

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REPORT OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL MEETING FOR SUBJECT UNIT 7A: DRAMA/CINEMATICS (UG/PG)

19 October 2018

PANEL: Professor A Moore, Head of School of Geography and Environmental Sciences, Ulster University (Chair)
Dr W Forsythe, Senior Lecturer, School of Geography and Environmental Sciences, Ulster University
Dr S O’Gorman, Senior Lecturer, School of Fine and Performing Arts, University of Lincoln
Dr L Papadimitriou, Reader (Associate Professor in Film Studies, Liverpool Screen School, Liverpool John Moores University
Ms E Bonner, Sports President, Students’ Union, Ulster University

Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator: Dr L Fitzpatrick, Senior Lecturer in Drama, School of Arts and Humanities, Ulster University

In attendance: Mrs K McCafferty, Academic Office, Ulster University

1 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The Panel met to consider the revalidation of the following provision:

Undergraduate Honours Subject: Drama (Single Honours/Major/Minor) (with CertHE/AB exit awards)

Undergraduate Honours Subject: Cinematic Arts (Single Honours/Major/Minor) (with CertHE/AB exit awards)

MA Contemporary Performance Practices (with PgDip exit award)

The Panel met with the Head of School, Dr Tom Maguire, the Associate Head of School, Dr Kathryn White and the Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator, Dr Lisa Fitzpatrick to discuss how the provision fitted within the Faculty’s other provision and discuss such matters as staffing and resources.

The Associate Dean (Education) Professor Ruth Fee was unable to attend the meeting but sent comments which were read out to the Panel stating the Faculty’s full support for the provision. The Panel noted the following key points:

- The vision for the Faculty was to have a markedly international student population and to continue to attract international applicants to the UG provision to provide pathways to PG study;
- Plans for investment of staff in growth areas and in new space for staff and students on the Cinematic Arts programme;
- New initiatives for employability within the School including graduate boot camps, student conferences and 1:1 career coaching;
- The success in securing Santander Special Project Funding to run an Employability and Enterprise Project with Drama and Music students at Magee to assist them in building a portfolio career;

The School of Arts and Humanities was established in 2017 following faculty restructure and offers programmes in Cinematic Arts, Drama, Music and Irish at the Magee campus. The first cohort graduated from the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts was in 2017. The School has decided to offer the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts in combination (Major/Minor) from 2019/20.

The BA Hons Drama was first validated in 2003 and the MA in Contemporary Performance Practices was validated in 2014 and had its first intake in 2016/17.

The School has secured £13m through collaboration with Queens University Belfast and industry partners for the Future Screens NI Project in 2018. [The aim of this project is to generate £6bn for the economy and create 3000 new jobs over the next five years.]

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

- Course Submission
- Guidelines for Revalidation Panels
- QAA Master's Degree Characteristics
- QAA Subject benchmarks for Dance, Drama and Performance (July 2015)
- QAA Subject benchmarks for Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies (Oct 2016)
- External Examiners' Reports for 2016/17 and 2017/18
- Preliminary comments from Panel members

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3.1 Revalidation Process/Employer Engagement

The Panel asked the Senior Team to elaborate on how they prepared for the revalidation meeting and what level of engagement there had been with employers.

The Senior Team explained that preparation for the revalidation had commenced during the previous year. Preliminary meetings to identify what was working well within the provision and to determine any gaps were organised from an early stage.

The Panel noted that the BA Hons Drama was a long established programme. The BSc Hons Cinematic Arts programme on the other hand was only introduced in 2016. The Senior Team explained that the various meetings with the employers had helped to highlight what they were looking for in graduates and how the provision could be further developed to ensure the most relevant skills were being taught. The Senior Team advised the Panel that minor revisions to the modules had reflected some of the suggestions from the employer engagement meetings.

The Senior Team emphasised that they wanted to prepare students for employment and that modules needed to be reviewed yearly to ensure they reflected employer needs. The Panel also noted that an employer engagement panel had been established and met regularly.

The Panel was impressed with the many activities that had taken place but felt the information should have been included in the document. The Panel felt that the document did not truly reflect the amount of good practice that was ongoing within the School.

3.2 Placement Opportunities and Employability skills

The Panel asked how many students chose to go on placement or study abroad and heard that numbers were small. The Senior Team explained that it was difficult to find an organisation that could provide a year long placement. Many placements tended to last only six weeks.

The Panel agreed there were difficulties in finding suitable placements but stressed the importance of explaining to students that their experience/skills also came from the range of activities that they were undertaking as part of their studies. The Panel felt that students should be made aware of this and be able to recognise the skills they were attaining. The Senior Team explained that they advised students of the skills they were attaining and that it was important to include this information in their CVs. The Panel also heard that the 'Arts Administration' module, for example, helped students in the preparation of their CV and how to write a covering letter for a job description.

