2UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE JOINT ULSTER UNIVERSITY REVALIDATION / THE CHARTERED GOVERNANCE INSTITUTE RE-ACCREDITATION PANEL FOR UNIT 5H: MSc MANAGEMENT AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

20 February 2020

PANEL:	Ulster University Representatives
	Dr N Ayre, Associate Head of School of Computing, Ulster University [Chair]
	Mr C Chambers, Vice-President for Sport and Wellbeing, Ulster University Students' Union
	Mr L Milliken, formerly Senior Lecturer in Law, Edinburgh Napier University and currently Chair of the Qualifications Committee, The Chartered Governance Institute
	Professor D Sloan, Professor of Learning and Teaching, Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University
	The Chartered Governance Institute Representatives
	Mr M Jones, Head of Student Experience, The Chartered Governance Institute
	Mr D Macdonald, Quality Assurance Manager, The Chartered Governance Institute
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mrs A Garland, Academic Policy and Standards Officer, Academic Office, Ulster University
	Ms C Dynes, Ulster University Students' Union (Observer)
APOLOGIES:	Mrs M Paris, Partnership Manager, Faculty of Computing and Engineering, Ulster University

1   INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider the revalidation / re-accreditation of the following provision within Unit 5H:

MSc Management and Corporate Governance (with Postgraduate Diploma exit award) in full-time and part-time modes at the Jordanstown campus and in full-time (Postgraduate Diploma only) and part-time modes at Marino Institute of Education, Dublin (Outcentre).

In order to be eligible for Graduate Membership (GradCG) of The Chartered Governance Institute, students must complete the first eight modules of the programme (120 credit points). Students exiting at this point will also be eligible for the award of Postgraduate Diploma in Management and Corporate Governance.

On the morning of the meeting, The Chartered Governance Institute representatives and the external University Panel members undertook a tour of the Library at the Jordanstown campus during which the Faculty Librarian, Mr G McFall, gave a presentation on the resources available to support the provision.

The Panel initially met with the Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator (Ms E O'Neill), the Head of School of Education (Dr D Cummins) and the Associate Dean (Education) (Professor H Farley). The provision was then discussed in more detail with the Course Team.

2   **DOCUMENTATION**

The Panel received the following documentation in advance of the meeting:

(i)   course submission;
(ii)   the University's Guidelines for Revalidation Panels;
(iii)   The Chartered Governance Institute's Guidance for University Partners (Validated Programmes) (2019);
(iv)   the QAA Benchmark Statement for Master's Degrees in Business and Management (2015);
(v)   external examiner reports for 2017/18 and 2018/19;
(vi)   'Curriculum Design at Ulster' document;
(vii)   preliminary comments from Panel members (CA7);
(viii) Assessment rubrics for each module and feedback from Mrs N Bartholomew, Quality Enhancement;
(ix)   Academic Office notes on regulatory and standards matters.

3   **MEETING WITH SENIOR STAFF**

3.1 REVALIDATION / RE-ACCREDITATION STRATEGY

The Panel began by asking the Senior Staff to outline the approach taken by the Course Team to the revalidation / re-accreditation process and how it had been ensured that the programme adhered to the requirements of both the University and The Chartered Governance Institute. The Panel was advised that the programme was well established, having been delivered since 2004, and that the Course Team worked closely with The Chartered Governance Institute. The Senior Staff explained that there had been extensive engagement with stakeholders, including external examiners, employers, students, alumni and The Chartered Governance Institute. A list of Advisory Forum members was provided to the Panel. Members of the Team had used feedback from stakeholders, as well as their own views, to balance the requirements of the professional body with their aims for the programme. The Panel was advised that, although all of the stakeholders had not met together, their various contributions had fed into the overall strategy. Regular participation in joint activities with The Chartered Governance Institute and ongoing discussion with stakeholders ensured the programme remained current and fulfilled the requirements of both the University and The Chartered Governance Institute. Examples were provided of how feedback had resulted in changes to the programme, such as greater tailoring of the curriculum and delivery for Dublin students.

