

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL: REVALIDATION UNIT 6B COUNSELLING (COLLEGES)

27 March 2019

PANEL:

Professor P Hanna, Associate Dean (Global Engagement), Ulster University (Chair)

Dr C Rhys, Head of School of Communication and Media, Ulster University

Dr S McClements, School of Architecture and the Built Environment, Ulster University

Dr R Glover, Assistant Professor in Psychotherapy, School of Nursing and Human Sciences, Dublin City University

Dr L Monk, Lecturer in Counselling, School of Education, University of Nottingham

REVALIDATION UNIT CO-ORDINATOR:

Mr S Brookes, Deputy Head of School for Early Years and Healthcare, Southern Regional College

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr P Brogan, Faculty Partnership Manager, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Ulster University

Mr B McArthur, Academic Standards and Policy Officer, Ulster University

1 INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider the following provision within the revalidation unit.

- Foundation Degree in Science (FdSc) in Counselling (with Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) in Counselling Studies exit award) (PT)
(Proposed new title – Integrative Counselling Practice)
- Certificate in Counselling Studies (PT)

The provision is offered by all six regional Colleges at a total of, in respect of the Certificate programme, 15 sites, and, regarding the Foundation degree, 8 sites. The College network was managed by a Subject Network Committee comprising representatives from each of the Colleges and from the University who meet regularly throughout the academic year.

Previous iterations of the programmes have been running since the early/mid-2000s and generally, with occasional exceptions, demand remained healthy over the lifetime of the provision.

It was proposed that the Foundation degree title be changed from 'Counselling' to 'Integrative Counselling Practice'. Having heard the Team's rationale for the change (see Section 4, paragraph 2, below), the external Panel members were fully supportive of the change.

Both revalidated programmes would be offered in part-time mode only. Appendix 2 to this report details the Associate Faculty's recommended minimum and maximum student intake numbers for each College at each delivery site in respect of each programme. A *minimum* of at least 15 students is the Colleges' projected student intake figure for each programme at each delivery site.

The Certificate programme would be delivered over one year (2 semesters) and the Foundation degree, over 3 years (6 semesters).

The Certificate comprises three 20-credit point modules and was currently accredited by the National Counselling Society (NCS). Most applicants to the programme would be those already in full- or part-time employment in a caring role who were seeking personal and professional development.

The Foundation degree was also currently accredited by the NCS which would enable graduates to apply to the NCS for registration as accredited practitioners. The Subject Network Committee intend to also seek professional accreditation of the programme from the British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists (BACP).

Students on the Foundation degree would undertake 100 hours of supervised practice at a placement site (down from 150 hours in the current programme – see Section 4, paragraph 15, below).

A CertHE in Counselling Studies exit award from the Foundation degree would be available.

The Foundation degree provides a progression route for graduates of the Certificate while Foundation degree graduates would be eligible to progress through a '2 + 1' articulation model into the final level of Ulster's part-time BSc Hons Professional Development in Counselling offered on the Jordanstown campus. This was a bespoke programme designed specifically for Foundation degree graduates.

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

- Agenda and programme of the meeting
- Guidelines for revalidation panels
- QAA characteristics statement for Foundation Degrees (2015)
- QAA subject benchmark statement for Counselling and Psychotherapy (2013)
- External examiners' reports for the last two years
- Revalidation documentation

On the day prior to the meeting, external Panel member, Dr Rita Glover, met with two student groups from across the Colleges. Dr Glover reported the outcomes of the meetings (summarised at Appendix 3) during the initial private meeting of the Panel on the day of the event. Several issues raised by students were discussed with the course teams during the meeting (see Section 3, paragraphs 2 to 5, and Section 4, paragraphs 12 and 18, below).

On the day of the event, the Panel met initially with senior management from each of the network Colleges and then with the College course teams.

