

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 9C1: EDUCATION (PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT)

2 May 2019

PANEL: Professor B Murphy, Director of Access, Digital and Distributed Learning, Ulster University [Chair]
Mrs F Devine, Lecturer, Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Ulster University
Professor M McMahon, Professor of Educational Leadership, School of Education, University of Glasgow
Dr S Puttick, Head of Programmes (Secondary, FE, Research Education), School of Teacher Development, Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs A Garland, Academic Policy and Standards Officer, Academic Office, Ulster University

1 INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider the revalidation of the following provision within Unit 9C1:

MEd Education (with Specialisms: Inclusive and Special Education, Information and Communication Technology, Leadership and Management, International and Comparative Education) (with PgDip and PgCert exit awards) (PT) (Fully online and Monaghan Education Centre (specified modules only));

Postgraduate Diploma in Senior Leadership [proposed new title – previously Postgraduate Diploma in Headship] (PT) (Coleraine, Jordanstown, Magee).

The Panel initially met with the Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator (Dr C Woods), the Head of School of Education (Dr D Barr) and the Associate Dean (Education) (Professor R Fee). The provision was then discussed in more detail with the Subject 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 QAA Benchmark Statement for Education Studies (2015);
- (iv) the QAA Master's Degree Characteristics Statement (2015);
- (v) external examiner report for 2017/18;
- (vi) preliminary comments from Panel members (CA7);
- (vii) Academic Office notes on regulatory and standards matters.

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR STAFF

3.1 OVERALL STRATEGY

The Panel began by asking the senior staff to explain how the provision fitted within the Faculty's overall strategy. The senior staff explained that the provision was research-informed and that the MEd programme could be taken fully online or by blended learning. The provision met the needs of the market by enabling senior teachers to access bespoke Continuing Professional Development opportunities. The senior staff advised that the provision was very popular and contributed to the Faculty's non-MaSN growth. The Panel was informed how the MEd programme played an important role in the School of Education because of its link to the PGCE programme, which was commissioned by the Department of Education. The School was required by the Department of Education to offer CPD opportunities for teachers and the senior staff explained that sixty credit points from the PGCE could be mapped against learning outcomes of the MEd programme allowing graduates of the PGCE to enter Year 2 of the MEd. The PGCE programme had been rated 'outstanding' in a recent inspection and this link to the Master's provision had been commended. The Panel was informed that all staff in the School of Education were involved in the MEd programme. A number of core staff delivered the taught modules and the other members of School staff were involved in the supervision of dissertations. The School had taken the opportunity presented by the revalidation exercise to streamline the provision, with the MEd now focusing on a smaller number of specialisms. Students successfully completing the Postgraduate Diploma in Senior Leadership could progress to complete the MEd Leadership and Management specialism.

3.2 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROVISION

The Panel asked the senior staff to explain how engagement with stakeholders had influenced the design and development of the provision. The Panel was informed that there were four main stakeholder groups:

- (i) Department of Education – many of the changes to the provision had been informed by the Department of Education and its aim to address the shortage of leadership education;
- (ii) Teachers across Northern Ireland – through the PGCE programme, staff in the School of Education had developed extensive links with schools across Northern Ireland;
- (iii) Outcentre provision – the arrangement to deliver the Leadership modules at the Monaghan Education Centre was long-standing and students at this outcentre had requested a curriculum with a broader focus;
- (iv) International stakeholders – the Head of School advised that he had held discussions with institutions in China and the Middle East.

The Panel was informed that colleagues from the Education Training Inspectorate and Monaghan Education Centre were involved in the delivery of the provision.

