EU Students London Campus	10	6	5
International Students London Campus	20	12	10
Total London Campus	30	18	15
Home/EU Students Birmingham Campus	5	5	0
International Students Birmingham Campus	10	10	0
Total Birmingham Campus	15	15	0
Total	45	33	15

There will be no May intake in Birmingham for the foreseeable future. Minimum intake of 15 or more students is projected for all other intakes.

Conditions

- i) That all issues identified by the Academic Office and detailed in the appendix to the panel report are addressed;

Recommendations

- i) To keep under review the level of flexibility required to deliver, enhance and support all academic staff delivering the programmes (sections 3.3 and 5.2 refer);
- ii) To keep under review student/staff access to Wi-Fi at all QAHE sites (sections 4 and 5.8 refer);
- iii) To keep under review access to the core text books for students and access to a range of non-core texts on site at QAHE to ensure parity with students based at Ulster campuses in Northern Ireland (section 4 refers);
- iv) To clarify to students the student feedback loop following SSCCs and actions resulting from the feedback process (section 4 refers).

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 03.05.19