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 TEAMS

Placement (Foundation Degree)

Students would be made aware of placement as early as initial induction and references would continue throughout Year 1, for example, in module, *Ethics and Professional Practice*, which was a prerequisite module for the first practice module in Year 2, *Supervised Practice 1*. In addition, guest lecturers from industry would contribute during Year 1. Furthermore, students would be encouraged from the outset to seek summer employment with local agencies which would provide them with real-world experience in advance of undertaking the practice modules.

The Panel reported comments from the student meetings detailing, in some cases, difficulties encountered by students in securing a placement, and generally, students feeling as though they were solely responsible for securing a placement. The Teams were unanimous in their response that students were not solely responsible for securing a placement. Each College outlined processes that were in place to support students in this regard involving placement officers, employment liaison officers and employer forums. It was acknowledged that there were challenges to identifying new providers given that sites were limited across the region. However, most Colleges maintained a database of, and had long established relationships with, existing providers which, the Teams assured the Panel, were sufficient at this time to meet anticipated demand. They pointed out that those Colleges whose catchment area bordered the Republic of Ireland had access to additional sites. Moreover, if it became necessary, the Colleges would support each other in the provision of sites.

Given the challenge that students report in acquiring clinical placements, Colleges should explore the development of a system which minimises the need for students to source their own placement.

Support for students

Students had also suggested that it would be helpful to have more information sessions on how to make best use of IT facilities. The Colleges outlined the support

currently available to students in this regard including dedicated staff support and online e-learning materials. Development of IT skills was an area that was targeted from initial induction and supported throughout the student journey. Southern Regional College pointed out that three new campuses due to open in September 2020 were currently under construction, each with new "state of the art" resources.

Some students reported that they would welcome more guidance and feedback during live practice sessions. The Colleges responded that to ensure that this was the case, co-tutoring was already a normal feature of practice sessions. All the Colleges agreed that, where necessary, to ensure adequate support was available in this area, part-time staff were employed. An added value of this approach was that it provided an excellent opportunity to integrate part-time teaching staff.

Physical resources

Another concern raised by students, although not in respect of all Colleges, related to the inadequacy of recording equipment which, it was suggested, required upgrading. It was also suggested that in some cases, the onus had been placed on students to provide their own devices. Two of the Colleges indicated that they had just invested in new equipment. Others emphasised that the adequacy of equipment was reviewed annually and upgraded where necessary.

Staff qualifications

The Teams confirmed that the baseline academic qualifications of full-time permanent staff were Ulster's Certificate in Teaching and PGCE in Further Education, the latter having to be completed within two years of their start date. Many staff had additional qualifications including PhDs.

4 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAMS

Preparation for revalidation

The Colleges deliver the same programmes through a network arrangement. There was therefore no competition between the Colleges. Staff were well acquainted across the network and collaborated by various formal and informal means. The role of module leads was spread across the network. All staff were passionate about the subject and were keen to develop and improve the provision and to support each other. Therefore, preparation for revalidation was fully supported by all staff and Dr Brogan, the Faculty Partnership Manager, ensured throughout the process that the participants remained focused. It was pointed out that the process of change and improvement was a continuous process that took place throughout the approval period between the formal revalidations.

Foundation degree title

The proposal to change the title of the Foundation degree from 'Counselling' to 'Integrative Counselling Practice' was based on several factors including primarily, feedback from internal and external stakeholders, and the development of a core integrative delivery model across all modules and years. In addition, most counsellors in the UK were familiar with this approach and identified themselves as 'integrative' counsellors. The new title would provide a clear statement about the nature of the programme and would distinguish it from other similar degrees.

It was anticipated that the new title would prove more attractive to those working in the profession who would understand the rationale for the title. Furthermore, many of the students would be graduates of the Certificate programme and would therefore understand its relevance. Moreover, open nights would provide opportunities to explain the title and its relationship to the programme content. The programme was about introducing students from the outset to the integrative nature of counselling. The content and delivery model would provide students with a unique identity and a baseline from which to learn and develop their skills. As well as learning about it, students would have opportunities to practice integrative counselling during the programme.