3.2 MAPPING OF CONTENT TO THE REVISED SYLLABUS OF THE CHARTERED GOVERNANCE INSTITUTE

The Chartered Governance Institute representatives stated that they would like to see a summary of how the content of the programme had been mapped against the Institute's new syllabus. It was noted from the documentation that three modules had been removed and replaced by three new modules, *Behavioural Dynamics and Effective Team Performance Management*, *Effective Boardroom Decision Making and Risk Management* and *Company*

Compliance and Administration. The Chartered Governance Institute representatives asked the Senior Staff to elaborate on how the other modules in the programme had been reviewed in light of the new syllabus and was advised that the module co-ordinators had reviewed the individual modules in terms of content, assessment and reading lists. All modules had been revised to reflect regulatory changes, as well as changes to The Chartered Governance Institute's syllabus. The Senior Staff explained that while content was covered in a specific module, it was often reinforced later in another module. The Chartered Governance Institute representatives requested that a mapping exercise be undertaken to ensure that content matched to the Institute's syllabus had been assigned equivalent effort hours to those assigned by the Institute.

3.3 CONTENT

The Chartered Governance Institute representatives queried the rationale for the inclusion of the *Human Resource Management* module as this was not included in the Institute's syllabus. The Senior Staff explained that this module did not contribute to the Postgraduate Diploma element which students were required to successfully complete in order to be eligible for Graduate Membership of The Chartered Governance Institute (Grad CG). Only students progressing to complete the Master's award would take this module, which was considered by the Course Team to be an important aspect of the programme in terms of its management content.

The Panel was of the view that the focus within the programme on ethics, sustainability and corporate responsibility needed to be made more explicit in the course document.

3.4 MODULE SIZE

The Panel noted that 20 credit-point modules were encouraged by the University as the normal minimum size but that the Course Team had chosen to retain 15 credit-point modules. The Senior Staff advised that the 15 credit-point modules were more suited to the part-time delivery of the programme and that the larger number of modules facilitated the mapping of the content to The Chartered Governance Institute's syllabus.

3.5 ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

The Panel noted that a number of modules were assessed by one piece of assessment and queried the rationale for this strategy. The Senior Staff explained that a single piece of assessment was appropriate for some modules and that the assessment strategy for each module was determined by how the achievement of the module learning outcomes could be best demonstrated. Furthermore, the assessment of some modules by a single piece of assessment avoided overassessment.

3.6 STUDENT RECRUITMENT

The Panel noted that the course document did not include a breakdown on the gender, diversity and age of students enrolling on the programme and asked the Senior Staff to elaborate on this. The Senior Staff explained that, in general, the Jordanstown cohort tended to comprise mainly graduates coming straight from Honours degrees, while the Dublin cohort tended to consist more of students who were already employed, although it did also include some recent graduates. A breakdown of the cohorts was provided annually to The Chartered Governance Institute.

3.7 STUDENT FEEDBACK

The Panel enquired how student feedback was obtained and was informed that this was through the University's Staff Student Consultative Committee meetings. The local branch of The Chartered Governance Institute also comprised student representatives.

3.8 ONLINE PRESENCE

The Panel was of the view that the online prospectus did not capture the flavour of the programme and that its entry would benefit from highlighting the programme's unique selling points (USPs), such as its links with industry, including guest speakers, and with The Chartered Governance Institute. The Senior Staff advised that the programme had more of a physical than online presence, particularly in Dublin where an information evening was held before its commencement each year. The Senior Staff however acknowledged that it was also important to advertise the programme's USPs online.

3.9 STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The Panel enquired what opportunities were available for staff development. The Senior Staff advised that members of the Course Team were subject experts involved in research and were members of The Chartered Governance Institute. A number of staff members had been practitioners in the past and maintained their links with industry. Staff also attended and presented papers at conferences. In response to a question from the Panel, the Head of School confirmed that there was a School Sabbatical Policy in place.