3.3 POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA IN SENIOR LEADERSHIP

The Panel enquired why the Postgraduate Diploma in Senior Leadership was presented as a separate programme and had not been incorporated into the MEd. The senior staff explained that the Education Authority had until recently offered a Professional Qualification for Headship (NI) (PQH (NI)) but this programme was no longer running and its withdrawal

had left a gap in the market. The School of Education had decided not to subsume the Postgraduate Diploma in Senior Leadership into the MEd programme, which also offered a Leadership and Management specialism, as many of the Postgraduate Diploma market already had a Master's qualification. The Panel was informed that the Education Authority was currently working with partners to develop a new School Leadership Development Framework and had plans to re-introduce the PQH (NI) under a new Headship qualification. The Panel enquired if the Postgraduate Diploma in Senior Leadership would be in competition with the new PQH (NI). The senior staff were confident that the Postgraduate Diploma in Senior Leadership was sufficiently unique and well enough established that recruitment to this programme should not be affected by the new PQH (NI). The former was more rigorous and more research-informed than the latter and would be recognised as an alternative qualification. It was anticipated that the School of Education would be invited to bid for the new PQH (NI) provision.

3.4 STAFFING RESOURCES

The Panel noted that the curriculum vitae of staff who had recently retired had been included in the revalidation document and queried if these staff members were part of the teaching Team. The Panel also noted that the provision appeared to be heavily reliant on two members of staff, one of whom was part-time. The Head of School confirmed that the core teaching Team comprised full-time academic staff. The Panel was informed that a number of existing or retired school principals contributed to the Senior Leadership programme which was why their curriculum vitae had been provided. These members of staff taught alongside the full-time staff as part of the School's succession plan.

The Panel enquired if opportunities existed for teachers to be seconded to teach on the provision and was informed that in the past a professional development fund had enabled teachers from schools to do this, but that this had ceased when the Northern Ireland Executive collapsed.

3.5 STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The Panel enquired what staff development opportunities were available to ensure staff members kept up-to-date with current strategic issues in educational leadership on a global level. The Head of School explained that, as part of the annual staff appraisals, funding was identified for staff to undertake training courses, including courses on Educational Leadership. Members of the core teaching team regularly visited schools and engaged in discussion with principals and senior teachers. Internal training was provided for online delivery and all staff, with the exception of two members, had completed the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice and had been awarded fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. Opportunities were also available for staff to participate in international networks and conferences. The former Head of School, Dr McGuinness, remained involved in the delivery of the provision in order to ensure continuity. Dr McGuinness had established networks and contacts and his ongoing involvement would ensure that these were maintained.

3.6 LIBRARY RESOURCES

Given the fully online nature of the MEd programme and the School's desire to promote the provision internationally, the Panel enquired if all necessary resources were available online and if licence funds were available to ensure access to these resources for international students. The Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator explained that staff worked closely with the

Faculty Librarian to ensure all necessary resources were in place and that the revalidation exercise had provided an excellent opportunity to review the module reading lists. The Panel highlighted the importance of the availability of e-books for students taking the programme online. The Panel was informed that students at the Monaghan Education Centre tended to prefer to purchase hard copies of texts. E-books were available wherever possible and library induction, Harvard referencing support and Blackboard support were provided for all students.

3.7 ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

The Panel enquired what administrative support was available for the provision. The Head of School advised that better support was available now that the School of Education had been centralised on the Coleraine campus. There were five members of support staff in the School, as well as a dedicated placement support staff member.

4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with two students via Skype.

4.1 First Year Student

The first student was a primary school teacher in his first year of study at Monaghan Education Centre. The student stated that the programme had focused his mind on what leadership and management were within an educational context and had provided opportunities for him to broaden his network of primary and post-primary school teachers. The programme had also given him confidence to deal with different people and situations in school and had enabled him to broaden his knowledge of various aspects of public management and leadership. He had completed an Honours degree in e-Commerce and Marketing in 2003, followed by a Master's in Commerce and an online teaching course before commencing the MEd programme in 2018.

As the student lived in Monaghan, the location of delivery was convenient. The student stated that the programme had been delivered in Monaghan for twenty years and his uncle had completed the programme and had recommended it, as had friends. The student considered the programme to have been a good investment in his career.

In response to a question from the Panel about assessment, the student stated that the provision was assessed mainly by written assignments. He considered this method of assessment to be an effective way of gaining knowledge as the assignments required a large volume of reading. Discussions in class and group work were also valuable. The student commended the variety of assessment methods used and stated that he had particularly enjoyed exercises in which he had been required to prioritise scenarios individually and as part of a group.

