ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 5N: FOUNDATION DEGREE IN SCIENCE IN BUSINESS WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

5 December 2018


PRESENT:

Professor Victor Gault, Head of School of Biomedical Sciences, Ulster University (Chair)

Dr Sharon Loane, Head of Department of Global Business and Enterprise, Ulster University

Dr Jim Harkin, Associate Head of the School of Computing, Engineering and Intelligent Systems, Ulster University

Ms Jayne Revill, Principal Lecturer, Department of Finance, Accounting and Business Systems, Sheffield Business School

Dr Ian Robson, Senior Lecturer, The Business School, University of Aberdeen

Mr Gary Ervine, Student representative, Northern Regional College


IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms Carol Reid, Faculty Partnership Manager, Ulster University Business School.

Mrs A Guarino, Academic Policy and Standards Officer, Academic Office, Ulster University


1    BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

The Panel was convened to consider the Foundation Degree in Science in Business with Digital Technology. The course would be offered at the Northern Regional College, Ballymena and Newtownabbey campuses.

The provision is a level 5 award comprising six compulsory level 4 modules (20 credit points each), four compulsory level 5 modules (20 credit points each) and a compulsory 40 credit point work-based learning module. It would be offered in full-time mode over two academic years in Ballymena and Newtownabbey from September 2019. The College is planning for the provision to also be offered in Coleraine from September 2021, once the new campus is completed. A CertHE exit award is available for those exiting after successfully completing the six level 4 modules.

Graduates of the programme are eligible to be considered to progress to the following Ulster University courses:
1. BSc Hons Business Studies with Marketing Full time
2. BSc Hons Business Studies Part time

The following are the minimum and maximum student intake figures recommended by the Faculty (based on the available staff and physical resources on each campus).

| | Mode of Attendance | Year of 1st Intake | Year of 2nd Intake | Year of 3rd Intake | Year of 4th Intake | Year of 5th Intake |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Maximum cohort size for each site recommended by Faculty | FT | 15/site | 15/site | 15/site | 15/site | 15/site |
| Minimum cohort size for each site recommended by Faculty | FT | 15/site | 15/site | 15/site | 15/site | 15/site |

## 2    DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

- Course submission;
- Guidelines for Revalidation Panels;
- QAA benchmark statement for Business and Management 2015;
- External examiners' reports for the last two years;
- A statement from the Faculty Partnership Manager; and
- Preliminary comments from Panel members.

## 3    MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

### 3.1    Delivery on the Coleraine Campus

The Chair informed the Senior Team that the delivery of the provision on the Coleraine campus would not be validated during the revalidation meeting as the campus had not yet been built. The Senior Team were advised that they would be able to add the location using a CA3 form once the campus was built, at which time the facilities would be inspected by the Faculty Partnership Manager.

### 3.2    Context of the Provision

The Senior Team provided the Panel with some background information in relation to the provision and how it sits within the College's strategy. The Senior Team explained that their department, established 3 years ago, had outlined key strategic points such as embedding digital learning as much as possible within the provision; focusing on internationalisation; and cultivating direct links with industry to ensure delivery of demand based courses while maintaining the academic level taught. The Senior Team felt that the provision was an integral part of the department, describing business, computing and creative industries as linked with significant cross fertilisation between the three subject areas.

### 3.3    Integration of Theory and Practice

The Senior Team described the ethos of their foundation degree as one which prepares for life in academia as well as employment. Accordingly, the Team would ensure that the provision would maintain a balance of theory and practice. The first year would focus on developing academic skills and the final year will have a more practical focus, providing the students with the opportunity to implement the skills acquired in the first year. The placement, which would include an academic project, would provide further opportunities to link the theory taught throughout the provision with practical skills. The Senior Team suggested this balance equips the students with the insight to decide whether they would like to pursue higher education or opt for employment. The Panel noted that students' application of theory into practice was noted in the recent QAA report.

### 3.4    Career paths

The Senior Team detailed the possible career paths available to students. Some students from previous cohorts chose to progress to University to pursue such degrees as Business Studies with Marketing, Business Studies or Accountancy. Others opted for employment, with some acquiring a permanent position following their placement. The Senior Team added that the provision, along with the placement, would provide the students with the opportunity to explore where their passion and strengths lie and choose the path most suitable for them.

### 3.5    Digital Skills

The Panel noted that basic digital skills would be taught within the provision although this had not been articulated in the document. The Senior Team listed the full Microsoft package covered within the provision, including Microsoft Excel and Microsoft PowerPoint, and added that the students' digital skills would be enhanced further as they would be encouraged to take advantage of the VLE. Students would also have access to Lynda.com to further their skills. In addition, students would also be encouraged to take Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) course and achieve Microsoft accreditation.