3.10 MAXIMUM AND MINIMUM COHORT SIZES

The Senior Staff confirmed that the maximum cohort size at each site was 50 students and the minimum cohort size at each site was 15 students.

In response to a query from the Panel, the Senior Staff advised that the number of full-time students at Dublin tended to be small and that the Dublin cohort comprised mostly part-time students. Some of those who initially enrolled on the full-time programme obtained employment during their time of study and, as a result, transferred to the part-time mode

4 **MEETING WITH STUDENTS**

The Panel met with a group of students comprising three full-time students and one part-time student, as well as three graduates. All of the students and graduates who met with the Panel had studied or were currently studying at the Jordanstown campus.

4.1 TEACHING STANDARDS ACROSS MODULES

The Panel sought the views of the students on whether the standard of teaching across the different modules on the programme was equivalent. The students confirmed that, although delivery differed from module to module, it was of a high standard across the modules

4.2 CONTENT

The Panel sought the students' views on the relevance of the programme's content. The students stated that they were able to put into practice in the work place what they learned

in class. With regard to the Finance modules, the students advised that these enabled them to understand the basics and to engage in conversations about financial aspects. While recognising that this was essential content of the programme, the students' view was that this content could perhaps be covered in one module rather than two. One of the students reported that she had found the *Financial Accounting* module, which was the first module on the programme, challenging but that the content was useful for later modules.

The students stated that the wide range of content prepared them for a variety of careers. The first semester of the programme provided knowledge, while the second semester was more about application. The students were of the view that the programme was well planned in terms of its structure and that classes were delivered in a way that all students could understand regardless of their background. Some modules involved guest lecturers and opportunities were available for students to attend CPD events. There were many opportunities for students to work in groups and share experiences from the work place, as well as to meet with graduates of the programme.

4.3 DELIVERY

The Panel enquired how students assimilated the content of modules when they were block taught and was advised that the students consolidated their learning between teaching days. Given the block delivery nature of the programme, the Panel queried how students were able to catch up on any teaching sessions they were unable to attend and was informed that they were able to access the material on Blackboard.

4.4 ASSESSMENT

The Panel sought the students' views on the balance of assessment across the modules. The students stated that the assessment load was manageable in the first semester but that the second semester was busier. The students reported that they preferred coursework to examinations as undertaking critical analysis for a piece of coursework helped them to absorb the content of the module in a more effective way than simply remembering it for an examination.

4.5 LIBRARY RESOURCES

The students confirmed that they were satisfied with the resources held in the Library and the electronic resources available to support the provision.

4.6 STUDENT SUPPORT

The Panel enquired what support was available for mature students who had been away from the learning environment for a period of time. The students stated that they received excellent support from University staff and also from The Chartered Governance Institute and that experiences from the work place were useful for assignments.

The students stated that they also supported each other and that a class chat group had been set up. As there were only 11 students in the class, they all knew each other well and worked well together. Although there was a class representative, the majority of students felt comfortable approaching staff directly if they had an issue. Lecturers listened to what students had to say, took any issues that were raised seriously and were eager to help.

4.7   COMMENDATIONS

The Panel asked the students what they found particularly enjoyable about the programme. The students commended the residential, which had enabled them to get to know each other and feel comfortable with each other in class. Full-time and part-time students participated in the residential which lasted two nights. Another aspect of the programme that was important for, and attractive to, the students was the accreditation by The Chartered Governance Institute. The students stated that they found the programme challenging but well worth the hard work.

When asked if there were any aspects of the programme the students would change, one suggestion was to offer work placements to part-time students who were not in employment. Another student stated that the night class aspect of delivery could be very tiring but understood that this was the most suitable method of delivery for the cohort.

The Chair of the Revalidation Panel thanked the students for taking the time to meet with the Panel and wished them success in their studies and careers.