The Panel asked the student what he particularly enjoyed about the programme and what, if anything, he would like to change. The student replied that he liked the way in which the programme was assessed by written assignments rather than by examinations and that he enjoyed participating in the online discussion boards.

4.2 Final Year Student

The second student was a lecturer at South West College who was currently in his final year of the MEd and was working on his dissertation. Prior to undertaking the MEd programme, the student had completed an Honours degree in Biology and a PGCE. He had also worked in industry and undertaken other postgraduate study, as well as CPD training that involved a digital element. This student advised the Panel that the programme had encouraged him to become involved in project-based learning in his College and that he was a project-based learning champion.

The student stated that he liked the blended approach of the programme and the way in which he was able to communicate with his dissertation supervisor online. The method of delivery was suited to working life and enabled him to widen his network.

The student commended the variety of technology used and the blended learning approach to assessment, and stated that he enjoyed developing the different skills involved in, for example, podcasts, presentations and blogs. He was then in turn able to use these methods to assess his own students. The student also commended the verbal feedback given on assessments.

The student stated that his experience of the programme had been excellent and that staff were very approachable and always responded quickly to queries.

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

5 MEETING WITH SUBJECT TEAM

5.1 UNIQUE SELLING POINT

The Panel asked the Team to explain what was distinctive about the provision and to outline its unique selling point. The Team stated that the provision offered progression routes for students who had completed the PGCE, with these students being exempt part of the MEd programme. The MEd offered a choice of four specialisms: 'Inclusive and Special Education', 'Information and Communication Technology', 'Leadership and Management', and 'International and Comparative Education'. A unique selling point of the programme was the fact that a student's specialism was recorded on his/her award parchment. The provision had been designed to be relevant and to enable participants to reflect on practice in the classroom and link theory to practice. The programme also provided opportunities for networking. The collaborative learning environment, which brought together students from a wide range of disciplines and enabled them to learn from each other, was considered another strength of the provision.

5.2 POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA IN SENIOR LEADERSHIP

5.2.1 Title

The Panel asked the Team to explain the rationale for the proposed change in title of the Postgraduate Diploma from 'Headship' to 'Senior Leadership'. The Team stated that the new title would not only distinguish the programme from the new Professional Qualification for Headship but that the new title was also linked to the newly established Leadership College.

The Panel was of the view that the title 'Senior Leadership' was too general and recommended that the Team consider differentiating between 'Senior Leadership (Schools)' and 'Senior Leadership (Further Education)'. The Team however was concerned that this distinction might create a barrier for those wishing to switch sectors later in their career. The Chair was of the view that it would be useful to make the context of education explicit in the title.

5.2.2 Admission Requirements

The Panel queried why applicants for the Postgraduate Diploma in Senior Leadership were required to hold a second class Honours degree or better as this was not in line with University regulations which required an Honours or non-Honours degree for entry to a Postgraduate Diploma. The Team stated that applicants generally held at least a second class Honours degree as this was required for teaching posts and that a shortlist of applicants for September 2019 entry to the course comprised those with first class Honours degrees. The Chair reminded the Team that a case would have to be made to the University's Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee to deviate from University regulations.

The Panel also queried the rationale for the requirement that applicants had to have a minimum of seven years' teaching experience and was of the view that this requirement could be considered ageist. The Panel therefore recommended that this be changed to require applicants to be in a 'post-holding position' and that the requirement of seven years be omitted. The Team concurred with the Panel that the wording of this admission requirement should be reviewed.

5.2.3 Programme Learning Outcomes

The Panel noted that the Postgraduate Diploma in Senior Leadership had only four programme learning outcomes and that each of the four modules was shown to assess all of the learning outcomes and queried the rationale for this. The Team responded that the University's expectation was that programmes should have four programme learning outcomes, but the Chair advised that this was a misunderstanding of the Curriculum Design Principle and that the expectation was that modules had four learning outcomes but that programmes could have more. The Team was of the view that the programme would benefit from more learning outcomes and welcomed the opportunity to review this.