The Panel was satisfied that students were acquiring appropriate skills relevant to employment and asked that the information be reflected in the revised document.

3.3 Internationalisation of the Curriculum

The Panel noted a range of international connections to the provision, for example, an Erasmus programme exchange with the University of Malta and further provisional exchanges with the University Lisbon and with the Beijing National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts. The Senior Team also informed the Panel that many of the staff teaching on the programmes were international and that international research was included in the teaching of the modules.

The Panel noted that students from the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts programmes had travelled to the Berlin Arts Festival in 2017. The Senior Team also explained they had strong working relationships with many of the local drama groups and film festivals. These connections provided students with the opportunity to meet with the many international participants.

The Panel was impressed with how the provision was being internationalised and again stated that the document should reference the good practice and innovative processes that were taking place.

3.4 Human Resources

The Panel noted that staff were flexible in teaching across all the provision. Part-time specialist personnel were also invited to come in and share with students their specific knowledge of the industry and to help enhance their experience.

The Panel noted that a new member of staff would be appointed during 2018/19 to the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts programme.

The Panel also heard that three new technical posts would be filled by 2019/20 and noted plans for a dedicated equipment loan facility and the development of a workshop to provide students with the opportunity to gain technical skills relevant to their programme.

3.5 Demand

The Senior Team informed the Panel that the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts programme was recruiting well and that the BA Hons Drama was currently experiencing a slight dip in student numbers.

The Senior Team also explained that they were working closely with local schools and planned to invite potential students to come into the campus and find out about the opportunities available to them in the subject area.

The Panel asked the Senior Team if they felt there was a gender imbalance when it came to students choosing between drama and cinematic arts and noted that drama tended to be predominately female with Cinematics Arts attracting more males.

4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with a group of second year and final year students from both the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts and BA Hons Drama programmes. The following points were noted by the Panel:

Structure of Provision

- Students on the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts liked the practical work and finding out about what was happening in the industry;
- The students also felt the practical nature of the programme would help them in securing employment on graduating;
- The opportunity to go out and make their own films was considered a great opportunity;
- The practical aspect of the provision and having no examinations had appealed to many of the Cinematic Arts students and had influenced where they chose to study.
- The BA Hons Drama students felt that the programme covered a lot of interesting topics and one student particularly liked the 'stage management' component;
- The students on the Drama programme liked how their theory classes were followed-up by a practical class;
- The students felt they were gaining excellent additional skills from their studies;
- Both groups of students felt there was a good balance between theory and practice.

Induction

- All the students felt the induction had been a very beneficial exercise;
- There had been an opportunity meet with the other students before commencing the programmes and the transition from school to university had been smooth;
- The induction used ice-breakers and the lecturers were very supportive;
- Some of the students felt there might be room for more opportunities/activities before commencing the programme or as part of the induction.

Graduate Skills

- The students stated that on a weekly basis they were learning new skills that would be important when seeking employment;
- The final year students felt they had gained important employment skills, for example, help with writing their CV and how to approach building their own websites.

Assessment

- Students on the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts were asked to write a manifesto and do a class presentation. There were no formal essays;
- In some of the other modules, for example, 'Art Direction/Production Design' the students were required to write short essays;

- The BSc Hons Cinematic Arts students also explained that they were required to complete a 4000-6000 word dissertation in a specialised area, for example, directing. It was a reflective piece of work and the assessment criteria was set. There was no opportunity to negotiate the assessment.
- The BA Hons Drama students also informed the Panel that they did a dissertation but that it could be a blended piece of work, ie, a written component and a presentation. The students felt that by final year they knew where their strengths lay and welcomed the opportunity to be able to negotiate their learning.

5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

5.1 Programme Structure/Shared Modules

The Panel sought further clarification on the interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum and to identify the modules being shared.

The Course Team stated that students on both programmes shared two modules in Year One and Year 2. At Levels 5 and 6 both student groups could choose any of the drama optional modules. The Panel noted that the drama students could not choose any of the cinematic arts options but that there were plans to develop other shared module opportunities.

The Panel thanked the Course Team for clarifying which modules were shared, as it had not been particularly clear from the document. The Panel also stated that the 'Writing for Stage and Screen' module was a good example of a shared module but that the 'Issues of Performance 1' module appeared to focus more on drama. The Course Team appreciated the Panel's comments and explained that they had discussed the inclusion of more cinematic arts in the module but agreed to review the module and make it more collaborative. The Chair of the Panel emphasised the importance of reviewing the content of the modules and identifying those that were shared to ensure they reflected both subject areas.

5.2 Optional Modules

The Panel noted there were less optional modules available in the BA Hons Drama programme but heard that resource issues restricted the number of options they could offer.