5   **MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM**

5.1   REVALIDATION / RE-ACCREDITATION PREPARATION

The Panel enquired how the Course Team had prepared for revalidation / re-accreditation and was informed that this had involved the re-shaping of the curriculum and of the teaching and learning strategy. The Course Team had met with staff from the University's Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice (CHERP) and had made revisions to the curriculum in line with The Chartered Governance Institute's new syllabus. The Team provided some examples of how the different modules had been revised in accordance with the Institute's new syllabus. The Team stated that the changes to the Institute's syllabus had been well received and confirmed that modules had been updated. All modules involved guest speakers who provided real life contexts rather than simply learning from a text book.

5.2   CONTENT

5.2.1   Finance and Law Content

Further to the meeting with students, the Panel enquired how the Team conveyed the value of the finance and law content to students and was advised that every effort was made to ensure the content was as relevant as possible. The Team explained that students needed to know how to interpret a set of accounts and ask intelligent questions.

5.2.2   *Corporate Governance* Module

A discussion, led by The Chartered Governance Institute representatives, took place around the *Corporate Governance* module and its reading list. The Institute representatives stated that the Institute's study text for this subject area was a practical text and enquired how the practical nature was reflected in the module. The module co-ordinator stated that the key text used for this module was Tricker's

Corporate Governance: Principles, Policies and Practices and that he would carry out a review to ensure all aspects of the Institute's syllabus were covered. The Institute representatives noted that the reading list for this module was long and heavy on Corporate Governance texts and queried how students would navigate such a list. The module co-ordinator explained that students were guided towards electronic journals, with particular articles highlighted in class. The Institute representatives asked that a review of the module be undertaken to ensure the practical emphasis in the Institute's text was incorporated within the module.

5.2.3   Management Project

The panel queried how the Team promoted the Master's element of the programme, which included two taught modules and the *Management Project*, given that these modules were not required for the GradCG. The Team explained that these modules enabled further exploration of current issues and advised that students who exited with the Postgraduate Diploma in Management and Corporate Governance, and were eligible for the GradCG, could, under the University's regulations, return at a later date to complete the Master's award. The work experience of such students would ensure that currency of knowledge was retained.

The Panel noted the following statement included in the *Management Project* module description:

"*During the research process, supervisors will typically read and comment on one draft of the literature review and one other section of the project. Provision of feedback on additional sections / chapters thereafter is at the discretion of the individual supervisor.*"

The Panel queried if this meant that some students would receive more feedback than others, depending on their supervisor. The Team explained that supervisors were given an indicative timeline with approximately six formal contact points in addition to informal meetings with students. Supervision of the projects would be carried out in a way to suit both the student and supervisor. The module co-ordinator agreed to revise the statement in the module description.

5.3   LIBRARY RESOURCES

The Panel enquired how it was ensured that the resources held in the Library were relevant to the programme and was advised that the Faculty Librarian was a member of the Course Team. The Faculty Librarian reviewed the reading lists and provided advice on the resources available. The Faculty Librarian, who was present at the meeting as part of the Course Team, stated that a large proportion of the Library budget was allocated to electronic resources. As well as providing a Library induction for Jordanstown students, the Faculty Librarian also travelled to Dublin to provide induction for the cohort there and then returned in Year 2 before students undertook their project. Training and assistance were also available for students via Skype and Blackboard Collaborate and the Faculty Librarian attended Staff Student Consultative Committee meetings and provided one-to-one support where required.

The Panel was of the view that some of the module reading lists were dated and queried why they had not been checked and updated. The Faculty Librarian advised that he had

not received some of the reading lists before the revalidation document had been produced but that updated versions of these reading lists were now available.

5.4   RESIDENTIAL

The Panel was surprised to note that no information had been provided in the course document about the residential, given the positive comments from students about the benefits of this aspect of the programme. It was clear from the discussion with the students, that this compulsory element of the programme played a very important role in the students getting to know each other and the collegiality of the student cohort. In response to a question from the Panel, the Team explained that the residential included a Library induction and although there was no residential for the Dublin cohort, the students were given time to get to know one another during the block delivery of modules.