The Panel queried the decision to include digital marketing in the provision, especially as many businesses tend to outsource this kind of skill. The Senior Team explained that a gap had been identified in the local market for digital skills, such as social media marketing and digital marketing, as many businesses in Northern Ireland are too small to afford outsourcing of digital marketing. Accordingly, the decision to include digital marketing in the provision was a step towards closing this gap.

### 3.6    Staff

In response to the Panel's query, the Senior Team confirmed that most members of staff hold a PGCE, as all permanent staff members must have it completed within their first 2 years of employment. They also described various staff development and training opportunities such as CPD days offered as well as staff being supported and encouraged to attend conferences linked to their areas of expertise. Additionally, HE specific training to upskill staff was recently developed, and would be gradually rolled out by Human Resources to all staff.

3.7    Student Numbers and Recruitment

The Senior Team confirmed 15 students as the minimum and maximum intakes for each cohort for both Ballymena and Newtownabbey. The Senior Team were asked about the growth potential in student numbers. They explained that they were currently trying to widen their access by promoting the provision in local schools as well as promoting the articulation routes on their website and with students during the interview stages. The Senior Team added that the maximum cohort size of 15 was dictated by the physical class sizes. The Faculty Partnership Manager highlighted that the College could approach the Faculty at any time to request this number to be re-evaluated, provided there were sufficient resources to support the change.

3.8    Student Feedback

The Panel asked if the students were given an opportunity to raise any issues they had with the programme or other related matters and if these were addressed. The Team assured the Panel that students were being heard and any feedback received was considered and promptly addressed. They discussed the benefit of having small class sizes, which facilitated ease of interaction and discussion with the students. The Team stressed that many of the changes implemented in the provision were based on both student and staff feedback, emphasizing that students were an integral part of the decision-making process.


4    MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with six first and second year students from the existing provision.

The Chair welcomed the students noting that they were an important part of the quality assurance process, helping in assessing the quality of their experiences and to identify areas where improvement can be made. The student group was mostly complimentary of the provision, specifically mentioning:

- Having a good experience;
- Helpful teachers, providing plenty of support when needed;
- Feeling heard when they provided feedback or voiced a concern;
- Having ample opportunities of team work;
- Enjoying the many opportunities to travel abroad such as for placement or short trip; and
- Receiving good preparation and support around the WBL.

4.1    Physical Resources

Students mentioned they often struggled to access library materials due to low book stocks across all modules, describing limited physical copies as well as limited access to e-books. They added that as the books were shared across campuses, the waiting time for a book to arrive from another campus had the potential of denying them access to the required material when working under a strict deadline.

The Panel queried if this issue had been raised with the Team. The students gave multiple examples of situations where they had put forward a complaint and the Team quickly responded. However, they admitted that this specific issue had never been officially raised.

4.2     Student Representation

The Panel further explored the students' opportunities to raise any issues they had with the programme or other related matters querying if these were addressed. The Students detailed various mechanisms by which the College allowed for student feedback, such as module student surveys and student feedback sessions, which were conducted once each semester, assuring the Panel that any issues raised with the Course Team has been addressed quickly.

4.3     Placement

Students reported no issues relating to placement and felt that there was ample support in place and that placement opportunities, both nationally and internationally, were well communicated.

Although the Work Based Learning module was delivered in semester 2 of year 2, as it was designed to allow a culmination of all the taught modules in the provision, flexibility was given to students who could not commit to the full-time schedule in semester 2 to begin the module early.

The Panel thanked the students for their engagement and speaking openly and honestly about their experiences and wished them well for their studies and future careers.


5     MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

5.1     Course Design

The Panel asked the Team to outline the course design process. The Team explained that the course had been designed according to relevant career pathways and local industry needs. In addition to seeking advice form Ulster University's Faculty Partnership Manager, the Team had met numerous times to review the course, gathering information through consultations and feedback from students as well as employers to ensure the design was fit for purpose.

5.2     Internationalisation

The Panel queried how internationalisation was embedded in the curriculum. The team explained that internationalisation was one of the strengths of the provision, offering various opportunities for student mobility. These included international placement opportunities taken up by many of their students, as well as short 2 week projects in France, the Netherlands and Spain. In addition, the College hosted International students from Spain, France, Germany and the Netherlands. The Team pointed out that these opportunities were not limited to students, with staff having many opportunities to travel and cultivate international collaboration. Resources used listed

by the Team were Erasmus funding where possible (for placement and Key Action 2), in addition to internal College budget.

5.3     Study Skills and Student Support

Study skills were developed throughout the course as well as being specifically embedded into the PPD module. The Team discussed various learning strategies introduced, giving the example of group work to develop students' leadership skills.

The Team were aware of the importance of developing these skills as many of the students on the programme were from diverse backgrounds or employed during their studies and required additional support. The benefit of small class sizes was mentioned as it enabled staff to work closely with each student to provide personalised support.