The Panel felt the number of optional modules offered to students studying on the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts was a strength. The Course Team explained that they tried to manage student expectations and ensure a good range of modules. A review of the optional modules to be made available to students was conducted on a yearly basis and the range adapted to suit individual cohorts.

The Panel asked for clarification on whether Major and Minor combinations in cinematic arts would be made available and what modules students would choose. The Course Team confirmed that Major and Minor combinations in cinematic arts would be offered from 2019 and advised the Panel that a structure would be included in the revised document.

5.3 Assessment

The Panel asked if both the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts and BA Hons Drama programmes offered students the opportunity to negotiate the assessment weightings and type of assessment in the project/dissertation. The Panel explained that the drama students had informed them that they could negotiate their learning and liked the idea.

The Course Team confirmed that students on the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts programme could negotiate the type of project they wished to undertake but could not negotiate the assessment weightings.

The Course Team further explained that they followed policies and a shared language so that students fully understood what they were negotiating in terms of their assessment. The Panel noted that students on the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts programme submitted their dissertation proposal in Semester One as they needed the full year to complete their work.

The Panel asked if the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts programme was a practical degree as there appeared to be limited essay writing involved. The Panel also asked if the aim of the programme was to prepare students to go and work as a practitioner.

The Course Team explained that students on the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts programme needed to be able to read and write about films. The Panel also noted that the Course Team assessed theory and practice innovatively, for example, students doing the 'Editing' module were required to submit a video and an essay. The Panel acknowledged the explanation and asked the Course Team to make it clear in the revised document that it was a very practically oriented programme.

5.4 Curriculum Design Principles

The Panel noted that the document did not refer to the Curriculum Design Framework and asked the Course Team to ensure the revised document provided a narrative on their approach to incorporating the principles.

5.5 Group Work

The Panel informed the Course Team that the guidelines on the use of group work were very clear and concise but stated that it was not always clear how much of a module's assessment was a group effort or an individual piece of work.

The Course Team explained that in some modules there was both group work and individual assessments. The Panel noted that students were provided with a module brief setting out the group's contribution to the module assessment and the individual component. The requirements of group work were applied to all relevant modules and the Course Team stressed that students were made aware of this information. The Panel asked the Course Team to make the group work and individual student contributions to assessment clearer in the revised document.

5.6 Resources

The Panel noted that the Course Team was satisfied there was sufficient equipment to support the provision, and in particular, the BSc Hons Cinematic Arts programme. The Course Team also informed the Panel that they were exploring the possibility of hiring equipment from their contacts in the industry.

The Panel asked if the Course Team had any issues with the current number of staff supporting the provision and noted that appointments were being progressed.

The Course Team emphasised the many strong connections they had acquired in the industry and being in the strong position of being able to ask these people to come in and speak with the students. The Course Team considered the relationships they had built-up with employers helped significantly in providing students with relevant work-based learning opportunities. The Panel also noted that many of the teaching staff were on various

employer/industry boards and had access to the top personnel in the industry. The Course Team explained that the budget allocated to part-time hours was important to ensure the continuation of being able to invite people from the industry to come in and work with the students.

6 CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel commended the Course Team on the following:

- The range of assessment methods and innovative techniques used;
- The impressive choice of optional modules and student opportunity to negotiate assessment form and weightings;
- The evidence of strong learning support in place for a diverse range of students and in particular those entering at Level 4;
- The integration of new technologies at different levels of teaching and learning (in both delivery and assignments);
- The industry-facing nature of the provision which provided students with the opportunity to develop a wide range of subject-specific and transferable skills necessary for employability;
- The staff expertise reflected in the modules that promotes research-led teaching.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the provision be approved for a further 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 19 February 2019 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Condition

that the regulatory and standards matters identified by the Academic Office be addressed (appendix).

Recommendations

- (i) That Section A of the document be revised to include all the good practice, industry connections and innovative teaching and assessment techniques that are currently being utilised so that the strengths and USP of the provision is clearly evident (3.1, 3.2, 3.3);
- (ii) That Sections B1, B2 and B4 be revisited, to articulate the structure of all the programmes (Single Honours, Major/Minor combinations for both undergraduate programmes) and to clearly show the modules that will be offered from 2019, to ensure the accuracy of information being provided to students; Reference should also be made to alignment of the provision with the Curriculum Design Framework (5.1, 5.2, 5.4);
- (iii) That a table showing which modules are currently being shared between the two undergraduate programmes be included in the revised document. [Shared module descriptions should ensure they reflect a more interdisciplinary focus.] (5.1, 5.2)

APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked all the members of the Panel and in particular, the external members, for their valuable contributions to the revalidation exercise.