5.5   ASSESSMENT

5.5.1   Assessment Strategy

Further to the meeting with the Senior Staff, the Panel wished to explore the assessment strategy further with the Team. The Panel queried how monitoring processes and checks were built into the modules which were assessed by a single piece of assessment. The Team provided the example of how the Harvard Case Method approach was used in the *Strategy* module, with students working in groups to undertake case studies and that learning gap checks were incorporated throughout the module to ensure students were prepared to undertake the assessment. The Panel enquired how teaching was adapted for full-time students with no work experience and was informed that the lecturer on the *Strategy* module had an industry background and that guest speakers also contributed to its delivery. Students asked questions and learned from their part-time peers, and used the skills acquired in the Semester 1 modules to undertake the case studies.

The Panel queried with the Team the rationale for a number of the modules having only one piece of assessment and was advised that a single piece of assessment could comprise different parts.   The Panel also queried the rationale for the significant variation in terms of the balance of assessment across the modules. The Team stated that the programme incorporated different disciplines and that there were subject-specific reasons for the variation in assessment. The Team explained that every effort was made to ensure the balance of assessment across the different modules but that the volume of assessment in each module was reflective of the discipline being assessed. A shorter piece of work was not necessarily easier to complete and assignments involving a more descriptive element required a higher word-count.

5.5.2   Assessment by Examination

The Panel reported that the students had stated that they preferred assessment by coursework as this enabled them to absorb the module content, rather than simply remembering and being able to recall it for an examination. The Team was of the view that examinations were an important method of developing and assessing certain skills that were required in the work place.

5.5.3 Group Work Assignments

The Panel enquired what re-sit opportunity there would be for students who failed a group assignment and what processes were in place should a student have a complaint about the group. The Team explained that learning how to work in a group was an integral part of the programme and that class time was dedicated to planning group work. Staff met with the different groups and issues were discussed as they arose. The Panel was informed that, in accordance with the University's Policy on Group Work, at least 25% of the overall group work mark was given for individual contribution. To date there had been no particular problems with group work and no fails in a group work assignment.

5.5.4 Safeguards against Plagiarism

The Panel enquired what processes were in place to safeguard against plagiarism. The Team advised that assignments were submitted electronically through Turnitin and that they were designed to minimise opportunities for plagiarism. An example was given of how in the *Financial Accounting* module students were required to agree on a company to use for their assignment with the module tutor and were expected to use the most recent set of accounts. Students were asked to identify the ratios being used and were required to submit formulae and pages from financial statements used. Another example was given of how in the *Corporate Governance* module students were required to apply theory to practice and that reading lists were checked to ensure they matched the narrative of the assignment.

5.6 FEEDBACK

The Panel noted the emphasis on formative feedback but also noted that the first piece of assessment in some of the modules was not until week 8. The Team stated that students were continually receiving formative feedback before undertaking a piece of assessment.

5.7 LEARNING OUTCOME MAP

The Panel noted that in the programme learning outcome map some modules were shown to assess a small number of learning outcomes, while others appeared to assess a much larger number and queried the rationale for this variation across modules. The Team explained that some modules did touch on a number of learning outcomes as the same learning outcome could be assessed from different perspectives in different modules. The Panel queried if this added to the assessment load and the Team agreed to revisit the learning outcome map.

5.8 BLENDED LEARNING

The Panel enquired if all of the modules were delivered using blended learning and was advised that lecture materials were available on Blackboard, which was also used for the submission of assignments and providing feedback. An example was given of how podcasts were used for examination revision in one module. In another module, video podcasts of the teaching delivered to the class were uploaded to Blackboard. The Team explained that Blackboard was used in different ways for the different subject-specific modules.

5.9   CONTACT HOURS

The Panel noted that the contact hours differed for some of the modules and queried the rationale for this variation. The Team confirmed that all modules should have 36 contact hours but that these hours might be made up differently across the modules. The Panel asked that the contact hours information for each module be reviewed to ensure it was correct.