5.2.4 Specificity of the Programme

The Panel enquired how the Postgraduate Diploma in Senior Leadership had been developed to focus on the specificity of leadership in education rather than taking a generic approach to headship and was advised that the programme was extremely interactive and reflective. The Team outlined how the *Building Teams and Managing Resources* module involved the students reflecting on who they were as individuals and how others perceived them, concepts of team roles and also looked at New Public Management and areas such as managing a school's budget, buildings, ICT and the classroom. The *Leadership for Learning* module examined and critiqued key authors and in addition to the role of the leader in school also covered the leader in the classroom setting and encouraged students to reflect. The *Strategic Development Planning* module provided an understanding of strategic leadership, management and planning and the *Managing the Organisation* module covered

aspects such as financial planning and managing a budget, quality assurance processes, legal issues taught against an academic background, as well as models for self-evaluation.

5.2.5 Residential Leadership College

The Panel noted that the face-to-face sessions for the programme could be completed through a residential Leadership College which enabled students to complete the programme in a year and a half instead of two years. The Team explained that it was conscious that many students might find it difficult to commit to weekly evening face-to-face sessions, whereas a residential where the sessions were block taught would be more suitable for this group of students. The Chair highlighted the need to ensure that the maximum study load of 45 credit points per semester for part-time students was not exceeded.

5.3 MEd

5.3.1 Specialisms

The Chair asked the Team to confirm which MEd specialisms were being brought forward for revalidation. The Team advised that the following four specialisms were being brought forward:

- Inclusive and Special Education;
- Information and Communication Technology;
- Leadership and Management;
- International and Comparative Education.

The Chair reminded the Team that any specialisms not being brought forward for revalidation should be removed using the University's course revision CA3 process.

5.3.2 Content

5.3.2.1 Ethics

The Panel noted that the *Research Design and Initiation* module included in its reading list 'University of Ulster (2005), Research Ethics: Information for the School of Education' and queried if this was the most up-to-date version of these guidelines. The Team advised that the School of Education had a Research Director who kept staff informed of developments and circulated the most up-to-date ethics guidelines. The Team acknowledged that more recent guidelines were available and agreed that the reference should be updated in the revised course document. The Team assured the Panel that the information provided on Blackboard was up-to-date. The Panel was informed that all projects and dissertations were considered by an Ethical Filter Committee and that all staff involved in supervising dissertations were appropriately informed regarding ethical requirements.

The Panel was of the view that it was difficult to gain a sense of how aspects such as ethical leadership had been incorporated within the provision from the module reading lists. The Team stated that these aspects were topics of debates and discussions.

5.3.2.2 Module EDU732: International and Comparative Education

The Panel noted that the *International and Comparative Education* module examined educational practice in Singapore, Australia, Norway and Finland, all of which were high-performing countries, and was of the view that this module should take a more diverse and critical approach. The Team explained that the module involved reflection on current practice and how it compared to practice in other countries. Members of staff had been involved in projects in other countries, the study of which could also be included in this module. The Team advised that this was a new module which had not previously been delivered and assured the Panel that the case studies and resources utilised would be reviewed as the module developed. The Panel was of the view that literature on successful approaches and the influence of policy makers should be embedded in the module.

BOTH PROGRAMMES

5.4 GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

The Panel enquired how the University's graduate attributes such as entrepreneurship, cultural awareness, sustainability, global citizenship and self-confidence were embedded in the modules. The Team explained how the global aspect was incorporated through the use of comparative education case studies and how local and global citizenship was part of the School's identity. Emphasis was placed on the civic leader in post-conflict studies and on creating cross-community and international links. The Team advised the Panel that the provision was both inward and outward looking and catered for international as well as local students. The School had established international research links and had facilitated projects on the importance of education in conflict situations and the impact of education on society. The School of Education was also proud to host the UNESCO Centre which was internationally acclaimed.

5.5 MODULE READING LISTS

The Panel was of the view that the module reading lists required updating and noted that a number of them had not been presented using the Harvard Referencing System. The Panel therefore asked that the Team review the lists to ensure that they were up-to-date and presented consistently.