Exit award (Foundation Degree)

The Certificate of Higher Education exit award was a long-established exit route from the Foundation degree. Its title, 'Counselling Studies', was different to that of the Foundation degree in order to distinguish the more academically weighted CertHE from the more practice-facing Foundation degree. Those leaving with the CertHE award would not be qualified to practice whereas Foundation degree graduates would be eligible to apply for professional accreditation to practice as an integrative counsellor.

The Panel noted the current structure of the CertHE exit award and stated that its structure should be revisited and revised to ensure that it comprised level 4 modules only.

Certificate

Graduates of the Certificate programme would be eligible to apply for entry to the Foundation degree. Currently, no exemptions from level 4 of the Foundation degree were available to Certificate graduates. A discussion took place around the merits (or otherwise) of developing a Certificate curriculum which would provide exemption. The Panel suggested that this was something that the Teams might wish to consider in the future.

Learning and Teaching Strategy

The Panel noted the absence of group working. The Team stated that there were elements of group work, for example, in practice sessions where students would work with a 'client' and an 'observer'. They pointed out however that this was a 'personal' profession, in the sense that counsellors work alone with clients and so group activities were not as important an element of the programme as would be for other provision.

For student-led seminars, a student would be nominated to act as facilitator. The facilitator would be expected to carry out research in advance of the seminar and then lead the discussion on the day. To ease students into the role and build confidence, initially, students would work in small groups. Students who had progressed from the Certificate programme where they had more experience of this approach were more confident in the role.

Assessment

The Panel highlighted comments by the external examiner which suggested a need to standardise assessment procedures across the network. The Teams responded that steps had been taken to ensure that this was the case including the use of the same assessment criteria and cross-moderation across the network. It was pointed out that both external examiners for the provision had referred in their latest reports to the robustness of the assessment, marking and moderation processes. However, this was an area that the Team would keep under review.

The Panel noted a (small) number of the modules comprising three assessments under the umbrella heading of 'portfolio'. The Team stated that in each case, these were three linked stages of a single assessment culminating in a 'viva' examination.

Critical reflection would be a feature of the assessment strategy throughout both programmes. In marking reflective assignments, in discussions during tutorials and during classes (based on the nature of emerging client issues raised), staff would be looking for evidence of personal growth. The ability to critically reflect would build up from module to module and ultimately would feed into a student's practice.

Feedback

Students had reported differing experiences regarding the provision of formative feedback with some reporting excellent formative feedback while others expressed concern that they had received either limited feedback or did not receive it in a timely manner to aid submission of assignments. The Teams responded that the students were made aware that written coursework could be submitted for formative feedback, but some choose not to. Normally, feedback regarding written submissions would be provided within 15 working days. Moreover, tutorials were used to provide verbal feedback. Overall, each College provided a combination of oral and written feedback. It was pointed out that students would be able to raise any concerns in this area

through the Staff/Student Consultative Committee meetings, or indeed, informally at any time. All written work was submitted online using 'Turnitin'.

Training Supervisors (Foundation Degree)

Placement training supervisors were already knowledgeable in the integrative counselling approach. In addition, training days were provided for supervisors and throughout the academic year close liaison was maintained between supervisors and college staff who communicated regularly regarding various issues around the practice teaching.

Content (Foundation Degree)

The Panel noted that the underpinning element of the programme related to the integration of the key concept and skills around integration at a personal, theoretical and practical level and asked how students would reconcile the underpinning philosophies where they competed. The Teams outlined how each of these themes would be addressed through each year of the programme. Generally, the curriculum would build on similarities across the themes from year 1 onwards in order to "blend" the approaches. In the final module, *Developing a Personal Integrative Approach*, students would then assimilate and consolidate the various conceptual frameworks learned to that point in developing a personal integrative model drawing on all three themes which they would then take into their own personal practice.