5.4     Integration of Theory and Practice

In response to the Panel's query regarding the integration of theory and practice, the Team reiterated the process outlined by the Senior Team (refer 3.3) describing how they prepare the students to progress to either academia or the work place. The Team felt they were both academics and industry professionals, and they aimed to encourage students to choose paths according to where their passion and strengths lay, whether academic or practical. Critical evaluation taught within modules was mentioned by the Team by way of exemplifying the balance of theory and practice. The Panel commented that although not specified in the document, research led teaching was evident in the document.

5.5     Bibliography and Physical Resources

The Panel queried the presentation of the reading lists in the module descriptions, specifically listing journal titles rather than narrowing the reading list to specific articles within them. The team explained that the specific articles were detailed in the VLE, and that the journals were available in the College's library.

5.6     Physical Resources

In response to the Panel querying the limited physical copies and limited access to e-books raised by the students, the Team acknowledged the College did not offer access to many online databases, some of which have been previously available to students.

5.7     Stakeholder Engagement

The Panel asked the Team to outline the extent and nature of stakeholder engagement in the development and design of the programme. The Team stated that employer engagement was mainly sought out at the placement organisation stage, at which time the employers had the opportunity to clarify the practical skills they required, information which was then fed back into the programme and informed the curriculum. Additionally, the College held an employers' forum although it was not specific to the foundation degree. The Panel suggested the Team considered formalising this with an Industry Liaising Committee.

5.8    Course Structure

The Team assured the Panel the modules within the course were linked and delivered in a scaffolding manner in which level 4 modules covering core skills were delivered during the first year and then built upon with the more advanced level 5 modules in second year, taking cognisance of the mapping to progression routes to Ulster University.

5.9    Digital Strategy

The Team articulated their digital strategy, explaining that the four digital modules within the provision were connected and spread over the two years, during which the students developed a portfolio which also enhanced their employability. The Panel noted that this structure was based on student feedback and focused on development of practical skills.

The Team assured the Panel that Google Analytics was included in both the Online Business Information Systems and the Social Media and Creative Marketing modules. In addition, to align with both students' and employers' needs, all students who wished to advance their skills could avail of Lynda.com, as well as bespoke one to one support from the Team.

5.10    Placement

The Panel queried how the Team ensured qualitative placement was offered to students. The Team described the placement process explaining there were abundant placement opportunities available to the students. In the initial stages, the Team held a discussion with potential employers to ensure the placement on offer was relevant to the course and would be beneficial to the students. The Team explained the importance of balancing employers' expectation with students' abilities. As the provision would offer only a short term placement, the industry supervisors would be fully guided but not officially trained. The Team assured the Panel that international placements would only be offered in places that have links with the College, and that a support mechanism was in place to ensure the students would be fully supported.

5.11    International Business Module

The Panel discussed with the team the possibility of delivering the International Business Module fully online, as it would be delivered alongside the Work Based Learning module in year 2 semester 2. The Panel explained that a fully online format would support students in placements, particularly those completing an international placement, and would ensure uniform student experience and support. The team agreed the delivery would be online apart from a face to face lesson delivered at the beginning of the semester, prior to the commencement of the placement.

5.12    Introduction to Accounts Module

As the only module with a formal exam at the end of the semester, the Panel queried how equity was ensured across the two campuses. The Team explained that the exam would be scheduled to be taken on both sites at the same time. Furthermore,

the Exam would be drafted jointly across the teaching staff to ensure it fully aligns with the content taught on both campuses.

5.13   Staff Development

The Team assured the Panel that although some members of the teaching staff had limited teaching experience, they were fully supported by the College, describing the CPD available to staff as well as the collaborative ethos of the Team. Staff were also encouraged to keep their professional knowledge up-to-date and current, and were encouraged and fully supported in pursing staff development opportunities and participating in relevant conferences.

# 6   CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the team on the following aspects evident from the validation:

- the relevant content which reflects industry and students' needs;
- the quality, passion and enthusiasm of the students;
- the course team's enthusiasm and dedication to the programme;
- the international connections and the opportunities for international placements; and
- staff development and CPD opportunities.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the programme be approved 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 23 January 2019 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

i)   that matters of detail and clarification as identified in the notes by Academic Office to the Panel are addressed; and

ii)   that the team reviews the International Business module to ensure equity of learning and clarifies in the course document the structure proposed, and the delivery mode week by week.

Recommendations

i)   review the multiple campus learning resources;

ii)   review the use and access to suitable online research databases;

iii)   review the currency of the reading lists in the module descriptions; and

iv) articulate more clearly the academic rigor within the module descriptions (for example the reflective model used and balance of theory and practice).

7    APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked the Panel, particularly the external members, and the Course Team for their valuable contribution to the validation process. The Senior Team expressed special thanks to the Panel and Course Team, especially Julie Powell the Revalidation Unit Coordinator for the preparation of the course document.

Ref: AGu/panelreport/13/12/18