5.10   STUDENT SUPPORT

The Panel enquired what support was available for students who found themselves in extenuating circumstances. The Team stated that students' wellbeing was a fundamental part of the induction process and that the different types of student support were signposted in handbooks. There was a formal Faculty process in place to deal with extenuating circumstances and module tutors were flexible with assessment deadlines where a student had a genuine reason for not being able to submit on time. The Panel was informed that every effort was made to accommodate students who missed part of a teaching block and, where necessary, Jordanstown students could take a module in Dublin and vice versa. The Team stated that providing the best possible student experience was a priority and that the nature of the relationship between staff and students was that of 'fellow practitioner', not 'academic' and 'student'. Classes were seen by the Team as more of an interaction rather than staff teaching students. The Panel enquired if the very positive relationship between staff and students was a result of the small cohort and if a larger cohort would have a negative impact on this relationship. The Team agreed that a larger cohort would result in a change in the dynamic of the staff / student relationship but highlighted that the level of support and pastoral care available for the School's larger undergraduate cohorts was a notable strength of these programmes. The Panel recommended that measures be put in place to ensure that the strong and very positive relationship between staff and students, which was one of the programmes USPs, would be protected in the event of an increase in the intake to the programme.

5.11   STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The Panel enquired how the Team's engagement with staff development was supported. The Team stated that members of staff undertook research, were involved in projects and attended conferences. The Panel was informed that the content of modules was being continually updated and that staff research was incorporated into modules. Members of the Team valued the links they had with industry and involvement in the local branch of The Chartered Governance Institute. The Team stated that the University was very supportive of CPD and members of staff were aware of the School's Sabbatical Policy. The Panel was advised that most of the teaching staff were members of the Higher Education Academy.

6   **CONCLUSIONS**

The Panel commended the following aspects of the provision:

(i)   the excellent support provided by staff as evidenced by the positive comments from the students;

(ii)   the residential aspect of the programme and the resultant collegiality between students;

(iii)   the engagement with The Chartered Governance Institute through the local branches;

(iv)   the enthusiasm of the Course Team;

(v)   the library resources available and the way in which support from the Faculty Librarian is embedded throughout the programme.

The University Revalidation Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the programmes be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2020/21 – 2024/25), subject to the conditions and recommendations of the Panel being addressed, and a satisfactory response and revised submission being forwarded to the Academic Office by Thursday, 2nd April 2020 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

The Chartered Governance Institute Panel agreed that the programme be re-accredited for a period of three years (intakes 2020/21 – 2022/23), subject to the requested revisions and a mapping exercise of the course content against the Institute's syllabus being undertaken and the revised submission being forwarded by Thursday, 2nd April 2020 for approval.

Conditions

The Chartered Governance Institute

(i)   that the Course Team undertake a comprehensive mapping exercise of the course content against The Chartered Governance Institute's syllabus, which should include a review of the module reading lists to ensure the inclusion of the Institute's core texts.

Ulster University

(i)   that all of the points raised by the Academic Office in the Appendix be addressed.

Recommendations

Ulster University

(i)   that the residential aspect of the programme and its role be promoted;

(ii)   that the unique selling points of the programme, such as its links with industry, including guest speakers, and The Chartered Governance Institute, be advertised more fully in the Online Prospectus;

(iii)   that steps be taken to ensure the strong and very positive relationship between staff and students is guarded should there be an increase in the intake to the programme;

(iv)   that a rationalisation of the programme learning outcome map be undertaken;

(v)   that a rationalisation of the programme's overall assessment strategy be carried out;

(vi)   that the feedback provided in relation to the assessment rubrics be taken into account;

(vii)   that the Faculty commit to the ongoing support and facilitation of staff development, professional body membership, research, attendance at conferences and the development of links with industry.

7   **APPRECIATION**

The Chair thanked the Panel members for their valuable contribution to the revalidation process and the Team members for their engagement. The Associate Dean (Education) also thanked the Panel members for their constructive comments and engagement.