Clinical Hours (Foundation Degree)

The reduction in required clinical hours from 150 to 100 was primarily based on student feedback which indicated that in many cases it was challenging for students to commit to 150 hours given family and employment commitments. This would not in any way diminish the quality of the practice element since the professional body required only 100 hours of clinical practice. In response to the Panel regarding the *Supervised Practice 2* module having 48 hours each of tutorials and lectures, it was explained that lectures and tutorials would primarily be used to develop professional knowledge which would include the use of guest lecturers and to debrief and consolidate the learning following clinical practice.

Curriculum Design Principles

Cognisance had been taken of the University's Curriculum Design Principles in reviewing both the Certificate and Foundation degree programmes for revalidation. The assessment loads had been lightened, a greater variety of assessments introduced such as oral examinations, critical reflection assignments and poster presentations, and no written examinations were included. Learning outcomes had been reduced to no more than four and, apart from the *Supervised Practice 2* module, all modules were 20-credit point modules. Moreover, care had been taken to ensure consistency in the level of assessment across modules.

Modules (Foundation Degree)

Two prerequisite modules were included in the programme structure. The first, *Ethics and Professional Practice*, was placed in Year 1 and was a prerequisite module for Year 2 module, *Supervised Practice 1*. This latter module was itself a prerequisite module for the final year 40-credit point module, *Supervised Practice 2*. The prerequisite modules had to be passed before undertaking the linked module and were designed to ensure student readiness and ethical awareness to engage in practice. Students would be dealing with vulnerable people in isolation, so it was imperative that students were fit for practice before embarking on clinical practice.

Student Handbook

Some students had raised concerns about access to the student handbook on Canvas and inaccuracies and confusion regarding assessment forms. The Teams pointed out that each student was provided with a hard copy of the student handbook during initial induction. In addition, the handbook was made available on each College's VLE. Regarding assessment forms, before assessments, tutors would go through and explain the forms during a dedicated workshop. Module leads would routinely check all forms for any inaccuracies ensuring that each delivery site had the current version.

Miscellaneous

- All written assessment work would be submitted online.
- Where word limits were exceeded, penalties, which students would be made aware of in advance, would be imposed.
- Late submission of assessments would not normally be accepted as per programme regulations.
- Students would be made aware of how to avoid plagiarism through a dedicated workshop where, inter alia, referencing would be covered. Guidance on essay writing would also be provided.
- Studies Advisors would be on hand to guide students and would be available for one-to-one meetings.
- Study skills tutorials would be available online.

The Panel suggested that all module reading lists be reviewed as to their currency and that it be made clear regarding the English entry requirement for the Certificate programme whether exemption would be available.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the Course Teams on the following:

- Strong and positive interaction between course teams
- Provision delivered to high standard in line with the level of the awards
- Progression arrangement from the Certificate programme to the Foundation degree
- Clear rationale for assessment and feedback strategies
- Good examples of creativity in teaching
- Embedding of personal reflection in assessments
- High level of support for students
- Highly qualified staff
- Strong engagement with stakeholders

The Panel approved the change to the Foundation degree title to, 'Integrative Counselling Practice'.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the provision within Revalidation Unit 6B Counselling (Colleges) be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2019/20 – 2023/24 inclusive) for the minimum and maximum student intake figures detailed in Appendix 2 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 8 May 2019 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

- 1) All issues identified in Appendix 1 to be addressed in the revised document.
- 2) Make clear in the revised document whether applicants to the Certificate programme would be able to obtain exemption (through APEL) from the English language general entry requirement.
- 3) Seek ASQEC approval for the title of the Certificate of Higher Education exit award from the Foundation degree – see Section 4, paragraph 4.
- 4) Revise the structure of the Certificate of Higher Education exit award to ensure it comprises level 4 modules only.

Recommendations

- 1) With a view to the provision of exemption opportunities for Certificate graduates, consider closer alignment between the Certificate programme and level 4 of the Foundation degree programme.
- 2) Review the currency of the module reading lists in each programme.
Foundation Degree
- 3) In the revised document make clear how placement supervisors would be prepared for the Supervised Practice modules given the (new) enhanced integrated delivery model.
- 4) Consider providing co-tutoring opportunities for all skills development sessions.

6 APPRECIATION

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

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