5.6 ASSESSMENT

The Panel noted from the module descriptions that the assessment comprised mostly written assignments. The Team assured the Panel that a wide range of assessment methods was employed but acknowledged that this was not explicit in the module descriptions. The Panel was informed that reflection was the underlying ethos of all modules and that the written assignment was the outcome of the assessment process. The Team advised that the assessment process was explained to students in the module material available on Blackboard. The Panel requested that this information be included in the module descriptions.

The Team described the assessment strategy for *The Reflective Professional* fully-online module which, as well as two assignments, allocated ten percent of the marks for participation in online discussion boards. Students were required to reflect online and share practice from different jurisdictions. The first written assignment required students to select

and critique an article and share their findings with other students online. The Panel noted that the assessment for this module was described differently in the revalidation document and asked the Team to ensure that the correct versions of module descriptions were included in the revised documentation. The Panel further requested that the assessment schedule in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment commentary in the course document be revised to articulate the different methods of assessment.

The Panel queried how the assessment strategy in the Leadership modules enabled students to develop leadership skills in situ. The Team assured the Panel that the assignments in these modules focused on developing leadership skills and that students were very aware of their learning journey.

The Panel asked the Team to elaborate upon the assessment requirements to reflect the range of methods used, such as group work, role play, scenario building. The Panel also recommended that the Panel review the word count of assignments to ensure alignment with the University's guidelines.

The Chair thanked the Team members for their contribution to the discussion.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the following aspects of the provision:

- (i) the Team's strategic awareness of the sector and ambition to lead in the future, evidenced not only by this provision but also by the invitation to become involved in the new Professional Qualification for Headship (NI);
- (ii) the attention to, and concern for, the student experience and the Team's appreciation of the needs of this client group of professionals;
- (iii) the longevity of the provision and the success of the Team in maintaining its relevance to the fast-changing sector;
- (iv) the concept of the residential Leadership College which the Panel considered creative and innovative;
- (v) the online approach to reach practitioners.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the programmes be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2019/20 – 2023/24), 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 13 June 2019 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

- (i) that all of the points raised by the Academic Office in the Appendix be addressed;
- (ii) that the nature and specificity of the proposed new title 'Senior Leadership' be reviewed;

- (iii) that the admission requirement for the Postgraduate Diploma in Senior Leadership be reviewed; if a second class Honours degree or better is required, a case for consideration by the University's Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee should be submitted as this exceeds the normal University requirement for entry to a Postgraduate Diploma of an Honours or non-Honours degree;
- (iv) that the programme learning outcomes for the Postgraduate Diploma in Senior Leadership be revised (this will require review by the external subject specialist Panel members);
- (v) that the range of assessment and use of different methodologies be made more explicit in the module descriptions and in the commentary on 'Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies' in the course document and that the loading of each piece of assessment be considered in light of the University's Assessment Equivalence guidance; the Team should also consider revising the Assessment Schedule, included in the course document, to reflect the range of assessment;
- (vi) that the module descriptions included in the course document be reviewed to ensure they are the most up-to-date versions (if significant revisions are made the revised module descriptions will require review by the external subject specialist Panel members);
- (vii) that the extent and currency of the module reading lists be reviewed;
- (viii) that the nature of the 'face-to-face' sessions in an online context be clarified;
- (ix) that, with the introduction of the residential Leadership College which will enable students to complete the Postgraduate Diploma in Senior Leadership in a year and a half instead of two years, it be ensured that the maximum credit load of 45 points per semester for part-time students is not exceeded.

Recommendations

- (i) that the *International and Comparative Education* module (EDU732) be reviewed to widen its focus and incorporate a greater level of critical thinking (this will require review by the external subject specialist Panel members);
- (ii) that the way in which the University's Graduate Qualities are incorporated within the provision be made more explicit in the course document;
- (iii) that the Team consider availing of the support offered by CHERP and the Office for Digital Learning in relation to curriculum design and new approaches to online learning;
- (iv) that consideration be given to having a Head Teacher in Residence to provide a role model for aspiring young (seconded) leaders;
- (v) that staff be supported to become more active in relevant professional and academic networks.

7 APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked the Panel members for their valuable contribution to the revalidation exercise. The Head of School thanked the Panel member for their constructive comments and thanked the Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator for her work in preparing for revalidation. The Panel was also thanked by the Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator.